



## Exploring Algerian Higher Education Classroom Discourse: Verbal Abuse Manifestations and its Impacts on Learners of English

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Received: 24 November 2021

Accepted: 23 January 2022

Published: 22 February 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v8i1.3659>

### Abstract

The very mentioning of verbal abuse is more likely to send the reader/listener to educational settings like the primary, middle, and high schools. However, it is rare to affiliate between this linguistic maltreatment and higher education settings. The aim of this study is to explore EFL university learners' experiences of verbal abuse by means of investigating the various effects of verbal abuse on classroom participation, academic achievements and self-esteem. This study is based on the reflection of nine female master learners from the University of Mostaganem of their verbal abuse experiences. The data have been collected from a survey questionnaire that comprises different sections, involving closed and open-ended questions. The results showcase that learners tend to experience verbal abuse at the university, articulated by some teachers in a form of shaming and public criticizing, which mainly targets their "English language abilities". As to its effects, it has been found that due to learners' age (over 20 years old), verbal abuse does not negatively affect learners' motivation, self-esteem, and academic achievements; however, it tends to reduce their classroom participation rate.

### Keywords:

*academic achievements, motivation, self-esteem-motivation, verbal abuse*

### INTRODUCTION

Classroom discourse in EFL classes is believed to be a rich ground for different interactive practices between teachers and learners to take place. While some of these linguistic practices tend to take the form of constructive feedback, others are articulated along aggressive discourse known as verbal abuse. The latter may take different shapes and

forms such as public criticizing and shaming, and is likely lead to passivity in languages classes, lower self-esteem, and lack of motivation, stress, and anxiety, among others that negatively influence learners' academic achievements. However, what needs attention relates to problematic of this study which identifies a vivid disregard as to exploring verbal abuse in higher education settings and limiting studies to primary, middle and secondary schools' milieus. This study, as it explores verbal abuse in the afore-mentioned settings, attempts to answer the following question: what impact does verbal abuse have on learners' classroom participation, self-esteem, and academic achievements in higher education contexts?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Verbal Abuse**

Tackling learners' exposure to verbal abuse at the university necessitates defining this type of abuse first. Verbal abuse resembles bullying with a slight difference as the former does not represent physical aggression. Others tend to define it as the use of words or gestures that are likely to cause psychological harm rather than physical injuries. Moreover, this type of abuse is enacted in relation to offensive language such as threats, shouting, yelling, screaming, criticizing and passing nasty remarks. Given the serious effects it has on the abused individuals, it is stratified with the other types of abuse that have long-lasting repercussions such as stress, depression, physical disorders, and other damage.

In relation to the field of education, Casarjian (2002) provides the following definition of verbal abuse: "teacher's verbal attacks on the students' character or ability" (cited in Brendeg et al.2007, p.27). Other scholars like Wolf (2013) located verbal abuse with emotional abuse. He identifies the following forms of verbal abuse: insulting, threatening, demeaning or derogatory language, shaming, intimidating. Most importantly, verbal abuse is considered as the most frequent type of abuse in educational settings (Garbarino et al. 1986, Glaser 2002). Verbal abuse has other manifestations such as: ignoring humiliating, mocking, condescending, harming, humiliating, threatening, and belittling of an individual (Brennan, 2001; Bourdieou, 1994; Johnson, 2006, and Armstrong, 2009, as cited in as cited in Eriyanti, R. W., 2018). Other scholars outlined both overt and covert types of verbal abuse and suggest that this type of abuse aims at controlling the abused. Some example of verbal abuse can be delivered via a set of jokes that cause humiliation to the victim (Miller 1996, p. 179-180; Evans 1996, p. 211).

