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**INVESTIGATING FACTORS HINDER FIRST YEAR STUDENTS'  
COMPREHENSION OF LINGUISTICS COURSES**

**A case of first year students at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra**

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the **Master's Degree** in Sciences of Languages

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## **Dedication**

*To the memory of my father*

*To my dear mother who has raised me to be the person  
I am today. You have been with me in every step of my way. Thank  
you for all the unconditional love, assistance, and support that you  
have always given me, helping me to succeed.*

*To my lovely sisters: Laila, Sabrina, and Ahlam*

*To my brothers Aziz and Halim*

*To my sister-in-law and my brother-in-law*

*To all my cute nieces and nephews*

*To my close friends Ahlam and Imene*

*To all my family*

*To all my dearest friends*

*To everyone loves me*

*I dedicate this work*

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## **Abstract**

Linguistics is one of the important subjects are taught to first year students of English at Biskra University. The problem is that first year students do not achieve good marks in this subject. The current study aims at investigating the main factors that may prevent first year students from understanding linguistics courses. To deal with this study we posted the question of which main factors hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses. Based on the research question, we hypothesized that linguistic and psychological factors may hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses. In order to verify our hypothesis, the descriptive method was adopted in this study through the implementation of two different data collection tools which are an interview held with first year teachers of linguistics and a questionnaire addressed to first year students of English at Biskra University. The obtained findings showed that the main difficulties first year students encounter are their lack of linguistic background knowledge and their attitudes towards learning a foreign language. Depending on those results, the stated hypothesis was confirmed. Thus, in order to overcome those factors, some recommendations were given as well.

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**TL:** Target language

**FL:** Foreign Language

**L1:** First Language or Mother Tongue

**L2:** Second Language

**CI:** Comprehensible Input

**SLA:** Second Language Acquisition

**LAD:** Language Acquisition Device

**NS:** Native Speakers

**NNS:** Non Native Speakers

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## **General introduction**

English is considered as a foreign language in Algeria. Those students who are learning English as a target language are supposed to cope with a variety of subjects among them linguistics. By definition, Linguistics is the scientific study of language (Oxford dictionary). It consists of a diversity of theories about language itself and its origins and features. So that, first year students need a body of knowledge to depend on in addition to a comfortable environment in order to understand the complexity of those courses. There are numerous factors that may hinder foreign language learning generally and limit students' comprehension of linguistics courses especially. Those factors have a negative impact not only on students' achievement in linguistics module but also on their average as a whole. This study will seek to investigate factors hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses.

### **1. Statement of the problem**

As a field of study, linguistics is very important since it is interested in studying the language, its nature, and its features as well, but as a subject to be taught to first year students, it has some difficulties for them. First year students at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra as EFL learners face a problem presented in lack of understanding of linguistics courses. This problem was noticed from their low achievement in this subject. Therefore, the reason behind the continuous struggle towards the comprehension of linguistics courses may be the existence of certain factors.

### **2. Research question**

In the field of foreign language teaching, if the main purpose is to foster first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses then, the following question need to be addressed in this study:

- What are the main factors that hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses?

### **3. Research hypothesis**

This study is supposed to test the following hypothesis:

- Linguistic and psychological factors may hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses.

#### **4. Aims of the study**

This study aims at investigating factors that may hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses.

It also aims at:

- Helping teachers regulate their attitudes towards the presentation of linguistics courses.
- Enlightening students with those factors in order to overcome them later on.

#### **5. Significance of the study**

The present study would be a contribution in foreign language teaching and learning. It may help first year students increase the level of achievement in linguistics module through investigating factors hinder their comprehension of linguistics courses. Teachers also may benefit from this investigation through establishing a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom to better provide students with comprehensible input.

#### **6. Research design**

The descriptive method is adopted to describe and analyze the findings since it can provide consistent and comprehensive information and valid results. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate factors hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses will be via a qualitative research method.

#### **7. Population and sampling**

The sample of this study is first year students at the English Division in Mohamed Kheider University (about 25 out of 778 students). In order not to be bias, the selection of the sample is random because we cannot deal with the whole population. The other sample is teachers of linguistics at the same branch (two teachers) who supposed to have a more direct contact with students and thus knowledgeable about their needs.

#### **8. Research instruments**

To investigate factors hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses, two data collection tools are used:

- A questionnaire will be directed to first year students.
- An interview will be held with first year teachers of linguistics.

## **9. Limitations of the study**

Although the current study is an attempt to investigate factors influencing first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses, the limitations of the research also need to be accredited. This study is limited by time and population as well. For those reasons, the selected sample to answer the questionnaire will consist of only 25 first year students from the English Department at Biskra University. In addition, the sample of teachers that the interview might be held with is 3 first year teachers of linguistics from the English Department at Biskra University which is selected systematically from the whole population of teachers. However, the interview held only with two teachers since one of them refused and excused to be interviewed. Moreover, the short time provided in conducting this research, do not help to analyze the findings deeply.

## **10. Structure of the dissertation**

The current study involves a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical part includes chapters one and two. Chapter one reviews the linguistic factors that may influence the learning process. This includes the linguistic aspects of the language which are grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Chapter two is devoted to shed the light on some psychological factors that may influence the learning process. This includes anxiety, self-esteem, and motivation. Chapter three will provide the analysis and the discussion of the findings of students' questionnaire and teachers' interview.

# Chapter one

## An overview of linguistic factors influencing the learning process

### Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to highlight some linguistic factors that may influence the learning process. As far as mastering a foreign language requires mastering its linguistic aspects that include grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, it is necessary to deal with those aspects. To initiate the chapter, giving an overview of the input hypothesis is very necessary to introduce for the main points that will be discussed. The first element that will be commenced by is grammar, its emergence and its definition will be offered initially. Moreover, we will deal with grammar and meaning, on one hand, and grammar and function on the other hand. Moving smoothly into vocabulary where the focus will be at the beginning on its definition, and then on its kinds. To go extremely into vocabulary difficulties faced by EFL learners, we will tackle initially its role in EFL classes and the importance of vocabulary building. Concluding with pronunciation, its fields, its definitions and its features will be discussed as well. To end up with intelligibility in pronunciation and EFL students perceptions of pronunciation is the last point in this chapter.

### I. 1. An overview of the ‘Input Hypothesis’

In EFL classes, students need not only to receive linguistic knowledge i.e. grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, but also they need to recognize that knowledge and understand it. In his Input Hypothesis about SLA (Second Language Acquisition), Krashen (1985) stated “humans acquire language in only one way\_ by understanding messages or by receiving ‘comprehensible input’” (80). In other words, students progress in their learning by understanding structures that are a bit beyond their existing knowledge.

According to this view, teachers have to provide their students with a Comprehensible Input (CI) that contains simple grammar and vocabulary produced in intelligible pronunciation. Indeed, the language used by the teacher should be corresponding students’ level. In addition, students in their turn have to be aware about grammar rules and to build their vocabulary and develop their communicative skills.

## **I. 2. An overview of grammar**

There was a shift in the study of English grammar from prescriptive into the scientific view. Saadania (2013) accordingly affirmed that the methods used previously to study grammar was purely from the prescriptive point of view until the 19th century, there is a shift into a more scientific view. This shift occurred thanks to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and his book ‘Course in General Linguistics’ that was published in 1916 by his scholars. Then, de Saussure radically altered the field of linguistics which emphasized the scientific study of a language generally and grammar especially. His work on linguistics gave way to structuralism which de-emphasized meaning and focused on the form of a language.

To sum up the above section, grammar was traditionally studied in prescriptive point view which emphasized meaning rather than the structure of a language. Recently, the emergence of linguistics field during de Saussure era contributes in changing the study of grammar into the more scientific point of view and gives rise to structuralism which studies the relationships that form a language. According to this view, grammar now focuses primarily on the structure of a given sentence and the relationships between the sentences that form certain text. Grammar is seen as source of rules that govern the relationships among words and within sentences to form well-structured text in written or spoken form.

## **II. 2. 1. Definition of grammar**

Grammar is widely defined by many researchers from deferent perspectives. As far as language is utilized for the purpose of communication, it should have a well-formed structure in order to be meaningful. Wilcox (2004) defined grammar as a system of rules that governs a certain language and allows the users of that language to convey meaningful messages. This latter is achieved by building both meaningful words which in their turn lead to build sentences and long pieces of writing or utterances. Knowing the rules of the target language helps students to establish a meaningful communication. Grammar is the study of a language rules. It makes an association between the structure of sentences or utterances and their meanings.

The above definition of grammar was based on the language as a system of communication that needs rules to make structures in order to convey meanings. The following definition; however, focuses on the form of a language rather than on its function by dividing grammar into two sub-studies: syntax and morphology. According to

Galasso (2002), grammar is separated into two studies which are closely related to each other i.e. they complete each other; they are namely called syntax and morphology. By definition, morphology is the study of grammar that is interested in how words are structured from their smallest units which called morphemes. Syntax deals with how words are combined together to form phrases, clauses and sentences. Both morphology and syntax deal with the form of language, but the former concerned with the word level while the latter is concerned with the sentence level.

On the light of the two above definitions, grammar could be defined as a set of rules for the arrangement of morphemes within a word and for the arrangement of words within a sentence to form well-structured texts. Those forms are used to convey meaningful messages and communicate effectively in the target language.

## **I. 2. 2. Grammar and meaning versus grammar and function**

The main purpose of using a language is for communication. Grammar provides users of a certain language with rules that govern the order of elements in particular discourse in order to convey meanings where each word or sentence has its function. Thornbury (1999) made a distinction between grammar and meaning, in one hand, where the focus is on the words formation in precise order to make sentences and texts and grammar and function, in the other hand, where the focus is on the intended meaning of the speaker or the writer and its interpretation by the listener or the reader.

### **I. 2. 2. 1. Grammar and meaning**

In the case of grammar and meaning, grammar looks at the meaning communicated in particular context. Thornbury (1999), accordingly argued that in some cases, a well-formed sentence does not convey meaning in its context and the vice versa. Indeed, sometimes few words with little or no grammar may make a sense in its word level where the context is provided i.e. the hearer or the reader should know the participants, the place and the time where the discourse takes place in order to be able to interpret the intended meaning of the speaker. For example, when a ticket inspector at a train says: Tickets! , the passengers will respond to his utterance by showing him their tickets. Although this utterance was produced with little grammar in only one word, the hearers interpreted it correctly thanks to the context. In short, the role of grammar and its rules of formation are reduced when the context is presented. Grammar plays a major role presented in providing the reader or the listener with the full structure that helps them to interpret the intended

meaning when the context is not offered. As a result, in addition to learning the structure of sentences, students need to learn more the expression of their meaning in particular context.

### **I. 2. 2. 2. Grammar and function**

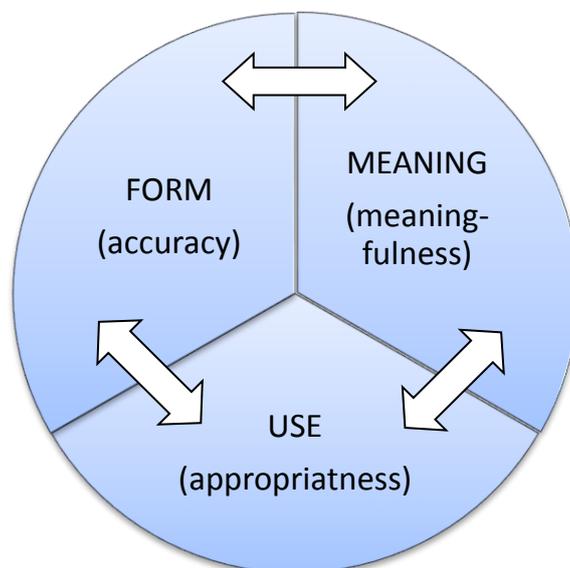
Each word within a sentence has its function and each sentence has its function within a discourse. According to Thornbury (1999), a word in a given sentence may function as subject, verb, adjective and other functions whereas a sentence or an utterance may function as a request, an invitation, an offer and other functions within a discourse. For example a father asked a young man who has come to take his daughter out whether he drinks or no by directing this question: do you drink? The young man answered with no and thanked the father for his offer. In this example the young man misinterpreted the father's intended meaning (request for information) and interpreted it as an offer. It is a matter of misunderstanding the function of the question. The father's question is grammatically correct, however, this structure has at least two meanings: the first one is the literal meaning i.e. the father is wondering if the young man is a drinker of alcohol or not, and the second meaning that the question may have in another context is an offer of a drink. In the light on this example, the sense of words and grammar is not very necessary, but the most important is the interpretation of the speaker's or writer's intended meaning. This latter has a relationship with the function of the individuals' utterances or sentences. As a result, learning grammatical structures is not sufficient, students should focus more on these structures in their use, and on their functions in order to communicate effectively. An association between forms and functions is very important. The role of grammar in this context is providing students with certain form-function matches to make the task easier. For example, the form would you like.....? It functions as an invitation or an offer. However, the context is still an important ingredient in a discourse to recognize its function.

### **I. 2. 3. The importance of grammar and grammar teaching**

Generally speaking, when dealing with a discourse, listeners or readers need a context in order to interpret speakers' or writers' intended meaning. The importance of the context takes place mostly where little grammar or no grammar is provided. According to Widdowson (1990: 86), grammar plays a major role in understanding meaning since "... it frees us from a dependency on context and a purely lexical categorization of reality" (cited

in Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011). With more grammar and full structures, listeners or readers could interpret the intended meaning correctly without referring to the context. Sometimes, the participants, the place and the time are not mentioned in particular discourse, however, thanks to grammar which provides listeners and readers with the full and well structured forms, they can understand meanings and communicate effectively.

Apart from the importance of grammar, grammar teaching is also very necessary. Zhang (2009) argued that in the field of language teaching, there are several claims about teaching grammar that emphasize the acquisition of grammar structures rather than learning them. However the function and the significance of grammar in language teaching are conserved. It is difficult to acquire grammar structures especially when the language does not exist in the learner's immediate context i.e. the target language (TL) is a foreign language (FL). Those learners who pick up a language without any formal instruction, they could achieve a degree of its fluency, but they could not achieve its accuracy. As a result, teaching grammar helps learners to improve their accuracy. Moreover, grammar is not only the study of rules about linguistic form, but it is also the study of meanings and functions. Grammar represents the three dimensions of form, meaning and use. The relationship between these three dimensions is illustrated in the following pie chart.



**Figure1. The three dimensions of grammar (Zhang, 2009: 187)**

Figure 1 shows that the three dimensions; form, meaning and use are interdependent. Indeed, a change in the form i.e. the structure of a sentence leads to a change in its meaning. For example, a change in the form of a sentence from active to the

passive voice leads to a change in its meaning. In the active voice the focus is on the doer rather than on the action, but in the passive voice which is more formal, the focus is on the action rather than on the doer. When the students know how to use these two voices accordingly to the context, they master the three dimensions: form (accuracy), meaning (meaningfulness) and use (appropriateness).

In order to ensure the importance of teaching grammar, it is necessary to make this conclusion. Zhang (2009) emphasized that grammar is the base of English language, so teaching it is very necessary. Grammar structures should be taught for many reasons. First, it governs the words' order within a sentence. Moreover, it governs the relationships between the elements within a sentence such as subject-verb agreement. Finally, grammar helps students to be more accurate. To sum up, teaching grammar is very important issue in EFL classes.

