

# Beyond Age and Gender: Hidden Factors Shaping Student Participation in Online Classes and Face-to-face

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## Abstract

This study examines the relationship between participation and performance, exploring classroom participation dimensions as mediating factors. The study investigates the multifaceted dynamics of student participation, focusing on perceptions of silence and engagement across diverse educational modalities. It also explores the impact of demographic factors such as age, gender, and academic major on participation. The study compares students' perceptions of participation in two conditions: face-to-face and online classes. Using a survey as the data collection tool, the study involved 168 male and female EFL students from various majors at Arab Open University in Saudi Arabia. Results revealed significant differences in the influence of student-associated variables based on participants' academic discipline and gender. However, no statistically significant differences were found for other variables concerning gender and cultural background. Regarding age, significant differences were reported across all variables except those related to instructors. Notably, no significant difference was found based on the modality of instruction (traditional face-to-face versus online learning). Furthermore, the study revealed positive correlations among the constructs assessed by the questionnaire.

**Keywords:** silence, participation, EFL learners, online classes, learners' age, learners' gender, learners' cultural background, learners' major

## Introduction

Participation in language learning is not merely a secondary aspect but serves as the cornerstone of effective language acquisition (Hiver et al., 2024). Participation in language learning refers to the active engagement of learners in various communicative practices and interactions that facilitate the acquisition of a second language (Ohashi, 2013).

Understanding the significance of participation in language learning is crucial in educational contexts, where traditional methods often prioritize passive absorption of knowledge over active engagement. Participation in language learning can be influenced by many factors including individual, social, and environmental dimensions (Papi & Hiver, 2020). These factors encompass various dimensions, including demographic characteristics, instructor attributes, learning environment dynamics, emotional aspects, and educational delivery methods. Demographic background, encompassing variables like gender, age, major, and cultural background, shape learners' perspectives, interests, and prior linguistic exposure, thereby influencing their levels of engagement and motivation (Pawlak, et al., 2022). Moreover, teacher-related factors such as teaching style, and rapport with students significantly impact learners' participation (Akbari & Allvar, 2010). Classroom-related factors such as class size, physical environment, and the availability of interactive learning materials also play pivotal roles in shaping learners' involvement (Shamsu, 2023). Affective factors, including self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety, deeply influence learners' willingness to engage in class activities and express themselves (Arifin, 2017; Fallah, 2014; Hamouda, 2013). Additionally, the modality of learning, whether online or face-to-face, introduces distinct dynamics that affect participation, with factors like technological proficiency, communication bandwidth, and social presence influencing learners' interaction and engagement differently across modalities (Mullen, 2020). Understanding and addressing these complex factors is crucial for developing inclusive and effective English language learning environments that accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of learners.

The study aims to examine how students' perceptions of participation may vary between face-to-face and online learning environments. These two modalities inherently differ in several key aspects that could significantly impact student participation and engagement. Face-to-face environments offer immediate, non-verbal cues and spontaneous interactions, which can facilitate more natural communication and immediate feedback. In contrast, online learning environments provide flexibility in time and location, potentially allowing for more thoughtful, asynchronous contributions but may lack the immediacy of in-person interactions. While existing literature has explored the effectiveness of both modalities, less attention has been paid to how students view their engagement and participation across these different learning contexts. This study aims to address this gap by investigating if there are significant differences in learners' perceptions about participation according to various demographic factors (i.e., age, gender, and academic discipline). Furthermore, by explicitly comparing students' perceptions of participation in face-to-face and online learning conditions, this study will provide valuable insights into how these distinct learning environments shape student engagement.

#### *Research questions*

*RQ1. How do demographic backgrounds such as gender, age, major and cultural background influence perceptions of students about participation in English language classes?*

*RQ2. How do students' perceptions of participation in English language classes is affected by the modality of learning (online vs. face-to-face)?*

#### **Literature review**

##### *Participation and language learning*

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that active classroom engagement is a crucial factor in enhancing learning outcomes (Alshuraiaan, 2023; Liu, 2005; Tatar, 2005). For example, Liu (2005) found a positive correlation between increased levels of student

involvement and improved academic performance. In addition, Some-Guiebre (2020) posited that participation plays a vital role in shaping students' identities within the educational context. In the realm of TESOL, Alshuraiaan (2023) identified a positive relationship between teacher-student interaction patterns and the achievement of language learning objectives. Tatar (2005) further emphasized the significance of active participation in successful language acquisition. This active involvement not only reduces dependence on rote memorization but also fosters the development of higher-order cognitive skills (Ward & James, 2015). Students' participation in the classroom is influenced by a multitude of factors, spanning from teacher-related aspects such as teaching methods, characteristics, and knowledge, to student-related factors like motivation, attitudes, and learning styles.