### ***Types of Verbal Abuse***

Many scholars have grouped verbal abuse into many categories. One may list the following typologies. Anderson (2002) mentions the following ones: withholding, countering, discounting, jokes, blocking and diverting, accusing, blaming, judging and criticizing. Cook et al. (2001) and Oweis and Diabat (2005) suggest the ensuing sub-types of verbal abuse: judging, criticizing, accusing, blaming, abusive anger, discounting, condescending, ignoring, trivializing, blocking, diverting, threatening, abuse disguised as jokes, and sexual harassment. Evans (1993) advances his 15 subtypes as follows: withholding, verbal abuse disguised as jokes, trivializing, judging, criticizing, blocking, diverting, name calling, countering, discounting, accusing, blaming, undermining, forgetting, ordering, demanding, denial, abusive anger, and threatening.

### ***Effects of Verbal abuse***

As to the negative effects of verbal abuse, scholars agreed on its psychological impacts on learners' well-being, which leads to psychological distress, namely long and short term depression and poor self-esteem (Graham and Bellmore 2007; O'Moore and Kirkham 2001; Salmivalli 2001; Seals and Young 2003). Moreover, this type of abuse tends to harm the relationship between the learners and the teachers as learners associate schools and universities with punishment (Daly et al., 2014). The consequences of this abuse on the learners may be more serious as it makes them miss learning opportunities and it develops outside classroom repercussions such as behavioral, emotional, and social maladjustment (Brendgen et al., 2006). Given the fact that teachers are seen as models for their learners, experiencing verbal abuse by the learners in classrooms would mislead them into believing that verbal abuse is an effective way of social interaction, and which opens the room for other aggressive behaviours to be practiced outside classroom settings (Bandura, 1986).

### ***Verbal abuse Impacts on Achievements***

Dealing with the impact of verbal abuse on learners' achievements, one needs to mention how this abuse transforms the learning environment into unfavorable place for learning. This abusive interaction, as documented in many studies, negatively influences learners' achievements. Brendgen et al. (2006) and Glaser (2002) have argued that repeated verbal abuse in elementary school led to learners' low academic achievement during the period of adolescence. Toblin et al. (2005) share this view and suggest that children who have experienced verbal abuse obtained lower grades when compared with the other children. The effects of verbal abuse on learners' achievement can extend to delays in obtaining high school degrees till age 23 (Brendgen et al. 2007). The link between verbal abuse and academic achievements may be intercepted by feelings of anxiety. In other words, the learners who experience verbal abuse repeatedly like sarcasm when doing mistakes are more likely to develop anxiety towards school activities (Beck et al. 1992). Hughes et al. (1999) suggest that anxiety that is caused by verbal abuse decreases motivation to learn and as such negatively influences learners' academic achievements.

### ***Verbal abuse Impacts on self-image and self-esteem***

Among the various shapes of verbal abuse, one mentions "psychological maltreatment" which leads to the individuals to be unable to develop their potentials as they grow up (Dean (1979). This led Shumba (2002) to point at the dangers of this kind of maltreatment since it causes humiliation, dehumanization, the destruction of their self-image, hatred for schools, demotivation and deformation of their character, shyness, confusion, and fear.

Following this line of the negative impacts of verbal abuse on the learners, one mentions self-esteem. The latter is believed to be lowered as the learners who experience verbal abuse are likely to participate less in the classroom which impedes their self-actualization (Branan, 1972). Another line can be drawn between self-esteem and achievement. Part of the reason why self-esteem is influential is due to its very nature that is always under construction depending on interactions with others. Other scholars, however, suggest that self-esteem is about individuals' perceptions of themselves which are not tightly linked to others (Roman et al. 2008). This led scholars such as Franks and Marolla (1976) to identify two types of self-esteem: outer and inner dimensions of self-esteem. Perception comes to play an essential part as to one's beliefs in their capabilities.

David Copperfield's Project Magic Handbook states, "Most people with disabilities have come to believe that they are less capable than a non-disabled person" (as cited in Levin, 2006. p.15). Self-esteem is believed to be linked to one's ability to succeed. It also generates feelings of competence and ability to succeed (Franks and Marolla, 1976).

## **METHOD**

Referring to mixed method research paradigm, the study aims at exploring verbal abuse in higher education (EFL) and its impacts on learners' motivation, self-esteem, and academic achievements. It adopts mixed method quantitative methods research paradigm so as to identify the frequency of verbal abuse in higher education. It also processes data qualitatively via content and discourse analyses, focusing on the language used along participants' reflections on verbal abuse experiences.