#### **I. 2. 4. Grammar difficulties and their effects on the learning process**

Grammar difficulty could be observed in terms of the assimilation and the production of grammar rules. Green and Hetch (1992) distinguished easy rules from hard rules by the extent to which the rules can be expressed by the learner. Indeed, easy rules are constantly and correctly used by students in their outputs. The easy rules that Green and Hetch identify in their study include, “those that (1) [refer] to easily recognized categories; (2) [can] be applied mechanically; (3) [are] not dependent on large contexts: for example the morphological dichotomies like *a/an*, *who/which*, straightforward cases of *some/any*, and simple word order” (179). “Hard rules,” on the other hand, refer to those that are difficult to identify or verbalize. One example given by Green and Hetch is aspect, the learning of which requires more than the acquisition of simple exhaustive descriptions (Cited in Shiu, 2011). In other words, grammatical rules considered as easy rules only if they are easily assimilated, produced automatically (unconsciously) and they are independent of contexts. On the contrary, hard rules are those that students find difficulties in understanding and producing them.

Another focus in the consideration of grammar difficulty will be discussed as well. Larsen-Freeman (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Larsen-Freeman, 2003a, 2003b) considered grammatical difficulty by focusing on linguistic form, semantic meaning, and pragmatic use. The linguistic form is related to the correct use of the morphological and syntactic aspect of a grammar feature. The semantic meaning is initially about the understanding of the literal message encoded by a lexical item or a grammatical feature.

The pragmatic use is related to the use of a lexical and grammatical feature appropriately within a context. According to Larsen-Freeman, grammar difficulty can be seen in the transition from one aspect to another. For example, learning the form of the English passive is easy, but using it appropriately within a context is more difficult (Cited in Shiu, 2011). Indeed, grammar difficulty could be seen in these three aspects: linguistic form (the structure), semantic meaning (the meaning of words as defined in the dictionary independently of contexts) and pragmatic meaning (the comprehension and the use of lexical and grammatical features depending on the contexts in which they applied). Precisely, grammatical difficulty takes place in manipulating them from one aspect to another.

Students who lack grammar competence may misunderstand written and spoken texts. Some researchers such as Wallace (1992) took word and sentence length as a criterion to measure a text difficulty. Thus, texts with longer sentences and longer words will be more difficult to understand than those with shorter ones (cited in Harmer, 2007). In other words, students who find difficulties in morphology, they lack the knowledge about the function of morphemes which leads to misunderstand the word. For example, a long word with two affixes (with one suffix and one prefix) may make the word difficult to be understood by many students because they consider it as a new and long word. The same problem occurs with complex sentences. For instance, students who lack the grammar knowledge about the functions of conjunctions, they find difficulties in the comprehension of complex sentences. This latter makes students misunderstand the whole text since they cannot recognize the relationships between sentences.

### **I. 3. An overview of vocabulary**

Vocabulary is a significant component of linguistic knowledge that students need to build and develop later on. Foreign language learners may find difficulties in understanding the meanings of new knowledge especially with those technical terms. This is due to the fact that the majority of EFL students at early stages particularly have limited vocabulary because they have limited exposure to the target language.

#### **I. 3. 1. Definition of vocabulary**

The concept of vocabulary is widely defined by many researchers. Vocabulary can be defined as “the total number of words that are needed to communicate ideas and express the speakers' meaning” (Alqahtani, 2015: 25). Vocabulary is a set of words used by a

person to communicate. In communication, as speakers/writers, they need to express their intentions and as listeners/readers, they need to interpret intentions and meanings. Indeed, vocabulary is the association between the words and their meanings in a given language.

Beside the former definition of vocabulary which focused on the relationship between form and meaning, a distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary could be made. Saengpakdeejit (2014) stated “we can say that receptive and productive knowledge is another aspect which is useful in understanding the L2 vocabulary learning process” (150). Receptive vocabulary refers to the knowledge that students hear or read while productive vocabulary refers to the knowledge that they utter or write. In other words, vocabulary is a set of words that students hear and/or use in their outputs.

### **I. 3. 2. Kinds of vocabulary**

In their learning process, EFL learners use vocabulary in order to communicate meanings. They could be either passive i.e. listening or reading, or active i.e. speaking or writing. Vocabulary is divided into two types, namely receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. Alqahtani (2015) accordingly cited the explanation of each type. In the following two paragraphs, a distinction between those two kinds will be made.

#### **I. 3. 2. 1. Receptive vocabulary**

When learners are passive as readers or listeners, they receive vocabulary. At this case, receptive vocabulary, as Webb (2009) explained, is words that learners recognize and understand when they are used in context, but they cannot produce. Receptive vocabulary is a kind of vocabulary that learners recognize when they see or meet in reading text, but they do not use it in speaking and writing (cited in Alqahtani, 2015). Receptive vocabulary is words and/or expressions that students comprehend from the context, but they cannot produce in their outputs. The misuse of receptive vocabulary is due to the fact that students either do not know their exact meanings and spelling or they do not know how to pronounce them correctly.

#### **I. 3. 2. 2. Productive vocabulary**

When learners are active as speakers or writers, they produce vocabulary. At this case, productive vocabulary, as Webb (2009) explained, is the words that the students comprehend and they can pronounce correctly and then use them constructively in speaking and writing. It involves what is needed for receptive vocabulary plus the ability to speak or write at the appropriate time. Therefore, productive vocabulary can be

addressed as an active process because the learners can produce the words to express their thoughts to others (cited in Alqahtani, 2015). Productive vocabulary is words and/or expressions that students comprehend and produce correctly in written or spoken forms since they are certain about their meaning and their pronunciation as well.

### **I. 3. 3. The importance of learning and building vocabulary**

Vocabulary plays a major role in the learning and development of foreign language competences and skills. For instance, vocabulary knowledge is significant in reading comprehension. Its importance is illustrated in the following hypothesis: “The heart of the instrumentalist hypothesis is that knowing the words enables text comprehension; this hypothesis claims that vocabulary knowledge is directly and importantly in the causal chain resulting in text comprehension” (Anderson & Freebody, 1979: 3). The instrumental hypothesis argued that the more students possess and develop their vocabulary the more they understand meanings. Vocabulary is the key of reading comprehension.

To master the four basic skills, students need not only to acquire new vocabulary, but also they need to expand their existing knowledge. Roy (2013) accordingly stated about the necessity of building vocabulary that contextual vocabulary is not sufficient, so vocabulary building is important in expressing individuals’ intentions to others. Moreover, building vocabulary is an important issue for students to know the meaning of words, their usage in a given context, and their independent usage in other situations. In other words, vocabulary is an essential component for all language skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thus, foreign language learners need to learn and develop their vocabulary. In some situations, guessing the meanings from the context could not be the best solution, so students have to build their vocabulary. Building vocabulary enables students to know the sense of words and how to apply and understand them in different contexts.

### **I. 3. 4. Vocabulary difficulties and their effects on the learning process**

Students who are learning English as a foreign language encounter with many vocabulary difficulties. As far as English Language is derived from the Latin, this makes English vocabulary enormous. Roy (2013) accordingly argued that English vocabulary is integrating words from numerous languages. For example, this kind of words applied for specific purpose to indicate especially technical words such as scientific and academic vocabulary. Another feature which makes English vocabulary difficult to master for EFL

learners is that English is a dynamic language. Indeed, many words in English change in highly irregular way. An example of this irregular change is affixes. Affixes in English change the words' meanings such as antonyms which used to give the opposite of words, and they change their functions also in the sentence such as 'ly' adjusts the function of an adjective to function as an adverb. These difficulties may affect students' outputs either their writings (in terms of correct spelling) or their speaking (in terms of correct pronunciation).

Another problem facing EFL learners to master English vocabulary is the L1 interference. Saigh and Schmitt (2012) claimed that there is an influence of L1 on the learning of second or foreign language. This occurs when students transfer their L1 processing routines over to the L2 in their attempt to process the L2 forms. The influence of L1 on L2 learning process could be negative transfer if students generalize their experience of learning L1 over the L2 learning process. Students' difficulties represented in words spelling and word recognition. For example, Arabic native speakers who are learning English as a second or foreign language have spelling difficulties due to the differences between Arabic and English orthographies. The influence of L1 on L2 word recognition is another problem face EFL students. This problem may occur in the case of translation, for example, when students translate words literally from their L1 to the target language and they neglect the context.

In addition to grammar difficulty and its effects on the comprehension of a text that was discussed previously, vocabulary plays a major role in a text's comprehensibility. Paran (1996) claimed that it depends on the number of unfamiliar words to consider whether the text is difficult or not. If readers and listeners do not know half the words in a text, they will have great difficulty in understanding the text as a whole. In order to understand the text, students need to recognize a high proportion of vocabulary without consciously thinking about it (cited in Harmer, 2007). In other words, the difficulty of vocabulary is presented in terms of unknown words within a text. Students' comprehension of the text either in spoken or in written form depends heavily on their understanding of the words that forming that text.

#### **I. 4. An overview of English pronunciation**

Pronunciation is an aspect of any given language. It is a component of linguistic knowledge that plays a major role in enhancing FL learners' communicative competence. Students, either as listeners or speakers, need to develop their communicative skill in order

to be able to produce comprehensible pronunciation and comprehend what they are listening to.

### **I. 4. 1. Phonetics and phonology**

The study of pronunciation includes two fields, phonetics and phonology. Kreidler (2004) made a distinction between these two fields: “Phonetics is the science which studies speech sounds as sounds” whereas “Phonology is the description of the sound system of a language, the link between speech and meaning” (11). The main differences between the two fields are illustrated and summarized in the following two paragraphs.

#### **I. 4. 1. 1. The field of phonetics**

Phonetics deals with the way sounds are uttered by the speaker, the acoustic properties of sound waves, and the effects that these have on the hearer. Phonetics is concerned with how sounds are produced by the speaker, the speech organs used to produce certain sound, the auditory manner of their production, and their effects on the hearer (Kreidler, 2004). Phonetics deals with the physical aspects of speech. Phonetics studies the sound in isolation i.e. it stops at the sound level. It is interested in providing the transcription of the language sounds according to their articulation manner in form of phonemes.

#### **I. 4. 1. 2. The field of phonology**

Phonology studies how sounds are organized into a system. It associates the physical aspects of speech with the linguistic knowledge possessed by speakers including grammar and vocabulary (Kreidler, 2004). Phonology deals with the organization and interpretation of sounds in particular language. In other words, phonology goes beyond the sound boundaries; it deals with words, sentences and texts. It studies word stress, rhythm, and intonation.

To sum up this section, the difference between phonetics and phonology is that the former is a science that studies sounds in isolation and the organs that are responsible for their articulation. However, the latter describes the sounds as a system of a particular language in its meaningful units.

### **I. 4. 2. Definition of pronunciation**

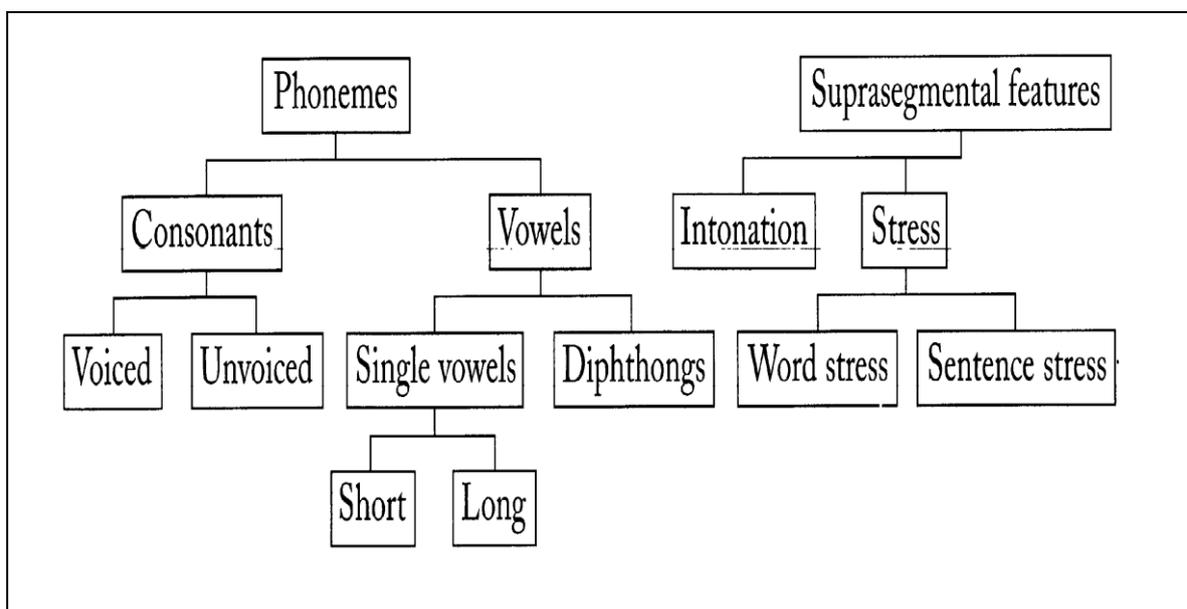
There are many definitions of pronunciation. The most general, and the well-known definition of pronunciation was provided by Oxford dictionary. Oxford dictionary defined pronunciation as “the way in which a language or particular word or sound is said” (2006).

According to this view, pronunciation is seen as referring to the manner of articulation at the sound level, and then moving to words and sentences levels by combining sounds.

Pronunciation is widely defined as referring to the production of sounds that we use to make meaning. It includes segments, supra-segmental aspects, voice quality, and gestures and expressions that are closely related to the way we speak a language (AMEP, 2002). In the light of this definition, pronunciation refers to the production of sounds used by humans for communication. It consists of particular sounds of a language, aspects of speech beyond the sound level such as stress and intonation and the way the voice is projected when speaking a language.

### I. 4. 3. Features of English pronunciation

English pronunciation incorporates a multitude of aspects. Kelly (2000) stated “In order to study how something works it is often useful to break it down into its constituent parts” (1). Separating pronunciation into its smallest components is helpful to study it. The main features of English pronunciation are shown in the following diagram:



**Figure2. Features of pronunciation (Kelly, 2000: 1)**

Figure 2 shows the main features of English pronunciation. Pronunciation involves two main features. First, features at the sound level i.e. phonemes that consist of two categories. The first category is consonants which include two subcategories voiced and unvoiced consonants, and the second one is vowels that consist of two subcategories single

vowels including short and long vowels, and diphthongs. The second features are supra-segmental features at the word and/or sentence level. These features include intonation and stress. This latter includes word stress and sentence stress.

Some features introduced previously defined by Kelly (2000) as follow:

**Phonemes** “are the different sounds within a language” (1). Phonemes are also known as segments. When the letter, in spelling and writing form, produced in spoken form it called phoneme. Phoneme is an individual sound.

**Supra-segmental features** “are features of speech which generally apply to groups of segments, or phonemes” (3). Supra-segmental features incorporate a set of phonemes. The combination of phonemes provides words and sentences.

Under the category of phonemes, two subcategories are identified which are namely vowel sounds and consonant sounds. The following table lists English phonemes with examples for each phoneme.