### *Factors affecting learners' participation*

Factors influencing learners' participation encompass a multifaceted range of elements ranging from individual characteristics to contextual dynamics. These factors include demographic variables such as age, gender, and cultural background, as well as classroom-related aspects like teaching style and the availability of interactive resources. Additionally, affective factors such as self-confidence, anxiety, and motivation, alongside the modality of learning, whether face-to-face or online, significantly shape learners' engagement in educational activities.

Several studies (e.g., Fassinger, 1995; 2000; Moffett, et al., 2014; Qureshi, et al., 2023; Ghalley & Rai, 2019; Weaver & Qi, 2005) have investigated the various factors influencing classroom participation. Ghalley (2019) highlighted several such factors, including classroom size, fear, perception of faculty authority, student preparation, and confidence. Additionally, Weaver and Qi (2005) observed that participation can manifest in different forms, such as "para-participation," initiated by students through nonverbal gestures, visible presence in class, or informal discussions with professors outside of class. Fassinger (2000) emphasized viewing the classroom dynamics from a group perspective, where supportive and non-competitive environments encourage higher participation rates, foster trust among students, and promote the expression of opinions. In addition, instructors, as noted by Fassinger (2000), play a pivotal role in cultivating such environments by fostering cooperation through activities that create a positive classroom climate. Additionally, Qureshi et al. (2023) found that social factors—such as interaction with peers and teachers, social presence, and the use of social media—positively influence active collaborative learning and student engagement, thereby enhancing their learning performance.

Student involvement in learning has been examined in many studies (e.g., Benlahcene, et al., 2024; Fawzia, 2002; Wong & Liem, 2022). For example, Fawzia (2002) identified learner, social, and educational factors affecting oral engagement. The interplay between student tendencies, social dynamics, and educational settings significantly influences participation levels. Benlahcene et al. (2024) explored how self-efficacy mediates the connection between interpersonal relationships (with parents, peers, and teachers) and different forms of engagement (cognitive, behavioral, genetic, and emotional). Their findings underscored the significance of positive interpersonal bonds with these key figures in bolstering students' self-efficacy and, consequently, fostering their engagement across academic domains. Furthermore, Zrekat, et al., (2016) highlighted the effectiveness of student-centered approaches in promoting greater engagement compared to teacher-centered methods.

### *Classroom-related factors*

Factors influencing learners' participation in class also include the conditions related to classroom. First, class size emerges as a significant factor. Smaller class sizes result in greater academic progress, improved knowledge of students, and enhanced classroom processes (Brühwiler & Blatchford, 2011). In addition, smaller classes fostering greater willingness to participate and reduced anxiety among students compared to larger classes. Moreover, larger class sizes tend to hinder communication, impacting overall participation rates (Ngutunyi, et al., 2024). Second, seating arrangements also play a crucial role in student participation (Correa, et al., 2017) with certain setups proving more conducive to engagement. Third, timing further influences participation (Rocca, 2010), particularly in courses meeting infrequently or at specific points during the semester.

### *Personal characteristics*

Another factor that may deter students from participating in class is their personal fear of appearing inadequate in front of others, regardless of the classroom environment. Students often feel anxious in the presence of their classmates and instructors, which can lead them to avoid participating. Several studies have shown that confidence is reported as the most motivating factor for participation. The instructor's communication style significantly influences students' participation levels, with students believing that professors play a crucial role in shaping their participation. Research indicates that teacher actions are indeed pivotal in promoting classroom interaction (Santiago-Garabieta, et al., 2023).

Students' personality also affects their participation in class. Hesitant students may be reflective learners, needing time to prepare themselves for responses, or they may be afraid of speaking in groups, especially if they are introverted or come from a culture that discourages participation. Many small-group techniques recommended for inattentive behaviors are particularly effective for hesitant learners. According to Wenden (1991), personality includes traits such as extroversion and introversion, social skills, inhibition, and intrinsic factors that influence learners' behavior, including self-esteem, risk-taking, anxiety, and empathy. In addition, Rubin and Thompson (1994) considered extroversion as a primary characteristic affecting language learning success. They affirm that sociable learners who actively engage with native speakers tend to be more successful due to increased language exposure and opportunities for practice.