### **Participants**

This study exposes university classroom discourse to the light of criticism as it reflects on verbal abuse experiences of 9 Algerian female students of English (master degree) whose age ranges between 20-25 years old.

### **Instruments and procedures**

To collect data, a questionnaire including open -ended and closed questions, was administered to the participants to reflect on their experiences of verbal abuse. As to the procedures of data collection, the author of this article engaged in an informal discussion with master students about classroom discourse, to identify, later, that some students lived certain experiences of verbal abuse. These students were chosen as the participants of this study. The discussion was followed by administering the questionnaire to 9 female students. In the process of data analysis, both content analysis and discourse analysis were used, since this study takes into account the contents of the participants' reflections and the manners of reflecting on verbal abuse experiences.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The originality of this study stems from the settings it retrieved data from. Most of the conducted studies focused on verbal abuse in primary school, middle school, and high school settings; however, this study sheds light on these types of abuse in higher education and presents its findings along the following three sections:

1. Learners' university violence experiences
2. Participants' verbal abuse experiences
3. Effects of verbal abuse on learners

### **Section one: Learners' university violence experiences**

The first part of this section attempts to know whether or not the participants of this study lived violence experiences at the university. It also digs deeper into identifying the types of the appointed at aggressive behaviour. However, before that, it identifies learners' age, which we believe, plays significant role in intensifying or mitigating violence impact on learners' psychological well-being and achievements. The learners have been asked to

mention their age so as to locate them with a particular age category. Analysing the findings, it has been found that learners' age ranges from 20 to 25 years old. This suggests that all the learners are over 18 years old which stratifies them within the adulthood category. The figure below presents learners' age:

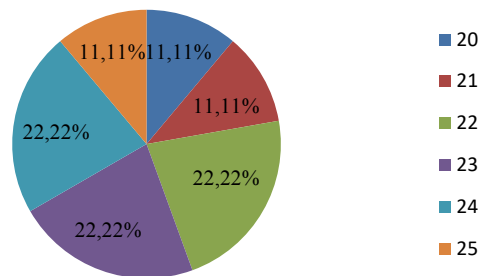


Figure 1. Participants' age

The participants have been asked to identify the different types of violence they are exposed to at higher education settings. Analysing the findings, it has been found that all the participants (100%) claimed they have lived this aggressive behaviour (s) in higher education contexts. To go deeper in unveiling these experiences, the learners have been asked to identify the type of these violent acts against them. The findings are provided below:

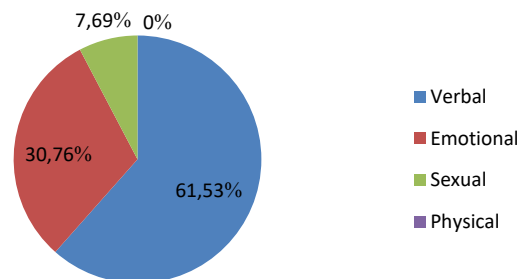


Figure 2. Types of Violence in Higher Education Settings

Analysing the data presented above, it becomes clear that learners at the university tend to experience different types of violence. Most of the learners (61, 53%) mentioned verbal abuse as the most recurrent type they come across. A good percentage of answers (30, 76%) identified emotional abuse as one of these violent rapports at the university. The minority of the learners mentioned sexual abuse (7, 69%) in their answers. However,

none of them identified physical abuse which is more common in other levels of education, namely the primary school settings.

### **Section Two: Participants' verbal abuse experiences**

The second section is dedicated to learners' descriptions of verbal abuse experiences at the university. The learners had been invited to reflect in writing on their verbal abuse experiences, focusing on the time, the setting, the reasons of occurrence, their feelings, their effects on them and on their learning, the words the teacher articulated, teachers' body language, and other minutiae. The approaches used to analyse these passages were content analysis and discourse analysis, with the focus being on the linguistic productions of this aggressive classroom discourse and its effects.