Vowels		Diphthongs		Consonants			
i:	<u>bead</u>	eɪ	<u>cake</u>	p	<u>pin</u>	s	<u>sue</u>
ɪ	<u>hit</u>	ɔɪ	<u>toy</u>	b	<u>bin</u>	z	<u>zoo</u>
ʊ	<u>book</u>	aɪ	<u>high</u>	t	<u>to</u>	ʃ	<u>she</u>
u:	<u>food</u>	ɪə	<u>beer</u>	d	<u>do</u>	ʒ	<u>measure</u>
e	<u>left</u>	ʊə	<u>fewer</u>	k	<u>cot</u>	h	<u>hello</u>
ə	<u>about</u>	eə	<u>where</u>	g	<u>got</u>	m	<u>more</u>
ɜ:	<u>shirt</u>	əʊ	<u>go</u>	tʃ	<u>church</u>	n	<u>no</u>
ɔ:	<u>call</u>	aʊ	<u>house</u>	dʒ	<u>judge</u>	ŋ	<u>sing</u>
æ	<u>hat</u>			f	<u>fan</u>	l	<u>live</u>
ʌ	<u>run</u>			v	<u>van</u>	r	<u>red</u>
ɑ:	<u>far</u>			θ	<u>think</u>	j	<u>yes</u>
ɒ	<u>dog</u>			ð	<u>the</u>	w	<u>wood</u>

**Figure3. English phonemes (Kelly, 2000: 2)**

Figure 3 shows English phonemes and it provides each phoneme with an example to make a clear understanding for its articulation. English phonemes consist of vowels, diphthongs (combination of two vowels) and consonants.

#### **I. 4. 4. Perfect pronunciation versus intelligible pronunciation**

As far as the purpose of learning a SL or FL language is to communicate effectively in the TL, students and their teachers make their efforts to pronounce like native speakers. Morley (1991) stated that second/foreign language students and/or teachers could not achieve Perfect Pronunciation and /or they could not pronounce nearly like native speakers (NS). To pronounce like (NS) and achieve high levels of performance is unattainable for the majority of EFL learners and teachers. This latter is because of the age factor since the majority of EFL learners learn the TL after the age of adolescence. Indeed, the age factor makes non-native speakers (NNS) do not achieve perfect pronunciation. However, perfect pronunciation is not a necessary condition to communicate comprehensible output. The most important is intelligible pronunciation. Intelligible pronunciation is about producing comprehensible output in a clear manner.

There are many views about intelligibility in pronunciation. According to Lynch & Anderson (2012), adult students who speak a second language will not achieve the accent of NS. However, fortunately they do not need to pronounce like native speakers. What they need is “to be comfortably intelligible” (Kenworthy 1987: 3). The word comfortable is used to refer to the listeners rather than referring to the speaker. In other words NNS need to make their pronunciation comprehensible and understood by their listeners i.e. they need to speak in a clear manner.

#### **I. 4. 5. Students’ perceptions of English pronunciation**

As foreign language learners, students at early stages particularly have difficulties in comprehending English pronunciation. This problem may affect their listening comprehension as well. This occurs because of the minor exposure to the target language.

As far as a word is a set of phonemes, so the meaning of a given word would change if students perceived certain phoneme incorrectly. According to Harmer (2007), students have a problem of what they can hear. Their difficulty presented in hearing pronunciation features. This is due to the fact that many native speakers of different first languages frequently have problems with sounds that exist in the target language and their language does not have the same sounds. This problem is the result of the negative transfer from L1 over L2. An example of the influence of L1 on L2 learning process is the /p/ phoneme which exists in English language, but it does not exist in Arabic language. That is why the majority of EFL students whose native language is Arabic have difficulty not only in producing that phoneme, but also in perceiving it.

EFL students could not recognize sounds of the target language because of the little exposure to it. Gilakjani (2012) accordingly claimed “Adult learners may have little opportunity to surround themselves with the native target language input” (124). When students were not exposed to the target language outside the classroom, they would find the teacher’s pronunciation stranger and difficult to understand. This latter may result in difficulties in listening comprehension which leads to miscomprehension of the message or incomprehension of it at all.

The previous mentioned aspects of the language which are grammar vocabulary and pronunciation are interrelated. Indeed, if students find difficulties in pronunciation, they will encounter with difficulties in grammar and vocabulary as well. According to Ellis (1997), the appropriate use of particular sounds’ articulation allows the students to acquire the words’ forms, and to formulate phrases and sentences. This latter entails that students who are deficient at making combination of sounds into words and at analyzing them, they should have difficulties in the acquisition of the lexical and syntactic aspects of a language. In other words, pronunciation difficulties lead to grammar and vocabulary difficulties.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter was devoted to give an overview of linguistic factors that may influence the learning process. The linguistic factors discussed previously are those aspects of the language which are namely grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Those factors mentioned in the above section have a major influence on EFL students’ learning processes. Thus, students should be aware about those factors in order to develop their competencies. Teachers also have to take those factors into consideration when presenting their courses, and they need to assist their students in their learning progress. Not only linguistic factors may influence the learning process, but also psychological factors are considered. An overview of those psychological factors will be discussed in the second chapter.

## **Chapter two**

### **An overview of some psychological factors influencing the learning process**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is devoted to shed the light on some psychological factors influencing the learning process. As far as language is located in the brain and psychology is the study of human's brain, it is essential to deal with some psychological factors that may affect the learning process. The affective factors that will be tackled are: anxiety, self esteem, and motivation. As a starting point, it is necessary to establish definition for each element of them. Moving into their types is the second step that will be dealt with in this chapter to give more clarification and details. Going extremely to their effects on the learning process is the final point in that will be discussed in this chapter.

#### **I. 1. An overview of 'The Affective Filter Hypothesis'**

In EFL classes, students need, as it was tackled in chapter one, a comprehensible input that contains simple vocabulary and grammar and which produced in intelligible pronunciation. However, in his Affective Filter Hypothesis, Krashen (1985) claimed "comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition, but it is not sufficient" (81). Indeed, providing students with clear information may not be satisfactory for them. In other words, there are some conditions, in addition to comprehensible input, should be available for students to acquire the second/foreign language. In short, there are additional factors that may influence students' acquisition of the language and those factors may affect their comprehension of their courses as well.

In order to investigate factors influencing the learning process, several hypotheses are theories were formulated. Many researchers in the fields of education and psychology assume that there are hidden factors that may affect the learners' comprehension. In The Affective Filter Hypothesis, Krashen (1985) claimed that there are several affective variables associated with success in language acquisition include anxiety, self-esteem, and motivation. Those affective factors have a major impact on the learners' achievement. According to this view, there are some psychological factors that may affect students' acquisition of the second/foreign language and may also affect their assimilation of their courses. Those factors are interrelated and they may affect the learning process either positively or negatively.

## **II. 2. An overview of anxiety**

Anxiety is considered as one of the main psychological factors that may influence the learning process. In EFL classes, the majority of students, at early stages particularly, experienced anxiety. This latter may affect students' performances either in a positive or in a negative way.

### **II. 2. 1. Definition of anxiety**

The concept anxiety has been defined by many researchers. For instance, Spielberger (1983) defined anxiety as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system (cited in Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxiety is an emotional state of stress, fear, and pressure related to a stimulation of the autonomic nervous system which controls our involuntary behaviors and feelings.

In order to discover the source of anxiety another definition will be provided. While in the above definition the focus was on the association between anxiety and the individual's internal system, the focus here is on the external stimuli. Anxiety is "functionally related to actual confrontation with danger, not simply the detection of and preparation for danger" (Chorpita & Barlow 1998: 3). Anxiety produced when someone encounters with a definite danger. It is provoked not only to detect it, but also to prepare for it.

### **II. 2. 2. Types of anxiety**

In order to identify the influence of anxiety in the learning of a second language, anxiety has been classified into three types. MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) identified three types of anxiety: trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety. Depending on the context i.e. situation and time, anxiety could take three types: trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety.

There is a different taxonomy of anxiety. According to the categorization that employed by (Scovel, 1978), anxiety is classified into two types: facilitating and debilitating anxiety (cited in Khodadady & Khajavy, 2013). This taxonomy based on the effect that anxiety has on the learning process as a criterion of classification. Anxiety may affect the learning process positively or negatively.

#### **II. 2. 2. 1. State anxiety**

The first type of anxiety that has been identified according to the situation where it is produced is called state anxiety. State anxiety is experienced in different situations and events from time to time, but not all the time. Cattell and Scheier(1963) stated that this

type of anxiety is temporary and provoked as an emotional reaction to the current situation.(cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). There some situation where the majority of people maybe anxious. The type of anxiety that produced during those stressed events or situations called state anxiety. State anxiety has a time limitation .i.e. it is stimulated during the existing situation as a response to it, and then it disappears when this situation finishes.

### **II. 2. 2. 2. Situation-specific anxiety**

The second type of anxiety that has been identified according to its context is called Situation-specific anxiety. This type of anxiety is associated with a definite type of situation or event. It is defined as “the probability of becoming anxious in a particular type of situation, such as during tests (labeled as test anxiety), when solving mathematics problems (math anxiety), or when speaking a second language (language anxiety)” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994: 2). Situation-specific anxiety is that type of anxiety which is related to specific event or situation. Indeed, individuals with situation-specific anxiety feel anxious in a specific kind of situations and this feeling is always repeated whenever that situation occurs.

### **II. 2. 2. 3. Trait anxiety**

The third type of anxiety that has been identified according to its context is called trait anxiety. There is a kind of people that feel anxious all the time. It does not a matter for them what the situation is, they feel anxious even when they are in normal and unstressed situations. According to Spielberger (1983), trait anxiety refers to the constant predisposition to become anxious during all the situations (cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Distinct from the other types, trait anxiety is timeless and it has no specific situation to be provoked. People who suffer from trait anxiety feel anxious in all situations even in those situations where they do not need to be anxious. In short, trait anxiety is a chronic feeling.

### **II. 2. 2. 4. Facilitating anxiety versus debilitating anxiety**

The second taxonomy that was employed by Scovel is based on the effect of anxiety on the learning process that could be positive or negative. In this classification, anxiety has two types: facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety. Anxiety does not always hinder the learning process, it could improve language performance. In Scovel (1978)’ taxonomy, facilitating anxiety has a positive effect on language leaning while debilitating anxiety has

negative impact on learners' performance (cited in Khodadady & Khajavy, 2013). Whereas debilitating anxiety impedes students from performing better, facilitating anxiety helps them to improve their progress of learning. In some situations, small amount of anxiety may help students to perform better. It pushes them to revise well and to be more motivated. This type of anxiety called facilitating anxiety because it facilitates performance and smoothes the progress of the learning. The second type of anxiety in Scovel's taxonomy is called debilitating anxiety because it hinders the learning process. It makes students very stressed and unable to concentrate in their tasks. Debilitating anxiety has a negative impact on the assimilation of the lectures and on the students' achievements as well.

### **II. 2. 3. Effects of anxiety on the learning process**

Depending on its level, anxiety could affect the learning process positively or negatively. Anxiety could be normal or abnormal feeling depending on its amount. Fletcher and Langley (2009) accordingly asserted that low level of anxiety is a normal and positive feeling that pushes people to work better or to take care of themselves in dangerous situations. In contrast, high level of anxiety is abnormal and negative feeling associated with nervousness which impedes people from success. Normal anxiety works as a facilitator and motivator in the learning context. On the contrary, abnormal anxiety works as a hinder and obstacle of the learning process. Normal/abnormal anxieties like facilitating/debilitating anxieties have the same effect on the learning process.

Anxiety is associated with learning a foreign language. Dobson (2012) stated that "Students with high levels of anxiety may also have more difficulty when learning a new language than students with lower levels of anxiety" (16). Foreign language students with low level of anxiety are more successful than others with high levels of anxiety. Accordingly, anxiety may result in reading comprehension difficulties. Consequently, some students may fail in understanding the meanings of what they are reading because of anxiety. Dobson (2012) adjoined that "some students are so worried about failing an assignment or test that the students cannot retrieve information or store new information" (16). The reason behind their failure in a test is that students with high levels of anxiety believe that they are unable to remember the structures or memorize new information. High level of anxiety makes the majority of students lose their concentration during the test because they believe that they forgot information that's why they start to think about failure rather than thinking about success.

Anxiety is also related to the language skills. Daly and Miller (1975) reported that researchers studying writing in a native language have found that students with higher levels of writing anxiety write shorter compositions and qualify their writing less than their calmer counterparts do (cited in Horwitz et al. , 1986). Anxiety associated also with writing skill. It may affect the quantity and quality of students' pieces of writing. Students who experience high level of writing anxiety may produce shorter pieces of writing with less level of quality than other students with normal anxiety.

Anxiety may also affect students' listening comprehension. Anxious students face difficulties in discriminating the sounds and structures of a target language message which results in the misunderstanding of that message. Moreover, many students commonly report that they have test anxiety that makes them forget certain grammar points and make careless errors in spelling or syntax although they know the structures and rules. Horwitz et al. (1986) accordingly appended "The student realizes, usually some time after the test that s/he knew the correct answer but put down the wrong one due to nervousness" (126). Anxiety affects students' listening comprehension first of all at the sound level (pronunciation) which leads to misunderstand words (morphological level) which in their turns lead to misunderstand sentences (syntactic level). This latter may lead to miscomprehend the meaning of the whole text (semantic level). Anxiety prevents students not only from comprehension their lectures, but also from success in their tests.

## **II. 3. An overview of self-esteem**

Generally speaking, self-esteem is a component of an individual's personality. In EFL classes, building the learners' self-esteem plays a major role in enhancing the learning process. In order to determine the necessity of building self-esteem in improving the learning process, its definitions will be discussed as well.

### **II. 3. 1. Definition of self-esteem**

The concept self-esteem is discussed by many researchers in the fields of psychology and education. Self-esteem is "usually used with reference to evaluations that individuals make and retain of themselves. It incorporates attitudes of approval or disapproval and the degree to which people feel valuable, capable significant and competent" (INTO, 1995: 10). Self-esteem is seen as referring to how individuals value themselves. It is related to the position of agreement or disagreement that people have in their minds about themselves and to what extent they believe that they are worthy and capable.

The former definition emphasizes the individuals' abilities of evaluating themselves. The focus here is on the charity and tolerance with oneself. According to Villeneuve (1997), Self-esteem means "that a person knows himself or herself well and feels comfortable with the kind of person they are" (5). Self-esteem is turning around the idea of the acceptance of oneself as it is in all conditions of success or failure. In addition to the acceptance of oneself that someone feels about her/himself, self-esteem means also the state of being proud of oneself.

### **II. 3. 2. The relationship between self-esteem and other components of the personality**

There are several components of the personality among them self-respect, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-attribute. These concepts have a relationship with self-esteem. To discover this relationship, it is necessary to define each component.

**Self-respect** refers to the judgment that individuals make in comparison with someone whom they are thinking that he/she is ordinary or ideal. If they are satisfied with themselves, they reach their self-respect. Branden (1969) stated "every human being judges himself by some standard; and to the extent that he fails to satisfy that standard, his sense of personal worth, his self-respect, suffers accordingly" (114). Self-respect is seen as referring to the sense of self-worth. It is the beliefs that individuals have about themselves that they have a value. Self-respect is the satisfaction of oneself as it is no need to compare it with any person.

**Self-confidence** is "the belief that one has the ability to produce results, accomplish goals or perform tasks competently" (Dornyei, 1994: 277). Self-confidence refers to the belief in one's ability to do something, achieve certain goal and/or present an activity successfully and in a good manner. While self-confidence is the sense of being able to do something competently, self-esteem is just opinions people have about themselves in general.

**Self-efficacy** is a component of students' personalities; it has a relationship with their success. According to Walker (2004) "self-efficacy refers to the confidence a person has the ability to be successful based on past success" (2). Self-efficacy is presuppositions that students make relying on past experiences. In other words, if students achieve in a given task, they will achieve in another. The past experience of success motivates students to perform better.