### *Learners' Age*

The influence of learner age on participation in language classes is a critical consideration that affects various aspects of the learning process. As individuals progress through different stages of life, their cognitive abilities, learning preferences, and motivations undergo significant transformations, which in turn can impact their level of engagement and participation in language learning activities. Younger learners, for instance, may exhibit higher levels of enthusiasm and adaptability to new language acquisition methods, whereas older learners may approach language learning with different expectations and prior experiences. Additionally, age-related factors such as developmental stage, life experiences, and cultural background can shape learners' attitudes towards language learning and their willingness to actively participate in classroom activities. Research conducted by Ke and Kwak (2013) investigated the impact of age and ethnicity on participation, perception, and learning satisfaction in online language learning environments. Their analysis of interaction transcripts revealed no significant advantage or disadvantage in the quality and quantity of online participation among students of non-traditional age or minority status. This suggests that factors such as age and ethnicity may not inherently influence participation levels in language classes conducted online.

Similarly, findings from a study by Cole, Lennon, and Weber (2021) shed light on student perceptions of online active learning practices, demonstrating the predictive potential of various elements on student engagement. While the study provided some evidence for the predictive potential of student GPA and age, it suggests that age alone may not be a determining factor in student engagement in online language classes. Thus, these findings suggest that age may not necessarily dictate the level of participation in language classes, particularly in online learning environments where other factors may have a greater influence.

### *Learners' Gender*

Gender is another factor that may affect participation. In this sense, we mean if the class is mixed of males and females. Results from previous studies revealed controversial findings. Some studies (e.g., Persaud & Salter, 2003) have found that male college students participate more than female students. Female students are often reluctant due to fear of criticism or disrespect from peers and teachers. Some studies (e.g., Anthony, 2012; Elfeky & Elbyaly, 2023) reported no difference in participation based on gender. The participation was similar for female and male students. These dynamics highlight the importance of an in-depth and inclusive studies to resolve this issue.

### *Learners' Cultural background*

The effect of students' cultural background on participation in language classes manifests through a complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, and individual factors. Cultural background influences students' communication styles, willingness to engage in class discussions, and attitudes towards language learning. Some studies were conducted to uncover this issue. For instance, Bećirović et al. (2018) examined the influence of cultural background on the frequency of various reading strategies employed by Bosnian university students. The research revealed that cultural background did not yield a significant difference in performance.

### *Teacher-related factors*

Another significant factor contributing to students' lack of participation can be attributed to the behaviour of the instructor. Specifically, students may feel reluctant to engage if their instructors fail to acknowledge them, ridicule them, belittle them, or overly criticize them. Over the last three decades, educational institutions have transitioned from lecture-based classes to ones that encourage student involvement. However, even experienced instructors struggle with evaluating participation, especially when it is assessed alongside more traditional measures such as essays, memorization, and oral presentations. Brown (2001) proposed that since teachers can influence student dialogue, they should provide opportunities for students to engage in conversation and practice using the language.

### *Affective factors*

Factors such as anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of making mistakes commonly hinder students from speaking (Schwartz, 2005; Thornbury, 2005).

### *Anxiety*

Anxiety in language classes can significantly impede students' willingness to participate, leading to reduced engagement and limited verbal interaction. Students

experiencing anxiety may exhibit reluctance to speak out of fear of making mistakes or being negatively evaluated, hindering their overall participation in class activities. Several studies have highlighted the significance of anxiety in foreign language classrooms, particularly regarding speaking in the foreign language (Cohen & Norst, 1989). Individuals experiencing communication apprehension may struggle with shyness and difficulty in speaking when communicating with others. Similarly, Brantemier (2005) reported that speaking causes the highest level of anxiety among all language skills, a phenomenon examined in numerous studies (Zrekat et al., 2016; Horwitz & Young, 1991). This type of anxiety, also known as communication anxiety, is a primary component of foreign language anxiety. MacIntyre (1995) pointed out that the impact of anxiety is not limited to problems encountered during speaking but pervade the entire language learning process. Horwitz and Young (1991) expressed surprise at the prevalence of anxiety and distress among students in language classes, while Campbell and Ortiz (1991) found language anxiety among university students to be 'alarming'.

### *Fear of making mistakes*

Fear of making mistakes is considered as one of the significant reasons that restrain students' willingness to speak English in the classroom (Collante-Caiafa, et al., 2020). This fear, linked to concerns about correction and negative evaluation, is compounded by apprehension over potential ridicule from peers or criticism from teachers, often leading to student disengagement in speaking activities. To overcome this issue, language teachers must emphasize that mistakes are integral to the learning process and not indicative of failure (Zainal Abidin, 2007). Factors influencing classroom participation encompass linguistic, pedagogical, cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural dimensions, which are interconnected (Zainal Abidin, 2007). Moreover, concerns about "saving face" and the impact of embarrassment due to language imperfections further inhibit student participation (Cohen & Norst, 1989; Zhu, 2003; Liu, 2005).