To explore verbal abuse deeply which is the commonest type among university learners, the participants have been asked whether or not they have lived any verbal abuse experience. Analysing the findings, it has been found that most of the learners (77, 77%) claimed they have been through such an experience.

#### ***Time of the incidents***

Reflecting on their verbal abuses at the university, most of the learners (44, 44%) attributed the time of this kind of classroom discourse to the second year license. A learner says: "It happened in the second year with the teacher of methodology". The first year license has also been nominated by some learners (33, 33%). A learner adds: "I had this experience in my first year at university in the classroom. The minority of learners (22, 22%), however, mentioned the third year. A learner says: "I experienced this kind of abuse in my third year university".

#### ***Setting /Place***

Asking the learners about the settings of these incidents, most of them (80%) mentioned the classroom, in particular the sessions of oral expression. A learner says: "I remember in the oral section when we were supposed to present a topic". Another learner adds: "It happened inside the classroom. It was a session of oral expression". The lecture on research methodology was mentioned by the minority of learners (20%).

#### ***Frequency of its occurrence***

The same learners were asked about the frequency of these experiences. Most of them claimed these experiences are lived very often (88, 88%). However, the minority of them (11, 11%) argued they are rare. A learner says: "This was the first time (rarely)".

Table 1. *Frequency of verbal abuse occurrence*

Frequency of verbal abuse	Percentage
Often	88,88%
Always	0%
Never	0%
Rarely	11.11%

### ***Agents of verbal abuse***

Following the same objective of exploring learners' verbal abuse experiences, they have been asked about the ones who were the main agents of this type of abuse. Most of the answers alluded to teachers as the agents of verbal abuse (72, 72%). The minority of them, however, identified students (27, 27%).

Table 2. *Agents of verbal abuse*

Agents of verbal abuse	Percentage
Teachers	72,72 %
Students	27,27%

### ***Targets of verbal abuse***

The following question targets identifying the target of these types' abuses. Analysing the findings, it has been found that most of the learners (58, 33%) mentioned "abilities" as the target of teachers' verbal abuse. Other learners identified "behaviour" (33, 33%), while the minority of learners (8, 33%) identified "physical appearances." The tables below represent the agents of verbal abuse, type, frequency, and its targets:

Table 3. *Targets of verbal abuse*

Targets of verbal abuse	Percentage
Behaviour	33, 33%
Abilities	58, 33%
Character	0%
Physical appearance	8, 33%

### ***Forms of Verbal Abuse***

The table below showcases the forms of verbal abuse learners at the university are exposed to. In here, what needs to be emphasized is the fact that some of these forms, teachers think, are not abuses; they take them as constructive feedback. Given the different percentages identified above, it becomes clear that learners (26, 08%) are more likely to experience "shaming and public criticizing." Another form of verbal abuse learners (17, 39%) come across is "teasing, name-calling, or yelling at them (calling them with words like dummy, stupid, etc.!)." "Sarcastic comments about your mistakes" are also common forms that learners experience in English language classes (17, 39%). Other forms of verbal abuse identified are "discussing learners' weak point in front of the students" (13, 4%) and "telling them that will never be successful in school or even in life" (13, 4%). The forms of verbal abuse which received the lowest percentages are "comparing the learner to other students and often criticizing them publicly (8, 69%) and "threatening them to withdraw you from the class or school" (4, 34%). This does not suggest that these forms are to be disregarded.