**Self-attributes** are the beliefs about oneself. Walker (2004) defines self-attributes as “The student’s beliefs about physical appearance, intellectual ability, athletic ability, and social ability are his/her self-attributes” (4). It is the convictions that students have about their abilities. Self-efficacy is the capacity to qualify oneself in terms of physical appearance and ability, intelligence, sociability.

Although there is exchangeability in using the above mentioned concepts, in the light of their definition, a slight difference could be assumed. The relationship between self-esteem and the other components of personality is that self-esteem is an umbrella term encompassing self-respect (the sense of satisfaction about oneself), self-confidence (the sense of being able to do something competently, self-efficacy (a presupposition made based upon previous experiences), and self-attribute (the convictions about oneself’ appearance and skills). The sum of those components of personality formulates self-esteem.

## **II. 3. 3. Types of self-esteem**

Depending on its level self-esteem has been classified into two types. Reece and Brandt (2005) believed there are two types of self-esteem which are namely: high self-esteem and low self-esteem (cited in Butt et al 2011). Self-esteem is categorized into two types: high self-esteem and low self-esteem. Reece and Brandt took in consideration the level of self-esteem as a criterion for their classification.

### **II. 3. 3. 1. High self-esteem**

The first type of self-esteem that has been identified according to its level is namely called high self-esteem. High self-esteem was defined by Walz (1991) as appreciating oneself and acknowledging self-worth, self-control, and competence, with a corresponding positive attitude and high self-evaluation (cited in Sternke 2010). High self-esteem is being pleased about oneself with high sense of worth and capability. Individuals with high self-esteem are able to manage their feelings especially the negative ones. High self-esteem is related to positive attitude. The effect that high self-esteem has on the learning process will be discussed in the next element under the title: effect of self-esteem on the learning process in details.

### **II. 3. 3. 2. Low self-esteem**

The second type of self-esteem that has been identified according to its level is namely called low self-esteem. Brendgen (2002) defined low self-esteem as having low self-

evaluations, self-criticism, and feelings of hopelessness (cited in Sternke 2010). Low self-esteem is evaluating oneself negatively with thoughts of dissatisfaction and depression. Individuals with low self-esteem lack the ability of acknowledging themselves and their abilities. Low self-esteem is associated with negative attitude. The effect that low self-esteem has on the learning process will be discussed in the next element under the title: effects of self-esteem on the learning process in details.

## **II. 3. 4. Effects of self-esteem on the learning process**

Self-esteem could affect foreign language learners positively or negatively according to its type. Brown (2007) accordingly stated that students with high self-esteem actually performed better in foreign language (cited in Nosratinia and Mohammadzamani, 2014). Having high self-esteem helps foreign language students to achieve better than those with low self-esteem. High self-esteem is a predictor of good performance and high achievement in a foreign language.

High self-esteem may affect all the aspects of individuals' lives generally and their learning processes especially in a positive way. High self-esteem makes people more prepared to participate in groups and share their thoughts. They can even make criticism to show their disagreement (Baumeister et al., 2003). Self-esteem takes place within a community where individuals with high self-esteem involve themselves and they are active participants in a certain communication. Contrasting students with low self-esteem, students with high self-esteem seem to be more engaged in communication either with their classmates or with the teacher. They can ask questions, seek for information or explanation, and impose their ideas.

Low self-esteem may affect students' performances negatively. According to Brandt and Reece (2005), students with low self-esteem claim that they are not responsible for their mistakes. Instead they develop a strategy of blaming others, so they will not be able to learn from their errors. In addition, they are apprehensive about their mistakes and failures with avoiding new attempts and lack of defined goals. Whereas, students with high self-esteem seem to be more likely to learn from their mistakes and failures since they believe that behind every experience there is something to learn. They are goal oriented with problem solving abilities. Students with high self-esteem are able to control their emotions to not affect their behavior negatively (cited in Butt et al., 2011). High self-esteem helps students to develop self-control which makes them behave positively when facing problems and failures.

High self-esteem is the key of success for all aspects of people's lives. Orth and Robins (2014) argued that "In classrooms and workplaces, sporting events and music recitals, people generally assume that high self-esteem is critical to success in that domain" (381). Indeed, the level of self-esteem has an influence on significant life outcomes; people with high self-esteem in contrast to those with low self-esteem seem to be more successful in their contemporary lives whatever the domain is.

## **II. 4. An overview of motivation**

In EFL classes, the majority of teachers seek to increase students' achievement. This latter is likely accomplished if teachers match their instructions and their techniques of teaching with students' interests and needs. Indeed, motivation takes place where students meet their needs.

### **II. 4. 1. Definition of motivation**

The concept motivation has been widely defined by researchers in the fields of psychology and education. Motivation is extensively associated with language learning and students' achievement. In order to define the concept 'motivation' Dornyei (1994) depended on Gardner's Tested Motivation Theory which he explained as "motivation to learn a foreign language is seen as referring to the extent to which the individual strives to learn the L2 because of a desire to achieve a goal and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (516). Motivation refers to the degree to which second language learners attempt to learn the target language due to their need to accomplish certain objective and the pleasure related to that task. The more students willingly struggle to learn a foreign language, the more they will succeed.

Another definition of motivation will be provided. In the following definition, Brophy (2008) focused on 'student motivation' as it "is rooted in students' subjective experiences, especially those connected to their willingness to engage in learning activities and their reasons for doing so" (4). Motivation is derived from students' personal experiences. Motivation is a set of feelings which encourages individuals to be occupied in their assignments and enables them achieve their goals. Motivation helps students in increasing their engagements in the tasks which leads them to achieve their desired objectives.

## **II. 4. 2. An overview of motivation theories**

There are several theories about motivation. A few of them will be discussed as well. The focus will be on those theories that are closely related to the learning context. These include needs theories among them Maslow's Theory and McClelland's Need for Achievement Theory, and also behavior reinforcement theories.

### **II. 4. 2. 1. The Needs Theories**

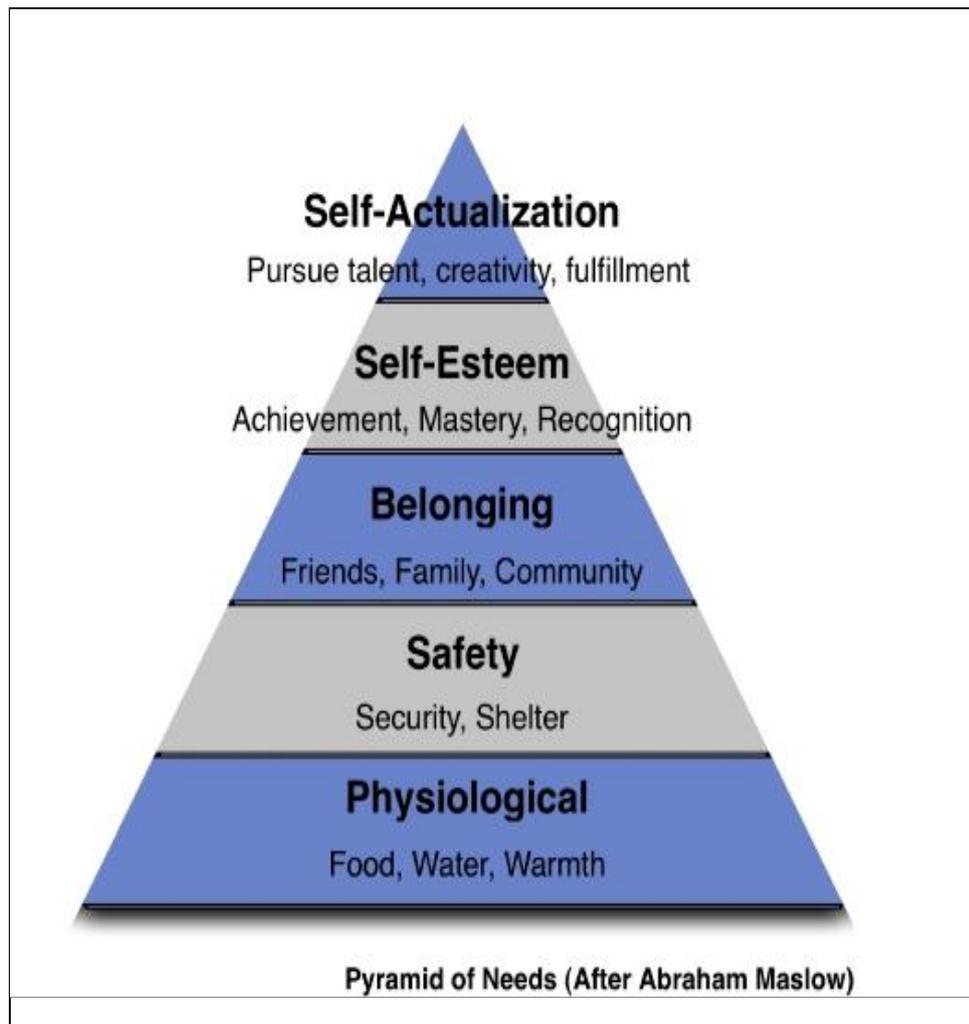
Needs theories are those theories of motivation that emphasize the fulfillment of an internal desire as a central goal. In these theories, motivation is considered as a primary condition to meet certain needs. There are two main needs theories: McClelland's Need for Achievement Theory and Maslow's Theory. The principles of each theory will be illustrated in the following two paragraphs.

#### **II. 4. 2. 1. 1. McClelland's Need for Achievement Theory**

McClelland has proposed a theory of motivation that is closely associated with learning concepts. Gibson, Ivancevich and Donnelly (1979) accordingly explained that the theory proposes that when a need is strong in a person, its effect is to motivate the person to use behavior which leads to satisfaction of the need. The main theme of McClelland's theory is that needs are learned through coping with one's environment. Since needs are learned, behavior which is rewarded tends to recur at a higher frequency (cited in Pardee, 1990). McClelland's theory claims that if a person needs strongly to achieve certain goal, her/his need motivates her/him to achieve that goal. The primary source of motivation is the environment surrounding someone who takes from it her/his needs. Needs are initially learnt from the environment thanks to motivation. Once those needs are met, the rewarded behavior is likely to occur again in higher level.

#### **II. 4. 2. 1. 2. Maslow's Needs Theory**

Maslow's Theory states that people have a pyramid hierarchy of needs that they will satisfy from bottom to top. There are deficiency needs which are the basic needs. Once those needs are met, people can move to the second level where they should meet the higher needs. The second level of needs is the growth needs that could not be satisfied unless the basics have been met (INTO, 1995). Maslow's Theory focuses on motivation as source of strength and desire to satisfy certain needs. People cannot reach self-actualizing unless certain lower levels of need are satisfied. This theory will be illustrated in the following diagram:



**Figure4. Maslow's pyramid of Needs (INTO, 1995: 8)**

The pyramid hierarchy shows a set of needs ordered from the bottom to the top. People should fulfill their needs in the order given. The needs are divided into two categories: deficiency needs that include physiological and safety needs which are the basic categories, and also growth needs that consist of belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. People cannot achieve their self-actualization unless they satisfy their physiological needs basically. In short, the satisfaction of the basic needs which are the physiological needs lead to the achievement of the safety needs and the other needs in order to achieve self-actualization which is the top of the hierarchy. The transition from the lower needs to the higher needs requires motivation as a necessary condition.

#### **II. 4. 2. 2. Behavior Reinforcement Theories**

Traditionally, behavioral theories claim that human behaviors are basically responses to certain drives or needs. Brophy (2008) accordingly continues "Behaviorists later

deemphasized drives or needs and instead focused on reinforcement as the primary mechanism for establishing and maintaining behavior” (4). Behavior reinforcement theories emphasized reinforcements as external stimuli that drive humans to initiate a given behavior and increase its frequency of occurrence later on. Reinforcements are used to raise individuals’ desires to behave in certain way. Once this behavior occurs, reinforcements are used again to make that behavior arise in the future in the same way or even better.

## **II. 4. 3. Types of motivation**

The taxonomy of motivation in SLA came from cognitive and social psychology. Tuan (2012) accordingly, cited that in cognitive psychology, two types of motivation are instrumental and integrative motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). In social psychology, two main types of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Harmer, 1991). In the light of these taxonomies, the categorization of motivation differs from one psychological perspective to another. In one hand, cognitive psychology classified motivation into two types: instrumental and integrative motivation. Social psychology, in the other hand, offered two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

### **II. 4. 3. 1. Instrumental motivation versus integrative motivation**

Cognitive psychology framework divided motivation into two types: instrumental and integrative motivation. The distinction between these two types is that instrumental motivation refers to the situations where the purpose of language learning is to get a benefit. The purpose of integrative motivation is that language is learnt just to be integrated in that language and its culture (Soureshjani & Naseri, 2011). Both instrumental and integrative motivation related to learning a foreign language, but they differ in the purpose of learning it. In the former, learners want to learn a foreign language in order to obtain an advantage from learning it such as getting a job while in the latter they are learning in order to be part of the community due to their interest in the target language and its culture. Both instrumental and integrative motivation helps students to achieve their goals. Students with instrumental motivation learn the target language to benefit from it their lives that is why their desire is enhanced to succeed. However, students with integrative motivation learn the target language because they want to explore the language and its culture in order to be liked by its community. They have also the desire to succeed and make efforts to achieve that goal.

### **II. 4. 3. 2. Intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation**

Social psychology framework classified motivation into two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The difference between these two types is that “extrinsic motivation is related to the purpose of getting something in the outside world like getting a prize. But in contrast, intrinsic motivation pertains to internal factors and learning the language just for itself” (Soureshjani & Naseri, 2011: 663). Motivation could be intrinsic or extrinsic according to its source whether it is internal to the individuals or external to them. Indeed, intrinsic motivation comes from the individual’s internal desire to do something whereas extrinsic motivation comes from the individual’s outside factors. Students with intrinsic motivation do their task because they find it enjoyable. They have the desire to succeed that’s why they like what they are learning and make their tasks pleasant. However, students with extrinsic motivation learn the target language and do their tasks in order to get something from the outside such as rewards. In other words, their desire is reinforced by external factors. These external factors could be abstract such as stickers or extra marks, and/or concrete such as prizes or money.

In the light of what has been said previously about the taxonomies of motivation, an assumption could be made. Instrumental motivation is, in some way, related to extrinsic motivation while integrative motivation is, in some way, related to intrinsic motivation.

### **II. 4. 4. Impacts of motivation on the learning process**

In order to attain certain goal “The motivated individual exhibits a desire and interest towards foreign language learning, both accompanied by an effort, the desire to achieve the goal (achievement motivation) acts as a propelling force and incides on the individual’s work” (Fernández & Cañado, 2001: 337). Motivated individuals are willingly interested in learning a foreign language. They make efforts to achieve their goals. This makes motivated students more successful than others.

Motivation has a significant impact on EFL students’ learning performance. Tuan (2012) stated that students with high level of motivation for learning frequently achieve better than those with low level or no motivation to study. Thus, motivation is a predictor of students’ learning achievements, that is to say, highly motivated students are more successful than those who are less motivated or unmotivated to learn. Tuan (2012) accordingly added “For these demotivated students, no curricula and teaching methods are appropriate or good enough to ensure their learning achievements” (430). Indeed, without

being intrinsically motivated, students could not achieve better even if they have all the sympathetic learning conditions.