### *Self-confidence*

Self-confidence emerges as a pivotal factor influencing students' willingness to communicate, as highlighted by Cao and Philp (2006). It plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions of their linguistic abilities and their comfort level in engaging in language interactions. Students with higher levels of self-confidence are more likely to actively participate in classroom discussions, ask questions, and express their opinions freely. Conversely, those lacking confidence may hesitate to speak out of fear of making mistakes or facing negative evaluation, thereby inhibiting their participation in language activities. Thus, fostering self-confidence among students is essential for promoting a supportive and inclusive learning environment where all learners feel empowered to express themselves and engage meaningfully in language learning experiences.

### *Online versus face-to-face participation*

The proliferation of online platforms has fundamentally altered the landscape of learners' participation, challenging the traditional dynamics of face-to-face interaction within educational settings. In online classes, participation takes on a multifaceted dimension, facilitated by various digital tools and platforms (Wu, 2023). In contrast to traditional classrooms where participation mainly relies on speaking, online learning provides various ways for students to engage. Learners can actively participate through text-based discussions, multimedia presentations, virtual collaborations, and interactive forums, transcending the constraints of time and space (Rapanta, et al., 2020). There are many ways to participate in an

online class. They help all kinds of learners feel included and engaged because they can choose how they want to join in based on what works best for them. Moreover, online platforms often offer asynchronous participation options, allowing learners to contribute at their own pace and convenience, further enhancing accessibility and flexibility (Bahiyah, 2023). However, while online learning broadens participation horizons, it also presents unique challenges, such as potential barriers to building rapport and the need for digital literacy skills. Thus, understanding the difference of online participation versus face-to-face engagement is essential for educators and learners alike in navigating the evolving landscape of contemporary education.

## Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach to investigate the relationship between different factors and learners' participation in English classes. Through the utilization of a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool, this research aims to systematically analyze and quantify the relationships between various variables that may affect learners' participation in language classes.

### Participants

The participants of this study were students enrolled at the Arab Open University, Saudi Arabia, representing diverse academic disciplines across various colleges within the institution. The sample consisted of 168 students recruited through convenience sampling methods. The demographic background of the participants is shown in Table 1.

*Table 1. Participants' demographic background*

Factor	Category	Number	Percentage
College	FLS	16	9.5
	FBS	74	44.0
	FCS	78	46.4
Gender	Male	62	36.9
	Female	106	63.1
Age	18-20	88	52.4
	21-25	52	31.0
	26-30	10	6.0
	above 30	18	10.7
Type	Online	98	58.3
	face to face	70	41.7
Cultural background	Non-Arabs	14	8.3
	African Arabs	16	9.5
	Arabian Peninsula	94	56.0
	Levantine*	44	26.2

*Note: FLS= Faculty of Language Studies, FBS= Faculty of Business Studies, FCS= Faculty of Computer Studies*

*\*In this study, Levantine refers to students from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq.*

Table 1 presents demographic data on participants categorized by various factors. In terms of college affiliation, the majority of participants were from the Faculty of Business Studies (44.0%) and the Faculty of Computer Studies (46.4%), while a smaller proportion belonged to the Faculty of Language Studies (9.5%). Regarding gender, there was a slightly higher representation of females (63.1%) compared to males (36.9%). The age distribution indicates that a significant portion of participants were between 18 to 20 years old (52.4%), followed by those aged 21 to 25 (31.0%). The majority of participants engaged in online

learning (58.3%) compared to face-to-face classes (41.7%). Lastly, concerning cultural background, the largest group consisted of participants from the Arabian Peninsula (56.0%), followed by Levantine participants (26.2%), African Arabs (9.5%), and non-Arabs (8.3%). These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the demographic composition of the study sample, highlighting the diversity among participants across different categories.

#### *Data collection tool*

The study used a 5-Likert scale questionnaire as a main data collection tool (See Appendix A). The questionnaire items utilized in this study were adapted from established scales previously validated by Kamau (2013). The comprehensive questionnaire comprised four constructs: Student-related factors (7 statements), Teacher-related factors (5 statements), Online-related factors (6 statements), Learning (subjects, and content) (4 statements).

#### *Procedure*

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Participants were recruited through a multi-faceted approach to ensure a diverse and representative sample. They were approached via various communication channels, including email, WhatsApp, and in-class announcements. Potential participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study's objectives, procedures, and confidentiality assurances. Those who expressed interest in participating were directed to a secure online platform where they could access and complete the questionnaire at their convenience. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Data collection took place over a specified period, during which participants were encouraged to respond honestly and thoughtfully to the questionnaire items. Rigorous measures were implemented to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants' responses throughout the data collection process.