Table 4. *Forms of Verbal Abuse*

Verbal abuse forms	Percentage
Shaming and public criticizing	26, 08%
Teasing, name-calling, or yelling at them (calling them with words like damy, stupid).	17, 39%
Sarcastic comments about your mistakes	17, 39%
Discussing learners' weak point in front of the students	13, 4%
Telling them that will never be successful in school or even in life	13, 4%
Comparing the learner to other students and often criticizing them publicly	8, 69%
Threatening them to withdraw you from the class or school	4,34%

### ***Linguistic articulations of abuses***

To explore these verbal abuse forms further, the learners have been asked to identify the way (s) these aggressive discourses have been uttered by the teacher. Analysing the data, it has been found that most of these verbal abuses come out in a form of judgments (15, 15%). They also figure out in form of criticism (12, 12%) and jokes (12, 12%). The other linguistic articulations are presented as follows: cursing (3,03%), threatening (3,03%), yelling (9, 09%), screaming (6,06%), saying nasty remarks (6,06%), blaming (6,06%), ordering (6,06%), mocking (3,03%), insulting (3,03%), shouting (3,03%), and ridiculing (9, 09%). Other ways of uttering this type of verbal abuse and which have not been identified by the learners are: trivializing, accusing shaming, intimidating, belittling, and humiliating.

### ***Reasons of verbal abuse***

The same learners have been asked about the reasons that instigated that verbal abuse. Among the reasons mentioned by the learners is making mistakes in the sessions of oral expression. A learner illustrates: "The reason was because I didn't have good pronunciation and good speaking skill; I was doing lot of mistakes especially in grammar". Another learner adds: "I was introducing a topic in front of my classmates. I made some mistakes". Other reasons involve misbehaviour issues, as indicated in the ensuing comment: "The reason of its occurrence is chewing gum". Some learners referred the reason of that aggressive discourse to their attempts to give their opinions in the oral session. A learner says: "When I wanted to answer and give my own point of view. Other incentives that fuelled verbal abuse, some learners argue, stem from state of sickness, as indicated in the following comment: "I was ill."

### ***Effects on Feelings***

The effects of verbal abuse on learners' feelings and emotions were vivid. Some of the learners expressed anger while being verbally abused by the teacher. A learner says: "I felt angry because we have no authority to face those kinds of teachers. This feeling has been shared by a group of learners as indicated in the ensuing comment: "the entire group felt angry, disappointed and discouraged to study and assist her module". It also



developed feelings of shame and stress as shown in this comment: “I felt stressed and shameful.” This aggressive classroom discourse is likely to lead some learners to cry. A learner says: “I felt very bad and cried a lot”.

The previous section explored violence at higher education, with the focus being on verbal abuse and its commonest types that most of the learners encounter in these settings. It also mapped out the various forms and articulations of this aggressive discourse. This section, however, carries on the discussion about verbal abuse, shedding light on its effects on learners’ psychological aspects and their academic achievements. The table below elucidates various effects of verbal abuse on learners’ studies:

Table 5. *Effects of verbal abuse of learners’ studies*

Items	Yes	No
Participation	77, 77%	22, 22%
Passivity	55, 55%	44, 44%
Skipping classes	33 33%	66, 66%
Anxiety	77, 77%	33, 33%
Motivation	44 44%	55, 55%
Academic achievements	33, 33%	66, 66%
Self-esteem	33, 33%	55,55%

### ***Participation***

To investigate the effect of verbal abuse on participation, the learners have been asked whether or not this discourse affects their participation in English language classes. Analysing the data, it has been found that most of the learners (77, 77%) claim it does affect their interactive practices. The other learners (22, 22%) negated these effects. The following open-ended question requested from the participants some details about the ways verbal abuse affects their participation. Analysing the data, it has been found that some learners stop participating, sometimes they avoid engaging in this practice in these classes. A learner says: “I stopped participating in his module.” Another learner adds: “I stopped participating in many lectures”. The same idea is expressed in the following comment: “I started avoiding participating in her class.” A learner says: “I would be careful to talk in her class”. Other answers reflected some psychological and emotional effects such as anger and shyness. A learner illustrates: “We feel angry to interact with that teacher.” Another learner comments: “Badly and sometimes I become shy.”

### ***Passivity***

The learners have been asked whether or not this aggressive classroom discourse transformed them into passive learners. Learners’ answers show that most of them (55, 55%) occupy the zone of passivity after being verbally abused. (44, 44%) of the answers negated the rapport between passivity and this type of abuse.