Students with high levels of motivation develop their learning abilities and behave positively towards the subject matter. Bhoje (2015) accordingly listed six benefits of motivation in improving the learning and performance. Motivation “can:

- ✓ Direct behavior towards particular goals
- ✓ Lead to increased effort and energy
- ✓ Increase initiation of, and persistence in, activities
- ✓ Enhance cognitive processing
- ✓ Determine what consequences are reinforce
- ✓ Lead to improved performance” (76).

The role of motivation is significantly appeared in EFL classes. It helps students to be goal oriented in learning the target language, and then increase their effort and intrinsic power to achieve certain goals. Moreover, motivation assists students in their engagement in activities since it drives students not only to commence certain task, but also to keep on doing it. Furthermore, motivation helps students to improve their intellectual power and their decisions about the results that strengthen them. As a result, motivation directs students to improve their performance.

Foreign language learners are exposed to new information daily. Krashen (1985) in his Affective Filter Hypothesis claimed that even though teachers make the input comprehensible, the acquirer needs to be opened to the input. Affective filter is a mental block that prevents the input from reaching the LAD (Language Acquisition Device). This occurs when students are unmotivated, lacking in self-esteem, and/or anxious. The filter to be down requires high motivation accompanied with high self-esteem and low level of anxiety. Indeed, to acquire the language, students need not only a comprehensible input but also they need to be opened to that input. According to this view, there is a device in our brain which is responsible for the language acquisition; this device called namely LAD (Language Acquisition Device). In addition, there is a filter formed by some psychological factors which are: anxiety, self-esteem and motivation. This filter or mental block is called affective filter. In order to acquire second/foreign language, new information that is transferred to students should reach the LAD. This latter may occur in one way; when students are highly motivated, and they have high level of self-esteem with low level of anxiety. In other words, to comprehend meanings, the affective filter should be low to allow the input reach the LAD, and then learning is facilitated and success takes place.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter was devoted to investigate some psychological factors that may influence the learning process. The psychological factors, discussed previously are anxiety, self-esteem and motivation. As a result, the factors mentioned in the above section have a major influence on EFL students' learning processes. Thus, students should be aware about those factors in order to manage them. Teachers also have to take those factors into consideration when presenting their courses, and they need to assist their students to overcome them.

## **Chapter three**

### **Analysis and discussion of results**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous two chapters, a review of some psychological and linguistic factors influencing the learning process in general has been proposed. In this chapter, the emphasis will be on how the previous discussed factors hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses. In order to achieve this goal, two tools were used to gather data which are a questionnaire directed to first year students and an interview held with first year teachers of linguistics. This chapter is divided into three main sections. The

first section includes the analysis of the students' questionnaire. The second section includes the analysis of the teachers' interview. The last section includes a discussion of the results to verify the formulated hypothesis.

### **III.1. Analysis of the students' questionnaire**

In order to investigate the major factors hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses, a structured questionnaire was designed and addressed to first year students at Biskra University.

#### **III. 1. 1. Administration and design of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire was addressed to first year students of English at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. The sample was chosen randomly about 25 students from the whole population. The questionnaire aims at investigating factors hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses.

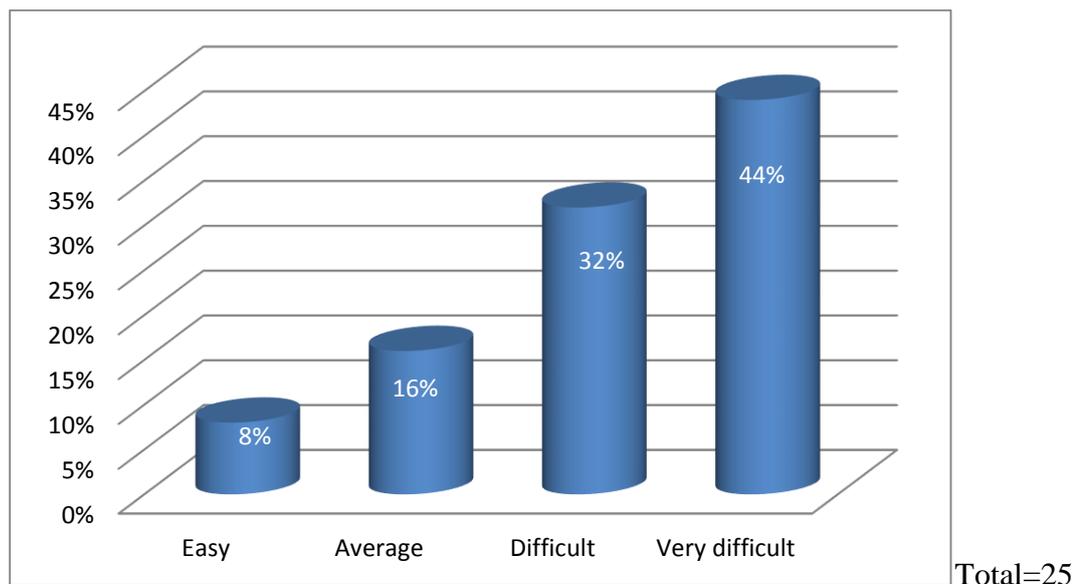
The questionnaire consists of 12 close-ended questions where the students asked to tick the appropriate answers. Those questions were raised for seeking the adequate answers about students' attitudes towards linguistics and the main difficulties encountering them when learning linguistics.

#### **III. 1. 2. Results and interpretations of the questionnaire**

##### **Question 1**

How do you find linguistics module

- a. Easy?
- b. Average?
- c. Difficult?
- d. Very difficult?



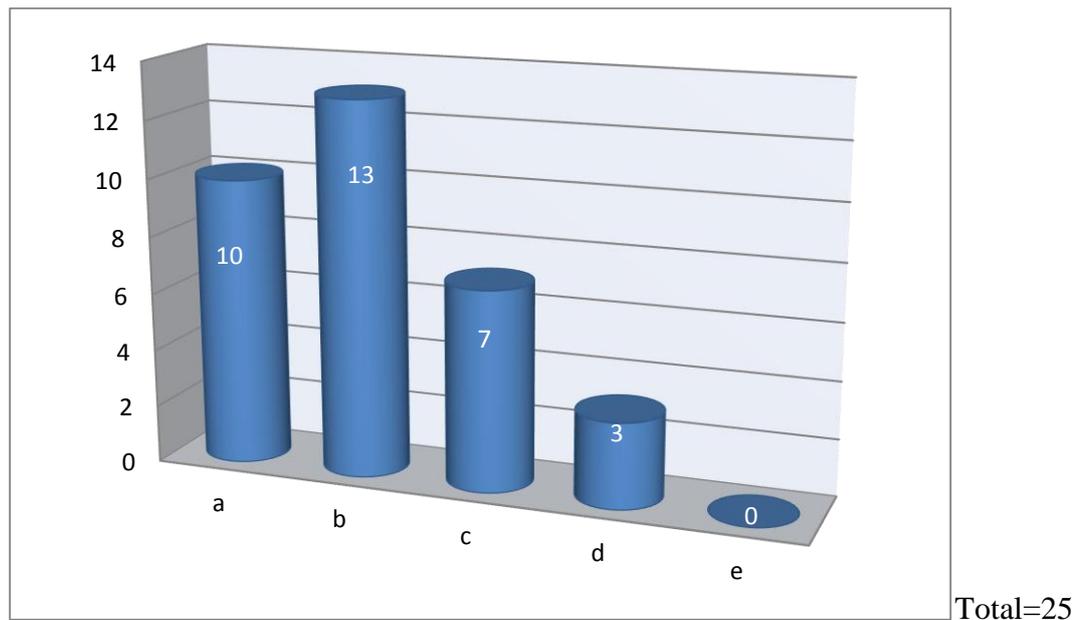
**Graph1. Students' views towards linguistics**

This question aims at testing students' attitudes towards linguistics module. The graph shows that the majority of students (76% of students) consider linguistics as a difficult module with different degrees. While 44% of students find linguistics very difficult, 32% of them consider it as a difficult module. The rest proportion of students which presents the minority of students (24% of students) is divided into two categories: the first category (16% of students) finds linguistics neither difficult nor easy i.e. they consider it as an average module. The second category which represents the minority of students (8% of students) considers linguistics as an easy module. In short, linguistics is a very difficult module according to the majority of students. In addition, students have a negative attitude towards linguistics.

### Question 2

If you found it difficult, is it due to:

- a. The complexity of its concepts?
- b. The lack of background knowledge concerning the content of linguistics syllabus?
- c. The overcrowded classroom?
- d. The teacher's explanation?
- e. Others?



**Graph2. The reasons behind linguistics difficulty**

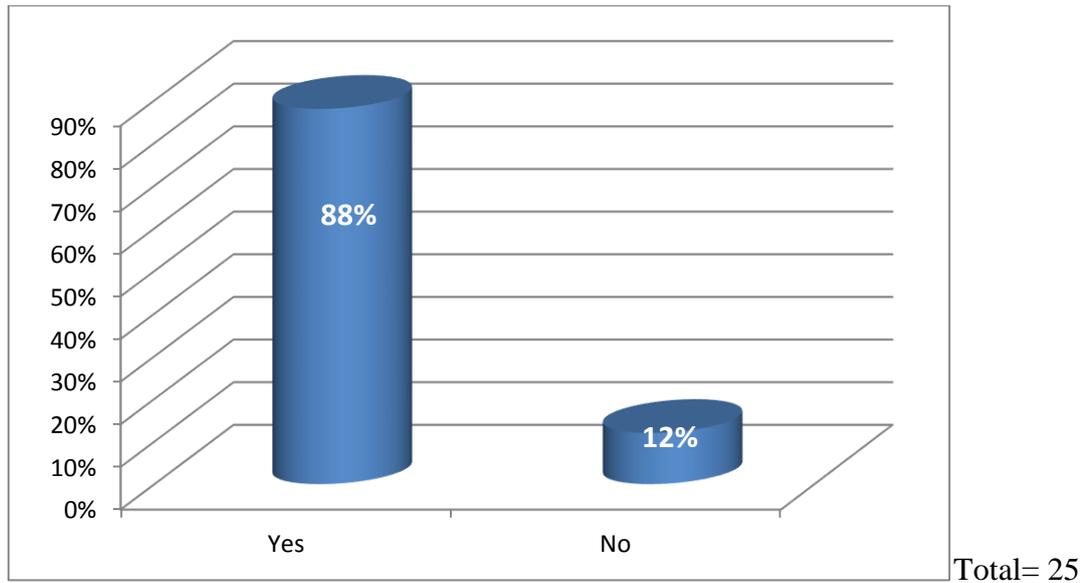
The aim of this question is to diagnose the reasons that make linguistics considered as a difficult module by first year students. According to students' views, all the above mentioned reasons are considered with different priorities. In this question many reasons of linguistics difficulty were given by one student while few students (only 2 students; those who considered linguistics as an easy module) did not give any response. The majority of students (13 students) agreed on the problem of their lack of background knowledge concerning the content of linguistics syllabus as a primary reason that makes linguistics a difficult module. In the second place, the problem of the complication of linguistics module is considered where 10 students link the difficulty of linguistics courses to the complexity of its concepts. This reason is the result of the first problem. Since they are first year students, they lack the background knowledge that helps them to comprehend such new and complex concepts of linguistics. In the third class, students place the problem of the environment as a reason behind linguistics difficulty. According to 7 students, the overcrowded classrooms hinder their assimilation of linguistics courses. In the last class, the minority of students (3 students) think that the teacher's explanation cannot help them to comprehend linguistics courses. However, none of students mentioned other reasons that make linguistics difficult for them.

### Question 3

Are you motivated to study English?

- a. Yes

b. No



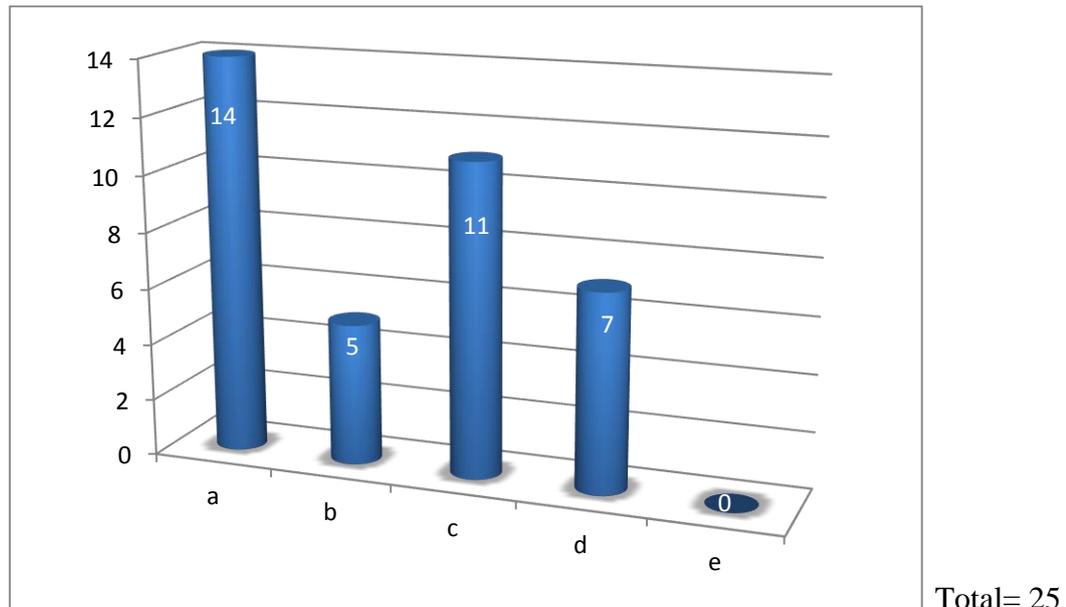
**Graph3. Students' motivation**

This question is an attempt to check students' motivation and to test whether they are motivated to study English or not. This question attempts to check students' desire and readiness for learning and assimilation of lectures. The majority of students (88% of students) are motivated to study English. However, the minority of them (12% of students) are not motivated to study English. In short, the majority of students are motivated, and they are psychologically ready to learn.

#### **Question 4**

Is your motivation caused by?

- a. Your desire to explore the English culture.
- b. Your desire to succeed.
- c. Your desire to obtain good job.
- d. Your parental encouragements.
- e. Others.



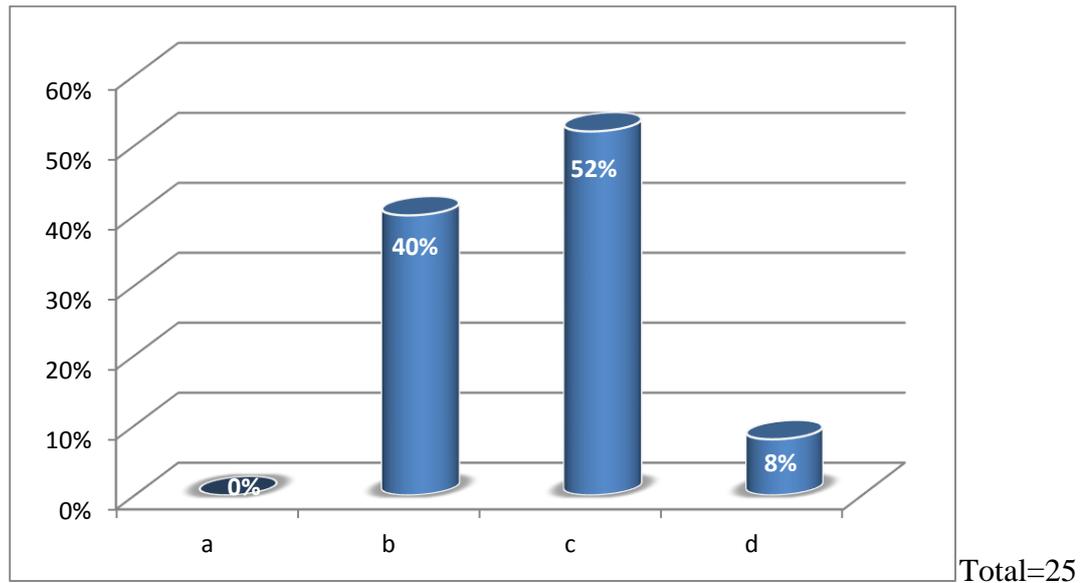
**Graph4. Students' sources of motivation**

This question aims at investigating students' sources of motivation. In this question many sources of motivation were given by one student while few students (only 3 students; those who are not motivated to study English) did not give any response. The majority of students (14 students) want to study English just to explore its culture .i.e. they have an integrative motivation. In the second rank, 11 students link their motivation to their desire to obtain good job .i.e. they have an instrumental motivation. In the third rank, 7 students study English because of their parental encouragements .i.e. they have an extrinsic motivation. In the last rank, the minority of students (5 students) relate their motivation to their desire to succeed .i.e. they have an intrinsic motivation. However, none of students mentioned other sources of their motivation.