#### *Data Analysis*

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants, while inferential statistical techniques such as t-tests, ANOVA were utilized to examine relationships and differences between variables of interest. All statistical tests were conducted at a predetermined significance level ( $\alpha$ ) to determine the statistical significance of the findings. Quantitative data obtained from the completed questionnaires were subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS version 29.

#### *Validity and reliability of the research instrument*

The survey was precisely designed to ensure the instrument's validity, undergoing evaluation by a panel of three Applied Linguistics professors. Following their review, the questionnaire received approval with minor suggestions and adjustments, culminating in the circulation of the final version. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88.

## **Results**



This study investigated how various factors influence student perceptions of their participation in English classes. The analysis focused on student-related factors (perceptions of their own contribution), teacher-related factors (perceptions of teacher support), online-related factors (perceptions of the online learning environment), and learning-related factors (perceptions of the learning process and materials). The following sections explore how a student's major, gender, age, and cultural background impact these perceptions, along with a comparison between online and face-to-face learning environments. Additionally, the study examined the relationships between these factors to understand how student perceptions are interconnected. The analysis of all statements of the questionnaire is shown in Appendix A.

### Learners' major

Table 2. Learners' major

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Student-related factors	FLS	16	3.2321	.55174	5.695	.004
	FBS	74	2.5753	.83097		
	FCS	78	2.8755	.78630		
Teacher-related factors	FLS	16	2.8000	.74476	2.507	.085
	FBS	74	2.3081	.82905		
	FCS	78	2.3333	.81840		
Online-related factors	FLS	16	3.1042	.66074	3.850	.023
	FBS	74	2.6216	.76017		
	FCS	78	2.8846	.76462		
Learning-related factors	FLS	16	3.6250	.38730	2.743	.067
	FBS	74	3.4054	.60066		
	FCS	78	3.6154	.59447		

FLS= FBS= FCS=

The means, standard deviations, F-values, and significance levels were computed to analyze the relationships between these factors and self-perceived participation. The analysis revealed significant differences in the impact of student-related factors (FLS:  $M = 3.2321$ ,  $SD = 0.55174$ ) compared to both teacher-related ( $M = 2.8000$ ,  $SD = 0.74476$ ;  $F = 5.695$ ,  $p = .004$ ) and online-related factors ( $M = 3.1042$ ,  $SD = 0.66074$ ;  $F = 3.850$ ,  $p = .023$ ). However, no significant differences were observed between student-related and learning-related factors ( $M = 3.6250$ ,  $SD = 0.38730$ ;  $F = 2.743$ ,  $p = .067$ ). Further exploration indicated that student-related factors had a stronger influence on self-perceived participation compared to teacher-related and online-related factors.

### Learners' Gender

Table 3. Learners' Gender

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	sig.
Student-related factors	male	62	2.6083	.95742	-2.087	.038
	female	106	2.8760	.69653		
Teacher-related factors	male	62	2.2516	.91324	-1.388	.167

Online- related factors	female	106	2.4340	.76369	-.408	.684
	male	62	2.7581	.93878		
Learning- related factors	female	106	2.8082	.64929	1.648	.101
	male	62	3.6210	.70963		
	female	106	3.4670	.49770		

Mean scores, standard deviations, t-values, and significance levels were computed to examine gender differences across different domains. Gender disparities were evident in perceptions of student-related factors, with females ( $M = 2.8760$ ,  $SD = 0.69653$ ) reporting significantly higher mean scores compared to males ( $M = 2.6083$ ,  $SD = 0.95742$ ;  $t = -2.087$ ,  $p = .038$ ). However, no significant gender differences were found in perceptions of teacher-related factors (male:  $M = 2.2516$ ,  $SD = 0.91324$ ; female:  $M = 2.4340$ ,  $SD = 0.76369$ ;  $t = -1.388$ ,  $p = .167$ ), online-related factors (male:  $M = 2.7581$ ,  $SD = 0.93878$ ; female:  $M = 2.8082$ ,  $SD = 0.64929$ ;  $t = -0.408$ ,  $p = .684$ ), or learning-related factors (male:  $M = 3.6210$ ,  $SD = 0.70963$ ; female:  $M = 3.4670$ ,  $SD = 0.49770$ ;  $t = 1.648$ ,  $p = .101$ ).