### ***Skipping classes***

To explore further the effects of verbal abuse on learners’ studies, they have been asked whether or not they skip the classes where verbal abuse occurred. Most of the learners

(66, 66%) argue they do not skip classes when they experience verbal abuse from the teacher due to many reasons. A learner sees this challenging and comments: “Because I wanted to attend so as to get information and do my best to prove that I am competent”. Another learner says: “Because I will not let her reaction to affect me.” The other learners who claimed they skip these kinds of classes (33 33%) provided some motives. A learner says: “Because teacher’s behaviour makes me hate the lecture.” Another learner adds: “I avoid meeting her”.

### ***Anxiety***

The rapport between anxiety and language learning has been discussed by many scholars, focusing on its negative effects. The learners have been asked whether or not verbal abuse makes them anxious. Analysing the findings, it has been found that most of the learners (77, 77%) develop anxiety due to this type of aggressive discourse.

### ***Motivation***

Motivation, too, plays a significant role as to learners’ achievements in classes. Given the rapport between classroom discourse and motivation, the learners have been asked whether or not their motivation to learn decreases when exposed to verbal abuse. Analysing the data, it has been found that most of the learners (55, 55%) negate any decrease of motivation due to such classroom discourse. However, a good percentage of answers (44, 44%) established this negative rapport.

### ***Academic achievements***

The previously mentioned learning variables tend to affect learners’ achievements. For this reason, the learners’ have been asked whether or not verbal abuse affects their academic achievements. Analysing the data, it has been found that most of the learners (66, 66%) deny any negative effect on their achievements. The learners who argued this type of classroom discourse did not negatively affect their performances provided various reasons. Some of them suggest they do not care about such abuse, as indicated in the following comment by a learner: “Because I don’t care and don’t give importance in that abuse.” Another learner says: “For me, I know my capacities and I don’t care about other’s judgments.” Others try different strategies to cope with it like attempting to forget these abuses. A learner clarifies: “Because I tried to forget about and do not let it to affect me negatively”. Other learners take this as a challenge and develop oppositional motivation, as illustrated in the ensuing comment: “Because when I had that experience I promised myself to work hard and show him that I am competent and deserve to be here with them”. The learners who acknowledged this negative effect of verbal abuse argued their stances too. A learner highlighted the decrease of motivation saying: “Because I feel I am not motivated to study.” Hating the subject was another consequence of such abuse as elucidated in the comment: “Because the teacher makes me hate the module and I would not work or do well in exams”.

### ***Self-esteem***

The fact that self-esteem is among the variables that either hinder or enhance English language learning, the learners have been asked various questions to cover the rapport between verbal abuse and self-esteem. The first question was whether or not learners give importance to how others see them. Analysing the data, it has been found that learners’

self-esteem is not affected by others (77, 77%). The next question was whether or not they give importance to how teachers see them. Here, the results contradicted the first ones. Most of the learners (77, 77%) acknowledged the importance of teachers' views about the learners in constructing their self-esteem. Following the same objective of exploring learners' perceptions of their self-esteem, the learners have been asked whether or not they give importance to how they see themselves. The findings suggest that most of the learners do give importance to how they see themselves (55, 55%), while (44, 44%) of them do not. To see the orientation of learners' self-esteem, they have been given the chance to choose among the three items, focusing on the one they give more importance to. Analysing the data, it has been found that most of the learners (88, 88%) prioritise how they see themselves over how the teachers and others seem them. The table below presents the findings:

Table 6:  
*Learners' perceptions of themselves /self-esteem*

Items	Yes	No
How others see you	33,33%	77, 77%
How teachers see you	77 77%	33,33%
How you see yourself	55, 55%	44,44%

The learners have been asked to mention the item (s) which has been affected by verbal abuse the most. Analysing the findings, it has been found that most of the learners (62, 5%) identify the second item that suggests how teachers see the learners. A learner says: "The teacher because he criticizes me and it's positive for me". Another learner adds: "The second one because the teachers are considered as idols". Some of the learners provided other arguments like the following ones. A learner says: "When the teacher sees me or considers me as a weak student." Another learner comments: "The second one, yes you feel underestimated and you'll have bad marks". Those who pointed at the effect of verbal abuse on how they seem themselves provided some arguments, too. A learner says: "How I see myself because when I get nervous or anxious I can't do things correctly." Another learner adds: "Myself because I felt angry and it really hurt me inside."