### Question 5

How do you evaluate yourself?

- a. Very good student.
- b. Good student.
- c. Average.
- d. Low level student.



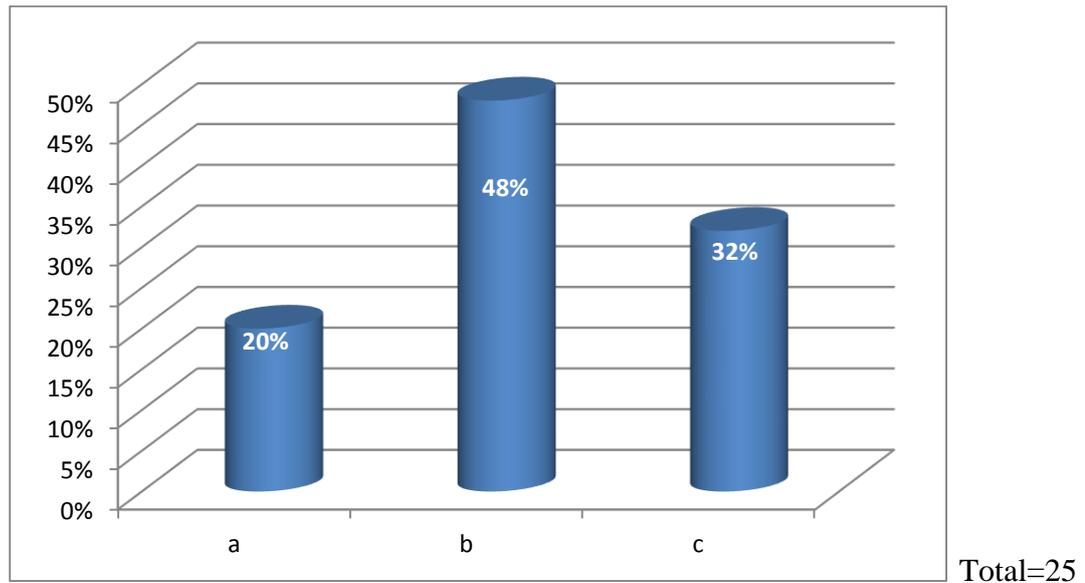
**Graph5. Students' evaluation of themselves**

This question is an attempt to test students' self-esteem whether they have high self-esteem or low self-esteem. The majority of students (52% of students) evaluate themselves as neither good student nor bad student .i.e. they consider themselves as average students. Mainly 40% of students evaluate themselves as good students. The last and the minority proportion (8% of students) evaluate themselves as low level students. However, none of students consider her/himself as a very good student.

### Question 6

If you do not understand a key concept, you will

- a. Ask your teacher for explanation.
- b. Use your dictionaries.
- c. Ignore it.



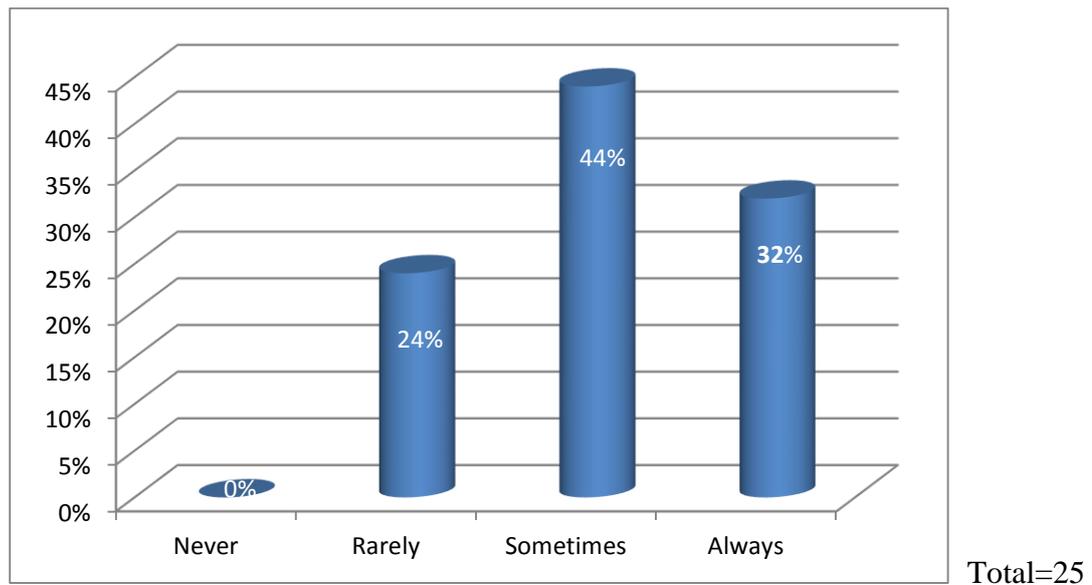
**Graph6. Students' attitudes towards difficult words**

This question aims at testing students' attitudes towards new and difficult words. It reflects their psychological states including anxiety, self-esteem and motivation. The majority of students (48% of students) use their dictionaries when they encounter new and/or difficult words. This latter entails that most of students are motivated and autonomous, but they have low self-esteem and high level of anxiety that prevent them from asking their teacher for explanation. Mainly 32% of students do not make effort to understand difficult words .i.e. they do not care about the meaning of those words, so they ignore them. This result reflects students' motivation; it means that those students are not motivated to learn. However, the minority of students (20% of students) ask their teacher for the explanation of unfamiliar or difficult words. Those students are highly motivated to learn, and they have high self-esteem with low level anxiety.

### Question 7

How often do you understand your teacher's pronunciation?

- a. Never.
- b. Rarely.
- c. Sometimes.
- d. Always.



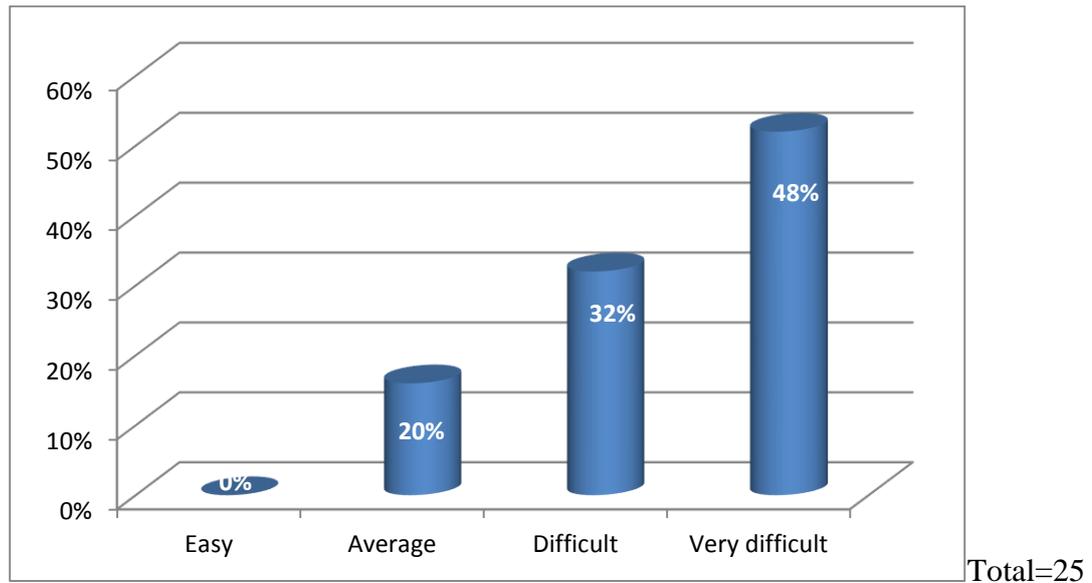
**Graph7. Frequency of students' understanding of the teacher's pronunciation**

This question attempts to test students' perception of the teacher's pronunciation and to check to what extent the teacher speaks with an intelligible pronunciation. Moreover, it seeks to test the effect of anxiety on students' listening comprehension. The majority of students (44% of students) answer that they sometimes comprehend the teacher's pronunciation, but sometimes they do not. While 32% of students always comprehend the teacher's pronunciation, 24% of them say that they rarely do. However, none of them say that she/he does never comprehend the teacher's pronunciation. In the light of these results, majority of students' answers with sometimes, one can conclude that they have some difficulties in understanding their teacher's pronunciation. This latter is due to either the teacher's unclear pronunciation or students' anxiety that prevents them from discriminating the language sounds.

### Question 8

How do you find the language used by your teacher?

- Easy.
- Average.
- Difficult.
- Very difficult.



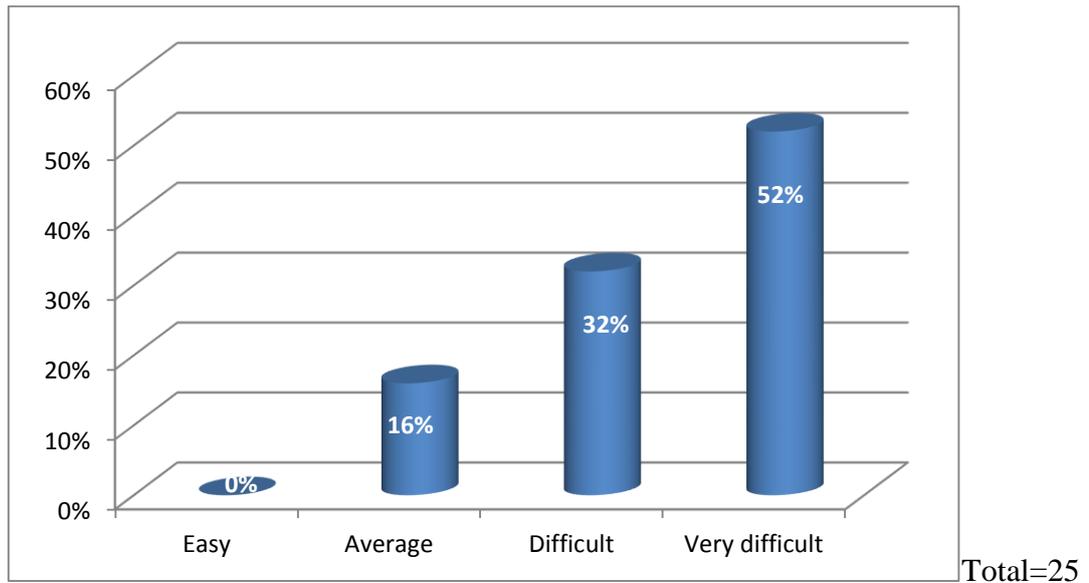
**Graph8. Students' attitudes towards the language used by the teacher**

This question attempts to investigate students' attitudes towards the language used by their teacher, and to what extent they find it easy or difficult in terms of grammar and vocabulary. The majority of students (80% of students) claim that the language used by the teacher is difficult with different degrees. While most of students (48% of students) state that the language used by the teacher is very difficult, 32% of them find it difficult. The minority of students (20% of students) finds the language used by the teacher neither easy nor difficult, for them it is average. However, none of students stated that the language used by the teacher is easy. In short, the language used by the teacher is considered as a difficult language in terms of its concepts and structure.

### Question 9

How did you find your linguistics exam?

- a. Easy
- b. Average
- c. Difficult
- d. Very difficult



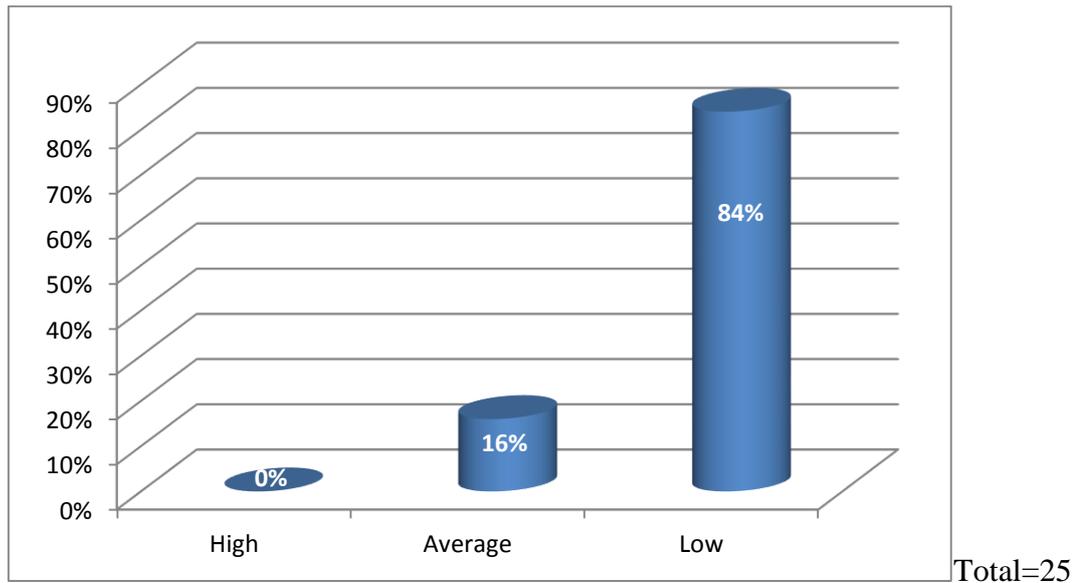
**Graph9. Students' evaluation of linguistics exam**

This question aims at investigating students' views about their linguistics exam and how they evaluate it. As the graph shows, most of students (84% of students) found linguistics exam difficult with different degrees. While the majority of students (52% students) found linguistics exam very difficult, 32% of them considered it as a difficult exam. For those students, the questions were very difficult and they did not match their current level. The minority of students (16% of students) found linguistics exam neither difficult nor easy, for them it was average which means that its questions were affordable for all students. However, none of students found linguistics exam easy.