### *Learners' Age*

*Table 4. Learners' Age*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Student-related factors	18-20	88	2.7597	.80216	4.520	.004
	21-25	52	2.9945	.71398		
	26-30	10	2.8286	.99614		
	above 30	18	2.2063	.78127		
Teacher- related factors	18-20	88	2.3409	.88884	.556	.645
	21-25	52	2.4769	.74954		
	26-30	10	2.2800	.85997		
	above 30	18	2.2222	.69583		
Online- related factors	18-20	88	2.8409	.77555	3.913	.010
	21-25	52	2.8846	.60457		
	26-30	10	2.8667	1.24425		
	above 30	18	2.2222	.62622		
Learning- related factors	18-20	88	3.6420	.57834	3.370	.020
	21-25	52	3.3654	.48117		
	26-30	10	3.6500	1.12546		
	above 30	18	3.3333	.34300		

Means, standard deviations, F-values, and significance levels were calculated to examine age-related differences across different domains. Significant age disparities were observed in perceptions of student-related factors ( $F = 4.520$ ,  $p = .004$ ), with participants aged 21-25 ( $M = 2.9945$ ,  $SD = 0.71398$ ) reporting the highest mean scores, followed by those aged 26-30 ( $M = 2.8286$ ,  $SD = 0.99614$ ), 18-20 ( $M = 2.7597$ ,  $SD = 0.80216$ ), and above 30 ( $M = 2.2063$ ,  $SD = 0.78127$ ). In contrast, no significant age differences were found in perceptions of teacher-related factors ( $F = 0.556$ ,  $p = .645$ ). However, age-related variations were evident in perceptions of online-related factors ( $F = 3.913$ ,  $p = .010$ ) and learning-related factors ( $F = 3.370$ ,  $p = .020$ ). Specifically, participants aged 18-20 and 21-25 reported higher mean scores for online-related factors compared to older age groups, while participants aged 18-20 exhibited the highest mean scores for learning-related factors.

### *Learners' Cultural background*

Table 5. Learners' Cultural background

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Student-related factors	Non-Arabs	14	2.8776	.86599	.077	.972
	African Arabs	16	2.7679	.85376		
	Arabian Peninsula	94	2.7660	.83322		
	Levantine	44	2.7727	.75109		
Teacher-related factors	Non-Arabs	14	2.6000	1.38119	.796	.498
	African Arabs	16	2.4000	.85167		
	Arabian Peninsula	94	2.3894	.81827		
	Levantine	44	2.2318	.56723		
Online-related factors	Non-Arabs	14	2.5000	.83205	1.339	.264
	African Arabs	16	2.8958	.53705		
	Arabian Peninsula	94	2.7500	.81823		
	Levantine	44	2.9280	.68521		
Learning-related factors	Non-Arabs	14	3.5714	.64621	.117	.950
	African Arabs	16	3.4688	.45529		
	Arabian Peninsula	94	3.5133	.65518		
	Levantine	44	3.5511	.45933		

The results shown in Table represent how the study factors were perceived across different cultural backgrounds (i.e., Non-Arabs, African Arabs, Arabian Peninsula, and Levantine). The mean scores and standard deviations are provided for each cultural background group within these factors.

The mean scores for different cultural backgrounds were quite close for each category. The F-test in all categories did not show any significant difference among these groups ( $p > 0.05$ ).

This indicated that, however there were slight variations in mean scores across different factors and cultural backgrounds, the lack of significant differences as indicated by the F-tests suggested that the cultural background of the participants did not affect the way they participated in the classrooms. The absence of apparent distinctions among different cultural backgrounds can be attributed to their extended existence in a common environment and consistent engagement with same educational approaches of Saudi Arabia.

### Learning modality

Table 6. Learning modality

	Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Student-related factors	Online	98	2.7347	.89179	-.804	.423
	face to face	70	2.8367	.68200		
Teacher-related factors	Online	98	2.3510	.79330	-.290	.772
	face to face	70	2.3886	.87071		
Online-related factors	Online	98	2.7007	.75754	-1.792	.075
	face to face	70	2.9143	.76705		
Learning-related factors	Online	98	3.4694	.60843	-1.425	.156
	face to face	70	3.6000	.55233		

Means, standard deviations, t-values, and significance levels were computed to compare perceptions across online and face-to-face learning environments.

An analysis of the data presented in Table 6 revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in overall self-perceived levels of participation between online and face-to-face

learning environments. While slight variations were observed, these differences did not reach the threshold for statistical significance across the measured factors. Regarding each type of factor, no significant differences were found in perceptions of student-related factors between online ( $M = 2.7347$ ,  $SD = 0.89179$ ) and face-to-face ( $M = 2.8367$ ,  $SD = 0.68200$ ) learning environments ( $t = -0.804$ ,  $p = .423$ ). Similarly, perceptions of teacher-related factors did not significantly differ between online ( $M = 2.3510$ ,  $SD = 0.79330$ ) and face-to-face ( $M = 2.3886$ ,  $SD = 0.87071$ ) settings ( $t = -0.290$ ,  $p = .772$ ). However, there were trends suggesting potential differences in perceptions of online-related factors ( $t = -1.792$ ,  $p = .075$ ) and learning-related factors ( $t = -1.425$ ,  $p = .156$ ) between the two modalities, albeit not reaching statistical significance.