The learners have been asked whether or not verbal abuse negatively influences the way they see themselves. Analysing the findings, it has been found that most of the learners (55, 55%) believe this classroom discourse does not negatively affect them. Others (33, 33%) argue it does, while (11, 11%) of them left the question unanswered. These students who are unaffected by this type of abuse suggest that they have taken this abuse positively, as stated by the ensuing learner: "Because verbal abuse can affect the behaviour positively". Others argue that they could overcome its negative effects as suggested in the following comment: "Actually it affected me for a short period of time, but I did my best to forget it completely". Another learner argues: "Yes, in the beginning and then I overcame this situation". Some other learners think that this abuse negatively affects the producers, teachers, and not the learners. A learner adds: "The verbal abuse depends on the person's values and he will never influence the way I see myself." Another one adds: "It influences the way we see her/him. I don't respect a person who doesn't respect himself or others". However, the learners who argued it affects them negatively

highlighted its effects on their psychological state, as indicated in the following statement: “It makes you lose the confidence in yourself.” Another learner adds: “Because I become shy and anxious and sometimes nervous”. Another learner adds: “It makes me feel that I have not enough knowledge.”

## **DISCUSSION**

As it has been showcased, university learners of English are likely to live various types of violence such as verbal, emotional, and sexual types of aggressive classroom discourses. However, verbal abuse scored the highest as compared to the other types. Indeed, verbal abuse can be produced by different agents at universities, however, in the case of the study; teachers were found to be the main agents of this aggressive discourse. Learners are exposed to this type of discourse very often; it targets learners’ linguistic abilities mainly, not to forget their behaviour and physical appearances. This aggressive discourse takes the shape of criticisms and judgments and occurs along various forms such as shaming and public criticizing, teasing, name-calling, yelling at the learners, sarcastic comments about their mistakes, and other forms mentioned in the study.

Analysing the findings of learners’ reflections on their verbal abuse experiences, it becomes clear that this classroom aggressive discourse tends to take place in oral expressions sessions, an opportunity for learners to develop their language skills, and which turns into linguistic negative feedbacks from some teachers. As to the reasons of verbal abuse, many sources were identified; however, the commonest ones relate to making English language mistakes, which we believe, need to be indirectly corrected in a form a recast. Most importantly, verbal abuse tends to affect the feelings of these learners leading to anger, shame, stress, while others express their emotions by crying.

Exploring the effects of verbal abuse on learners’ studies, it was found that this aggressive discourse influences various learning variables such as participation in language classes, anxiety, motivation, and academic achievements, most importantly. It becomes clear that verbal abuse is not limited to primary, middle, and high schools’ settings; on the contrary, it also occurs in higher education settings. Moreover as an attempt to answer the main question of this study, the claim of verbal abuse reducing learners’ rate of participation in English language classes and transforming them into passive learners who skip some language classes very often is confirmed, since the majority of the learners argued it affected their participation. Yet, due to their age that goes beyond 18 years old, learners’ self-esteem is not lowered when experiencing verbal abuse in language classes. Motivation to learn remains intact and this may be also attributed to learners’ age. By the same token, most of the learners denied any negative effect of verbal abuse on their academic achievements.

## **CONCLUSION**

The fact that university learners are grown up individuals does not eliminate being negatively affected by aggressive classroom discourse. That being said, these educational milieus need to be a hotbed for constructive feedback which does not target the learners, their characters and personalities. Alternatively, language mistakes may be corrected in a form of recasts that identify and correct language shortcomings indirectly. Even though verbal abuse does not lucidly obstruct the process of learning English at the university, it transforms the learning environment into suffocating place learners come to by obligation.

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