**Question 10**

Your grade in linguistics is

- a. High
- b. Average
- c. low



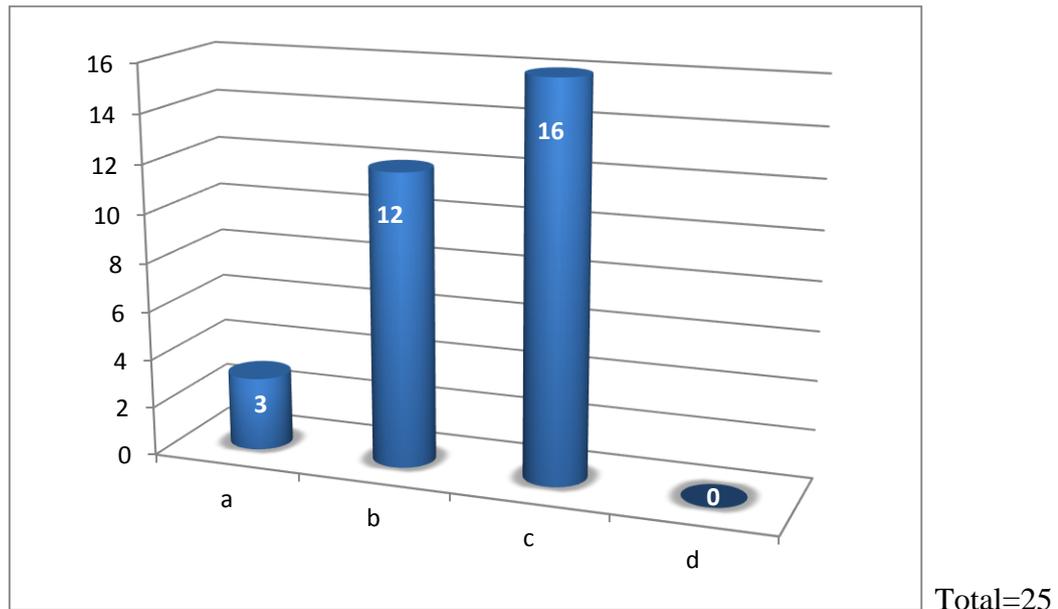
**Graph10. Students' grades in linguistics exam**

This question attempts to check whether the difficulty of linguistics exam affects students' grades in their official exam of linguistics or not. As the graph shows, the majority of students (84% of students) have low grades in the official exam of linguistics. The minority of students (16% of students) state that their grades are neither high nor low grades, their grades are average. However, none of students has a high grade in linguistics' official exam. Those grades reflect both the difficulty of linguistics exam and students' level. In the light of these results, one can entail that the exam questions do not match students' current levels.

### Question 11

If your grade is low, do you think that the reason(s) is/are?

- a. You did not revise well.
- b. You lacked your concentration due to your fear.
- c. The difficulty of the questions.
- d. Others.



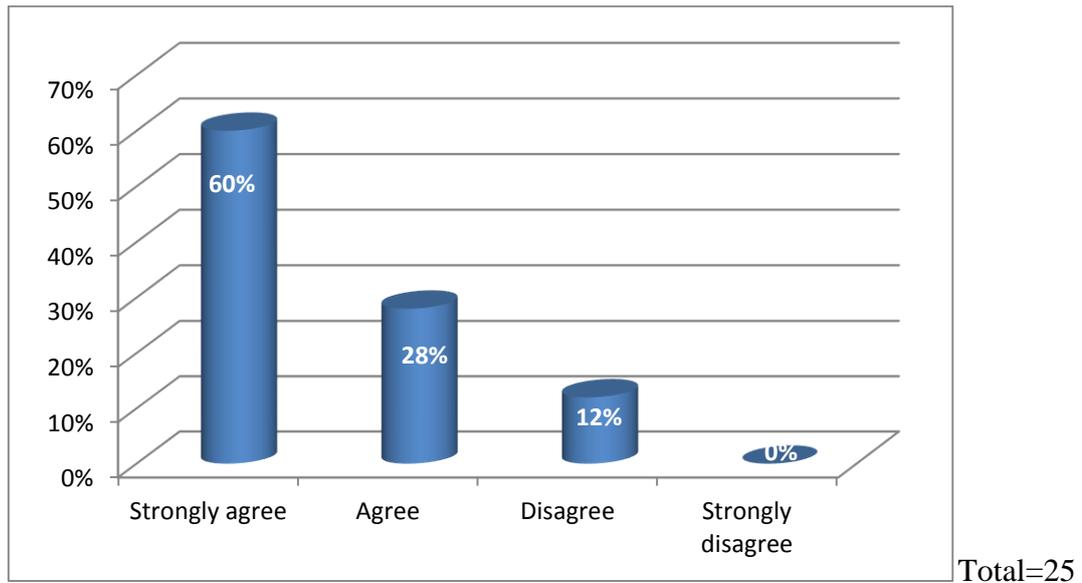
**Graph11. Reasons of students' low achievement in linguistics exam**

This question attempts to diagnose the reasons behind students' low achievement in their linguistics exam. In this question many reasons for low achievement were given by one student while few students (4 students whose grades were average) did not give any response. The majority of students (16 students) link their low grades in linguistics exam to the difficulty of questions. According to them, the questions were ambiguous and they did not match their current level. The second proportion of students (12 students) claims that they lose their concentrations during the exam since they were very anxious. Those results entail that most of students suffer from test anxiety. While the minority of students (3 students) state that they did not revise well and they were not prepared, none of students state other reasons for their low achievement in linguistics exam.

### Question 12

To what extent do you agree with delaying linguistics to second year?

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree



**Graph12. Students' attitudes towards delaying linguistics to second year**

This question aims at testing students' agreement or disagreements with delaying linguistics to second year. Most of students (88% of students) agree with delaying linguistics to second year with different degrees. The majority of students (60% of students) strongly agree with delaying linguistics to second year. While 28% of students agree with delaying linguistics to second year, only 12% of them disagree. However, none of students strongly disagrees with delaying linguistics to second year. Depending on these results, one can conclude that first year students are not ready to start studying linguistics from first year. According to them, their background knowledge and their level do not match the complexity of linguistics. In short, first year students prefer to build the basic and necessary knowledge that helps them understanding the language used in linguistics before studying it in second year.

### **III.2. Analysis of the teachers' interview**

In order to investigate factors influencing first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses, an interview was designed and addressed to first year teachers of linguistics at Biskra University.

#### **III. 2. 1. Description and design of the interview**

The interview was addressed to first year teachers of linguistics at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. The sample (2 teachers) was chosen systematically from the whole population because first year teachers of linguistics have a close contact with their students and they know their needs and difficulties as well. There are three teachers of

linguistics teaching first year students, but the interview was held with only two teachers since one of them excused and refused to make the interview. The interview aims at investigating factors influencing first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses.

The interview consists of 15 open-ended questions divided in two sections. The first section is about teachers' perceptions about linguistics while the second section is about their perceptions about factors influencing their students' comprehension of linguistics. Those questions were raised for seeking the adequate answers about teachers' methods and techniques of teaching linguistics. In addition, they aim at investigating the main difficulties encountering teachers when teaching linguistics.

### **III. 2. 2. Results and interpretations of the interview**

#### **I. Background information**

**Item one: What is your degree?**

**Teacher 01:** "magister degree."

**Teacher 02:** "license degree."

**Item two: How long have you been teaching linguistics?**

**Teacher 01:** "8months."

**Teacher 02:** "5 years."

While the first teacher has been teaching linguistics since 8 months, the second teacher has been teaching linguistics since 5 years. The teachers' experiences and the period of time of teaching linguistics enable them to implement the adequate methods and technique that help students understanding lectures. Moreover, teachers with long experience know their students' needs and the difficulties encountering them when learning linguistics.

#### **II. Section one: Teachers' perceptions about linguistics**

**Item three: How do you find teaching linguistics?**

**Teacher 01:** "It is exceptional in its preparation as well as its presentation."

**Teacher 02:** "Amazing, it is a wonderful experience."

The teachers' attitudes towards teaching linguistics differ from one teacher to another. While the first teacher finds teaching linguistics something special concerning its preparation and its presentation since the language used in this subject is rigid, the second teacher finds teaching linguistics as an amazing experience which reflects his intrinsic

motivation because he enjoys and likes his task. If the teacher is motivated to teach, students will be motivated to learn too. This latter facilitates the teaching-learning process.

**Item four: Would you please explain the main difficulties encountering you when teaching linguistics?**

**Teacher 01:** “Too much information and sources makes it hard to select what is appropriate for the students.”

**Teacher 02:** “The first difficulty is the students’ huge number. The second difficulty is that first year students have a shortage and poor level in English. The third difficulty is that students have pre-attitude about linguistics (its difficulty).”

There are several difficulties encountering teachers when teaching linguistics. Those difficulties are concerning the subject itself, students’ attitudes and levels, and the environment. According to the first teacher’s view, linguistics dealt with massive amount of information that makes the selection of what to teach difficult for the teacher. Another problem is that first year students have a very low level and limited background knowledge, in addition to the idea they have about linguistics even before they exposed to it. Concerning the environment, the huge number of students prevents teachers from performing in a positive and effective way.

**Item five: Which method do you follow in teaching linguistics and how do you present your lectures?**

**Teacher 01:** “I follow the discussion based lecturing method. The data show is used to introduce and present the lessons; debate and feedback is expected during the session.”

**Teacher 02:** “Unfortunately, as a teacher I have no ample opportunities to use different methods to exhibit linguistics courses. The method I follow is based on the question-answer approach. I provide students with handouts, explanations and giving examples.”

Both of teachers depend on teacher-student interaction. The teachers focus on discussion and question-answer methods. Those methods help students understanding difficult concepts since the teacher can explain and simplify the language used in the handouts or presented through the data show. Through discussion and debates, students can ask for explanation and the teacher provides them illustrations and examples. However, teachers find difficulties in terms of using different methods because of the huge number of students and the large classrooms where the lectures take place.

**Item six: What kind of questions do you set when preparing for exams?**

**Teacher 01:** “Analytical questions.”

**Teacher 02:** “Questions are: open-ended questions and a composition questions.”

Both of teachers set direct and analytical questions for the exam where students asked to produce their own language and knowledge in forms of sentences and compositions. These types of questions require a mastery of language in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Students have to use the appropriate concepts produced in well-formed structures.

**Item seven: How did you find your students’ marks of exam?**

**Teacher 01:** “Below my expectations.”

**Teacher 02:** “very low marks.”

Both of teachers argue on students’ low grades in the official exam. According to them, the majority of students have very low marks. Those marks may reflect either students’ low level or the questions’ difficulty.

**I. Section two: Teachers’ perceptions about factors influencing their students’ comprehension of linguistics courses**

**Item eight: What do you think about the time allotted to linguistics?**

**Teacher 01:** “It is sufficient.”

**Teacher 02:** “One session (90 minutes) per week is not sufficient at all.”

The teachers’ attitudes towards the time allotted to linguistics are different. While the first teacher thinks that the time allotted to linguistics is sufficient, the second teacher claims that one session weekly is not sufficient for linguistics.

**Item nine: What do you think about the program allocated to linguistics sessions and its appropriateness within the time table?**

**Teacher 01:** “It is fine.”

**Teacher 02:** “It is appropriate for learners and for the teacher too.”

Both teachers think that the program allocated to linguistics sessions is appropriate within the time table. Teachers believe that linguistics sessions are appropriate within the time table for both teacher and student.

**Item ten: What do you think about your students’ attitudes and their assimilation of the lectures when they are taught in large classroom?**

**Teacher 01:** “The huge number of students prevents both the teacher and the students from performing in the wished way.”

**Teacher 02:** “They have a negative attitude towards linguistics courses.”

Both teachers agree on the negative effects of large classroom on students’ performance. According to the teachers, large classrooms and huge number of students do not help neither the teacher to use different methods nor the student to perform better.

**Item eleven: As first year students are concerned, how do you find the language used in linguistics courses?**

**Teacher 01:** “It is somehow difficult for the majority of students.”

**Teacher 02:** “It is very simple language.”

The teachers have different views about the language used in linguistics courses. Whereas the first teacher find the language used in linguistics courses in some way difficult for first year students, the second teacher claim that it is very simple language.

**Item twelve: What do you think about your students’ background knowledge concerning the comprehension of linguistics terms?**

**Teacher 01:** “They have a very limited background about linguistics.”

**Teacher 02:** “Most of students came to the university without any linguistic background.”

Both teachers agreed on students’ lack of background knowledge. Teachers claim that first year students have a slight exposure to the language. Moreover, first year students came to the university without basic knowledge concerning its linguistic aspects (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation).

**Item thirteen: Which kind of activities do you set to help your students in building their vocabularies?**

**Teacher 01:** “sometimes they are assigned to look for definitions, compare between closely related terms...etc.”

**Teacher 02:** “I give them homework, books, sites, and giving them previous exams to be answered.”

Both teachers assist their students in building their vocabularies. The teachers use different activities to help students to be linguistically competent. Those activities are:

- Looking for definitions.
- Making comparison between closely related concepts.
- Giving them homework.

- Reading books.
- Consulting websites.
- Providing them with previous exams to be answered.

**Item fourteen: To what factors do you link your students' low grades in their linguistics exam?**

**Teacher 01:** "Skipping lectures, lack of attention, weak mastery of English, and limited knowledge about linguistics."

**Teacher 02:** "Students lack seriousness and commitments and they have poor level in English language."

Both teachers agree on the students' attitudes towards learning and their lack of linguistic background knowledge as main reasons behind their low grades in their official exam of linguistics. Students are careless about their lectures and they lack sincerity and linguistic background knowledge about linguistics. Moreover, students have a weak level in English language.

**Item fifteen: What would you suggest for teaching and evaluating linguistics to first year students?**

**Teacher 01:** "It would be of a great help to follow each theoretical part of a lecture by its implication in the practical side of linguistics. It would be beneficial to start teaching linguistics from second year."

**Teacher 02:** "Linguistics should be taught in small groups. The selection of students; new students should take a placement tests before they are exposed to learn English. We should have places where we can prepare and deliver lectures. We should have TD+ lecture. There should be more time for linguistics sessions in addition to workshops."

Both teachers give some suggestions concerning teaching and evaluating linguistics to first year students. Those suggestions varied from one teacher to another as follow:

- Students need to realize the implication of each theory of linguistics i.e. linking theoretical linguistics to applied linguistics.
- Students need to build the basic linguistic knowledge before start learning linguistics i.e. linguistics requires mastery of English language and background knowledge to be assimilated, so it is favorable to start teaching it from second year.
- New coming students to the university should take a placement tests before they are exposed to learn English when it comes to their selection.

- Linguistics sessions require small classes with small groups where students have TD sessions, in addition to large classrooms where the lectures take place.
- The time allotted to linguistics is not sufficient, so it should have more time for linguistics sessions.
- Teachers should have places where we can prepare and deliver lectures.
- There should be seminars to make students more knowledgeable in linguistics.

### **II.3. Discussion of the results of the students' questionnaire and the teachers' interview**

The analysis of both the questionnaire addressed to first year students and the interview held with first year teachers of linguistics reveals that there are several factors that hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses. The teachers and students did not agree on the same factors, but they agreed on their negative impact on students' assimilation of linguistics courses. Both participants of the teaching/learning process agreed on the students' lack of the linguistic background knowledge concerning the content of linguistics syllabus and their current (low) level as a primary reason behind students' lack of comprehension of linguistics courses. Those results confirm the first part of our hypothesis that linguistic factors may hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses. Both teachers and students agreed on the negative impact of students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language and the environment on students' assimilation of linguistics courses. Those results confirm the second part of our hypothesis that psychological factors may hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses.