The findings indicate a similarity in perceptions of student and teacher factors across online and face-to-face learning environments. This suggests that students perceive similar levels of engagement, motivation, and teacher support regardless of the learning modality. However, trends in perceptions of online-related and learning-related factors hint at potential differences that warrant further investigation. These differences may reflect unique challenges or opportunities inherent in online learning, such as the quality of digital resources or the effectiveness of online instructional strategies.

## Discussion

The results of this study shed light on the different dynamics of student participation across diverse educational modalities, considering factors such as learners' major, gender, age, cultural background, and learning modality. These findings offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of student engagement and its implications for self-perceived participation and educational outcomes.

*RQ1. How do demographic backgrounds such as gender, age, major and cultural background influence perceptions of students about participation in English language classes?*

The examination of learners' major revealed significant differences in the impact of student-related factors compared to both teacher-related and online-related factors. However, no significant differences were observed between student-related and learning-related factors, suggesting that student attributes may exert a stronger influence on self-perceived participation than factors related to teaching methods or online resources within specific academic disciplines. Regarding learners' gender, disparities were evident in perceptions of student-related factors, with females reporting significantly higher mean scores compared to males. However, no significant gender differences were found in perceptions of teacher-related, online-related, or learning-related factors, indicating that gender variations may primarily manifest in students' self-perceptions and attitudes towards their own participation rather than external factors. Age-related differences were observed in perceptions of student-related factors, with younger participants reporting higher mean scores compared to older age groups. While no significant age differences were found in perceptions of teacher-related factors, age-related variations were evident in perceptions of online-related and learning-related factors, suggesting that younger learners may be more attuned to the benefits and challenges of online learning environments. Cultural background did not significantly impact students' perceptions of participation factors, indicating a universal pattern in how students engage with educational content and interact with their peers and instructors irrespective of cultural backgrounds. The study's finding on the effect of age on participation aligns with previous studies (e.g., Cole et al., 2021; Ke & Kwak, 2013), which suggest that factors such as age and ethnicity do not inherently influence participation levels in online language classes. Concerning learners' gender, the study supports the findings of many previous studies (e.g., Anthony, 2012; Elfeky & Elbyaly, 2023) which conclude that there is no difference in participation based on gender.

Regarding learners' cultural background, the current study's finding is consistent with Bećirović et al. (2018), who found that cultural background did not significantly affect performance.

*RQ2. How do students' perceptions of participation in English language classes is affected by the modality of learning (online vs. face-to-face)?*

Comparing perceptions across online and face-to-face learning environments revealed no significant differences in student and teacher-related factors, suggesting consistent levels of engagement and support regardless of the instructional modality. However, the study also revealed interesting trends in the perceptions of online-related and learning-related factors, although these differences did not reach statistical significance. The slight preference for face-to-face settings in these areas warrants further exploration. It may indicate that while online learning environments can match traditional classrooms in terms of engagement and teacher support, there might be certain aspects of the face-to-face experience that are challenging to fully replicate online. This could suggest that students perceive certain challenges or limitations in the online environment, even when comparing factors specifically designed for digital learning. These might include issues related to technology use, digital literacy, or the quality and accessibility of online resources. Such perceptions align with findings from other studies that have identified technological challenges as potential barriers to effective online learning (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Similarly, the slight preference for face-to-face settings in learning-related factors might reflect students' perceptions of the overall effectiveness of traditional classroom instruction. This could be due to factors such as immediate face-to-face interaction, non-verbal communication cues, or the structured environment of a physical classroom. These elements have been recognized in previous research as potential advantages of face-to-face learning (Kemp & Grieve, 2014). It is important to note, however, that these differences were not statistically significant, indicating that the gap between online and face-to-face perceptions is not substantial. This suggests that while there may be room for improvement in online learning environments, they are not perceived as drastically inferior to traditional classrooms. The findings of the current study align with those of numerous other studies (e.g., Bahiyah, 2023; Rapanta et al., 2020; Wu, 2023), which have concluded that online platforms are effective in enhancing learner participation.

## **Conclusion**

This study has provided a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional factors that affect students' participation in language classes. The findings highlight the complex interplay between various factors and their collective influence on student engagement and participation. The analysis of learners' major revealed that student-related factors have a significant influence on participation compared to teacher-related and online-related factors. Additionally, the absence of significant differences based on cultural background suggests a universal pattern in how students engage with educational content, emphasizing the need for inclusive pedagogical approaches that accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds. Comparative analysis between online and face-to-face learning environments revealed consistent levels of engagement and support across instructional modalities, although trends in perceptions of online-related and learning-related factors warrant further investigation to optimize online learning experiences and address potential challenges.

Correlation analysis highlighted the interrelated nature of student, teacher, online, and learning-related factors, emphasizing the importance of holistic approaches in promoting students' participation. These findings have significant implications for educational practice and policy, emphasizing the need for personalized interventions and comprehensive strategies to enhance student participation and learning outcomes.

Drawing upon the findings of this study, several pedagogical implications emerge. Firstly, educators are advised to take into account the diverse attributes and preferences of students when crafting instructional activities. Furthermore, it is imperative that educational programs be tailored to accommodate the distinct requirements and inclinations of various age cohorts, thereby maximizing the efficacy of learning endeavors. Additionally, the formulation of strategies aimed at augmenting online learning experiences ought to be informed by insights gleaned from comparative analyses conducted in conjunction with traditional face-to-face instruction.

While this study offers valuable insights, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, the findings might be constrained by the sample size and demographic composition of the participants, suggesting the potential for biased generalizations. Hence, future research endeavors could benefit from larger and more diverse sample pools. Second significant limitation of this study is its reliance solely on students' self-reported perceptions of engagement and participation, rather than incorporating direct observational data. This methodological approach may not capture the full complexity of actual student engagement in different learning environments, as perceptions can differ from observable behaviors. Future research should address this limitation by combining self-reported data with systematic classroom observations to provide a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of student participation across online and face-to-face learning modalities. Thirdly, the study's focus on a specific educational context may restrict the applicability of its findings to broader settings. Therefore, future investigations should encompass a variety of educational contexts to enhance the generalizability and robustness of the conclusions.

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## Appendix A. The questionnaire

Constructs	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation
Student-related factors	I feel nervous and shy when I speak in front of the class.	19	27.4	27.4	20.2	6	2.66	1.171
	I do not participate because I am not sure about the correct answer.	19	23.8	28.6	25	3.6	2.70	1.145
	I feel more comfortable when I am silent during classroom discussions.	10.7	27.4	33.3	21.4	7.1	2.86	1.091
	I think that silence in the classroom encourages deeper thinking and reflection.	14.3	23.8	32.1	25	4.8	2.82	1.106
	My personality characteristics influence my participation.	20.2	23.8	27.4	25	3.6	2.67	1.159
	I do not participate because I fear that I may make mistakes.	20.2	26.2	25	22.6	6	2.67	1.200
	I do not participate because I do not know the topics well enough.	15.5	25	15.5	29.8	14.3	3.02	1.322
Total							2.77	.810
Teacher-related factors	I think that instructors play a role in the silence or participation of their students.	2.4	10.7	19	36.9	31	3.83	1.059
	I do not participate because the teacher does not give us enough time to think and answer.	41.7	35.7	13.1	4.8	4.8	1.95	1.082
	I do not participate because the teacher is unable to make me understand well.	33.3	36.9	20.2	7.1	2.4	2.08	1.017
	I do not participate because the teacher has a poor relationship with me.	41.7	33.3	17.9	2.4	4.8	1.95	1.059
	I do not participate because the teacher does not give equal chances or turns to all students.	38.1	40.5	9.5	6	6	2.01	1.121
Total							2.36	.824
Online-related factors	I do not participate in online classes because I am not familiar with the platform (e.g., Microsoft Teams).	38.1	44	7.1	7.1	3.6	1.94	1.030
	I do not participate in online classes because the online classes are boring.	21.4	40.5	26.2	7.1	4.8	2.33	1.042
	I am not able to concentrate when using a smartphone or computer to attend online classes.	15.5	22.6	26.2	22.6	13.1	2.95	1.265
	I use the chat to respond to the teacher's questions.	6	10.7	32.1	39.3	11.9	3.40	1.027

	I feel that it is more challenging to communicate effectively in online classes than in physical classes.	11.9	19	31	20.2	17.9	3.13	1.255
	I fear that misunderstandings may occur in online interactions.	10.7	27.4	26.2	25	10.7	2.97	1.178
Total							2.78	.766
Learning-related factors	I think that it is fair to assign five marks or more for classroom participation.	7.1	13.1	25	28.6	26.2	3.53	1.213
	I think that rewarding participation should not be limited to only oral participation. Writing and doing other assignments are also forms of participation.	1.2		16.7	42.9	39.3	4.19	.796
	I am an active participant in some courses and silent in other courses.	3.6	14.3	28.6	39.3	14.3	3.46	1.02
	I think I will participate better if all the students are the same gender as me.	19	21.4	25	19	15.5	2.90	1.33
Total							3.52	.587