Concerning the difficulty of linguistics as a module and the complexity of its language as well as first year students are concerned, students' answers on the questions 1, 2, and 8 confirm that linguistics is a very difficult module that contains a very difficult language and complex concepts. Yet the results of question 1 reveal that the majority of students (76% of students) consider linguistics as a difficult module with different degrees. While 44% of students find linguistics very difficult, 32% of them consider it as a difficult module. In addition to the results of question 2 which show that most of students (10 students) linked the difficulty of linguistics to the complexity of its concepts. Moreover, the results of question 8 reveal that the majority of students (80% of students) claimed that the language used by the teacher is difficult with different degrees. While most of students

(48% of students) stated that the language used by the teacher is very difficult, 32% of them found it difficult. On the light of the questionnaire results, one can conclude that linguistics is a very difficult module that consists of complex language according to students' views. However, the interviewed teachers do not agree on those results. In the item eleven, one of the teachers stated that the language used in linguistics courses as first year students concerned is somehow difficult while the second interviewee claimed that it is a very simple language.

When it comes to the linguistic factors that hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses, both teachers and students confirm that the reason behind students' low achievement in linguistics is their lack of background knowledge concerning the content of linguistics syllabus. The students' answers on the questions 2, 7, and 8 in addition to the teachers' answers on the items four, twelve, and fourteen show that first year students have a low level in English language with a very limited background knowledge. In question 2, the majority of students (13 students) agreed on the problem of their lack of linguistic background knowledge concerning the content of linguistics syllabus as a primary reason that makes linguistics a difficult module. Concerning the students' perceptions of the teacher's pronunciation and to what extent they found it intelligible, the students' answers on the question 7 show that the majority of students (44% of students) stated that they sometimes comprehend the teacher's pronunciation, but sometimes they do not. In addition to pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary are also concerned as aspects of the language that first year students do not master. The students' answers on the question 8 reveal that most of students (48% of students) stated that the language used by the teacher is very difficult in terms of its concepts and its structures. On the item four, one of the interviewee teachers claimed that first year students have a shortage and poor level in English. In their responses on the item twelve both teachers agreed on students' lack of linguistic background knowledge; teachers claimed that first year students have a slight exposure to the language and the majority of them came to the university without a basic knowledge concerning its linguistic aspects (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation). Teachers' answers on the item fourteen deduce that first year students have weak mastery of English, limited knowledge about linguistics, and they have poor level in English language.

Concerning the psychological factors that hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses, the students' answers on the questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 in addition

to the teachers' answers on the item fourteen confirm that there are several psychological factors that influence first year comprehension of linguistics courses. In their answers on question 3, the majority of students (88% of students) stated that they are motivated to study English. However, the teachers' answers on the item fourteen show the opposite; they find that their students do not exhibit any kind of motivation since the majority of students skip the lectures and they lack attention, seriousness and commitments. This latter is maybe due to the source of students' motivation. According to students' answers on the question 4, the majority of students (14 students) want to study English just to explore its culture .i.e. they have an integrative motivation. This type of motivation is less powerful in the learning context than intrinsic motivation. When it comes to self-esteem, the students' answers on question 5 reveal that they do not have high self-esteem since the majority of students (52% of students) evaluate themselves as neither good student nor bad student .i.e. they consider themselves as average students. Students' answers on the question 6 show that the majority of students (48% of students) use their dictionaries when they encounter new and/or difficult words. This latter entails that most of students are motivated and autonomous, but they have low self-esteem and high level of anxiety that prevent them from asking their teacher for explanation. In the question 11, most of students claim that they lose their concentrations during the exam since they were very anxious. Those results entail that most of students suffer from test anxiety.

In addition to the previous mentioned factors, the context of linguistics has its effect on the teaching/learning process. Concerning the place where linguistics sessions take place, the teachers' answers on the item ten reveal that the large classroom has a negative impact on students' attitudes, and it hinders their assimilation of linguistics courses since it prevents the teacher and the students from performing in a positive way. Moreover, students' answers on question 6 which show that the minority of students (20% of students) ask their teacher for the explanation of unfamiliar or difficult words. However, the teachers gave their students the opportunities to ask for explanation through using the methods stated in their answers on the item five. In the item five, both teachers answered that they follow discussion based lecturing and based on question-answer approach. In this item one of teachers stated that the large classroom does not help him to implement different methods, so what prevents students from asking for explanation is the environment which helps not only in decreasing their motivation and self-esteem, but also in increasing their anxieties. Concerning its time, both teachers answered on the item nine

that the program allocated to linguistics sessions within the time table is appropriate for both the teacher and students. However, in the item eight, one of the teachers stated that the time allotted to linguistics is not sufficient.

Furthermore, discussing students' grades and the nature of exam questions is of a great importance to conclude with. Both teachers and students agreed on students' low achievement in linguistics. This result was drawn from students' answers on the question 10 and the teachers' answers on the item seven as well. Concerning the nature of the exam questions, teachers answered on the item six that they set open-ended questions to discuss and a composition question. However, students' answers on the question 9 show that the majority of students found this kind of questions very difficult.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was devoted to investigate the effects of linguistic and psychological factors on first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses. On the light of the results revealed in this study concerning the negative impact of linguistic and psychological factors on first year students' comprehension of linguistics confirmed our hypothesis. Through the use and the interpretation of two different tools, an interview held with first year teachers of linguistics and a questionnaire addressed to first year students, our hypothesis was proved. Thus, teachers should take into consideration those factors when presenting their lectures, and when they set their exams, and also they need to assist their students to overcome them.

## Recommendations

Reducing the linguistic and psychological factors mentioned previously that influence first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses is the responsibility of both teachers and students. Therefore, the following implications will be recommended in order to minimize the effects of those factors on first year students of English at Biskra University.

1. Delaying linguistics to second year would be beneficial for students to build the basic linguistic background knowledge that helps them in understanding the content linguistics courses.
2. The time allotted to linguistics is not sufficient, so it should have more time for linguistics sessions. In addition, workshops and seminars should be held to make students more knowledgeable in linguistics.
3. Teachers should have places where they can prepare and deliver lectures. Moreover, Linguistics sessions require small groups; therefore, there should be small classes where students have TD sessions, in addition to large classrooms and amphitheatres where the lectures take place.
4. Teachers should be aware about students' current level and try to provide them with comprehensible input that contains simple vocabulary, grammar structures, and produced in intelligible pronunciation to be understood by the majority of students.
5. Teachers should involve their students in the classroom tasks and try to raise their engagement in the learning activities through the implementation of different methods and teaching materials, and through asking them challenging questions and giving them quizzes to push them to participate.
6. Teachers should exhibit their interest in the language teaching to their students to motivate them through planning lectures in a good manner, being at time, and managing the time during the session.
7. Teachers should create non-threatening environment for students by avoiding constant correction, and they have to make their effort when it comes to the selection of the appropriate technique for correcting students' mistakes.

8. Teachers should take into consideration their students' current level when they set exams' questions, and they have to vary those questions in order to give the chance to all students to answer.
9. Students should feel confident in their abilities and ask their teachers for clarification whenever it is necessary. They should keep in their minds that making mistakes is an essential part of the language learning process.
10. Students should get rid of their habit of skipping lectures and try to be responsible for their learning by attending lectures, taking notes, and asking their classmates and their teacher for the ambiguous points.
11. Students should be aware about their lack of background knowledge; hence, they need to read as much books and articles about linguistics as they can and consult the educational websites whenever it is necessary in order to be more knowledgeable about the subject.
12. Students should be well prepared for exams and try to make efforts to comprehend their lectures. They should also try to concentrate during the exam by thinking positively and by keeping in their minds that the exams' questions were set from what they learnt, so nothing needs their anxieties and worries.

## General conclusion

As a field of study, linguistics is very important since it is interested in studying the language, its nature, and its features as well. However, in the foregoing sections and through our investigation, we found that linguistics is very difficult subject to be taught to first year students.

As EFL learners, first year students of English at Biskra University face a problem presented in lack of understanding of linguistics courses. This problem was noticed from their low achievement in this subject. For this reason, we looked for the factors that may hinder their comprehension of linguistics courses. As a result, it was hypothesized that linguistic and psychological factors may hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses.

Chapter one was an attempt to highlight some linguistic factors that may influence the learning process in general. The first element that was commenced by is grammar, its emergence and its definition was offered as well. Moreover, we dealt with grammar and meaning, on one hand, and grammar and function on the other hand. The second element tackled in chapter one was vocabulary where the focus was on its definition, its kinds, its role in EFL classes and the importance of vocabulary building, and vocabulary difficulties faced by EFL learners. To conclude the first chapter with pronunciation, its fields, its definitions and its features were discussed as well to end up with intelligibility in pronunciation and EFL students' perceptions of English pronunciation.

Chapter two was devoted to shed the light on some psychological factors hinder the learning process in general. The affective factors that were tackled are: anxiety, self esteem, and motivation. The commencement was by establishing definition for each element of them. Then we discussed the types of each factor of them to conclude with their effects on the learning process.

In order to answer the question mentioned previously in the introduction of this current study and to verify our hypothesis, we gathered data through two different tools. The first data gathering tool is a questionnaire addressed to first year students of English at Biskra University. The second data collection tool is an interview held with first year teachers of linguistics at Biskra University.

The analysis of the results has shown that both participants of the teaching/learning process agreed on the students' lack of the linguistic background knowledge concerning the content of linguistics syllabus and their low level in English as primary reasons behind

students' lack of comprehension of linguistics courses. Both teachers and students agreed on the negative impact of students' attitudes and the environment on students' assimilation of linguistics courses.

The results obtained from the students' questionnaire have shown that first year students consider linguistics as a very difficult module since it consists of complex concepts. Moreover, first year students find both the language used by the teacher and the manner in which he produces the language ambiguous. Furthermore, first year students do not feel comfortable in the classroom; it raises their anxiety and decreases their self-esteem and motivation; therefore, they could not ask questions or participate during the lecture.

The results obtained from the teachers' interview reveal that first year teachers agreed on students' lack of the linguistic background knowledge and their weak mastery of English language as primary reasons behind their lack of comprehension of linguistics courses. In addition, teachers stated that students' negative attitudes towards the learning including their lack of motivation and seriousness affect their comprehension of linguistics courses.

The findings of both the students' questionnaire and the teachers' interviews confirm our hypothesis. The hypothesis stated that linguistic and psychological factors may hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses is accepted through the findings of the literature review and through the results of both students' questionnaire and the teachers' interview.

To conclude, our work was just an investigation about factors influencing first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses. This does not mean that those are the only factors; our work was just an attempt to test our hypothesis. Therefore, every researcher finds it interested, she/he can investigate other factors to fill the gap since we could not deal with all factors. However, we hope that the work was fruitful in one way or another.

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## Appendices

### Appendix one

**MOHAMED KHIEDER UNIVERSITY\_ BISKRA**

**FACULTY OF ARTS AND LANGUAGES**

**DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**SECTION OF ENGLISH**

# STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

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Dear students,

This questionnaire aims at investigating factors hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses.

You are kindly requested to complete this questionnaire. Your contribution will be of great importance for the accomplishment of this work.

Thank you for your sincere contribution.

**Please, read the following questions, and then TICK (✓) your suitable answer.**

**1. How do you find linguistics module**

- a. Easy?
- b. Average?
- c. Difficult?
- d. Very difficult?

**2. If you found it difficult, is it due to:**

- a. The complexity of its concepts?
- b. The lack of background knowledge concerning the content of linguistics syllabus?
- c. The overcrowded classrooms?
- d. The teachers' explanation?
- e. Others.....

**3. Are you motivated to study English?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**4. Is your motivation caused by:**

- a. Your desire to explore the language and its culture?
- b. Your desire to succeed?
- c. Your desire to obtain good job?
- d. Your parental encouragement?
- e. Others.....

**5. How do you evaluate yourself?**

- a. Very good student
- b. Good student
- c. Average

d. Low level student

**6. If you do not understand a key concept, you will**

a. Ask your teacher to explain it

b. Use your dictionary

c. Ignore it

**7. How often do you understand your teacher's pronunciation?**

a. Never

b. Rarely

c. Sometimes

d. Always

**8. How do you find the language used by your teacher?**

a. Easy

b. Average

c. Difficult

d. Very difficult

**9. How did you find your linguistics exam?**

a. Easy

b. Average

c. Difficult

d. Very difficult

**10. Your grade in linguistics is**

a. High

b. Average

c. Low

**11. If your grade is low, do you think that the reason(s) is/are:**

- a. You did not revise well?
- b. You lacked concentration due to your fear?
- c. The difficulty of questions?
- d. Others.....

**12. To what extent do you agree with delaying linguistics to second year?**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

## Appendix two

**MOHAMED KHIEDER UNIVERSITY\_ BISKRA**

**FACULTY OF ARTS AND LANGUAGES**

**DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**SECTION OF ENGLISH**

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### *Teachers' interview*

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This interview aims at investigating factors hinder first year students' comprehension of linguistics courses. As first year teacher of linguistics you are kindly requested to answer the following questions. Your contribution will be of a great importance for the accomplishment of this work.

Thank you in advance.

#### **I. Background information**

##### **1. Degree**

a. BA (license)

b. Master

c. Magister

d. Ph. D (doctorate)

2. How long have you been teaching linguistics at the university?

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**II. Section one: Teachers' perceptions about linguistics**

3. How do you find teaching linguistics?

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4. Would you please explain the main difficulties encountering you when teaching linguistics?

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5. Which method do you follow in teaching linguistics and how do you present your lectures?

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6. What kind of questions do you set when preparing for exams?

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7. How did you find your students' marks of exams?

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**III. Section two: Teachers' perceptions about factors influencing their students' comprehension of linguistics courses**

**8.** What do you think about the time allotted to linguistics?

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.....

**9.** What do you think about the program allocated to linguistics sessions and its appropriateness within the time table?

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.....

**10.** What do you think about your students' attitudes and their assimilation of the lectures when they are taught in large classroom?

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**11.** As first year students are concerned, how do you find the language used in linguistics courses?

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**12.** What do you think about your students' background knowledge concerning the comprehension of linguistics terms?

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**13.** Which kind of activities do you set to help your students in building their vocabularies?

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**14.** To what factors do you link your students' low grades in their linguistics exam?

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**15.** What would you suggest for teaching and evaluating linguistics to first year students?

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## ملخص

اللسانيات هي واحدة من المواضيع الهامة التي تدرس لطلاب السنة الأولى قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة بسكرة. المشكلة هي أن طلاب السنة الأولى لا يحققون علامات جيدة في هذه المادة. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التعرف على العوامل الرئيسية التي قد تمنع طلاب السنة الأولى من فهم دروس اللسانيات. للقيام بهذه الدراسة طرحنا السؤال حول ماهية العوامل الرئيسية التي تؤثر على استيعاب طلاب السنة الأولى لدروس اللسانيات. وبناء على سؤال البحث افترضنا أن العوامل اللغوية والنفسية قد تؤثر على استيعاب طلاب السنة الأولى لدروس اللسانيات. من أجل التحقق من فرضيتنا اعتمدنا المنهج الوصفي في هذه الدراسة من خلال الاستعمال لوسيلتين مختلفتين من وسائل جمع البيانات وهي المقابلة التي جرت مع اساتذة اللسانيات للسنة الأولى واستبيان موجه إلى طلاب السنة الأولى قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة بسكرة. وأظهرت النتائج المتحصل عليها أن الصعوبات الرئيسية التي تواجه طلاب السنة الأولى هي عدم امتلاكهم لخلفية معرفية واتجاهاتهم نحو تعلم لغة اجنبية. اعتمادا على هذه النتائج تم التأكد من الفرضية المذكورة. وبالتالي و من أجل التغلب على هذه العوامل تم تقديم بعض التوصيات كذلك.