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**THE STATUS OF HOMOGENEOUS GROUPING IMPLICATION  
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS IN THE  
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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A comparison diagram between homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping inside classrooms (Photo By: Eman Mohamed Abdelwahab)

## Declaration of Original Work

I, Eman Mohamed Abdelwahab, the undersigned, a graduate student at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), and the author of this thesis entitled “*The Status of Homogeneous Grouping Implication in English Language Classrooms in the United Arab Emirates*”, hereby, solemnly declare that this is the original research work done by me under the supervision of Dr. Badreyya AlKhanbooli, in the College of Education at UAEU. This work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any academic degree, diploma or a similar title at this or any other university. Any materials borrowed from other sources (whether published or unpublished) and relied upon or included in my thesis have been properly cited and acknowledged in accordance with appropriate academic conventions. I further declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, data collection, authorship, presentation and/or publication of this thesis.

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## Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the status of homogeneous grouping implication in English language classrooms in the United Arab Emirates public schools. The study aims at exploring students' and teachers' perceptions toward homogeneous learning in English language classrooms, encountered challenges and possible suggestions of improvement. The Mixed method was used for data collection and analysis, by using both qualitative (Interview and short-essay questions) and quantitative (Likert-scale questionnaires) data as main sources of data.

The Study sample included 645 participants, consisting of 30 English language teachers and 615 high school students from 13 public schools in the United Arab Emirates. The study results presented significant difference between high achieving and low achieving students' perceptions towards learning in homogeneous context. High achieving students showed high preference towards learning in homogeneous classes, while low achieving students preferred learning in heterogeneous classrooms. Teachers' perceptions supported students' views. Additionally, most teachers showed preference towards teaching in heterogeneous classes, as they mentioned how the existence of high achieving students lessen the load on teachers by helping less achieving colleagues. Some teachers indicated their equal preference in using either homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping.

Many challenges were presented by both students and teachers. One of the most highlighted challenges include the need of low achieving students to be placed in a heterogeneous context to improve their learning and be motivated. Furthermore, teachers clarified how teaching low achieving students homogeneously can be overwhelming and require additional time and effort to satisfy students' learning needs.

A set of suggestions were provided by students and teachers, including the need for more involvement of higher achieving students in low achieving students' classrooms, the need for additional answering time for low achieving students and more focus on skills-oriented activities to develop basic skills.

**Keywords:** Homogeneous Grouping, Heterogeneous Grouping, Ability Grouping, English Language Learning, Learning Approaches.

## Title and Abstract (in Arabic)

حال تطبيق مجموعات التعليم المتجانس في صفوف تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بمدارس دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

### الملخص

الهدف من هذه الأطروحة هو دراسة تأثير التجميع المتجانس (Homogeneous Grouping) في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بمدارس دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. تهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف مواقف وتصورات المعلمين والطلاب في صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الحكومية بدولة الإمارات، بالإضافة إلى بحث التحديات التي يواجهها الطلبة والمعلمين والاقتراحات الممكنة للتحسين. تم استخدام منهج الطريقة المختلطة (Mixed Method) لجمع البيانات وتحليلها، باستخدام البيانات النوعية (Qualitative Data) مثل المقابلات وأسئلة المقال القصير، والبيانات الكمية (Quantitative Data) مثل الاستبيانات باستخدام مقياس Likert الخماسي كمصدرين أساسيين للبيانات.

اشتملت عينة الدراسة على مشاركة 645 مشاركاً، من بينهم 30 معلماً للغة الإنجليزية و 615 طالباً من طلاب المدارس الثانوية من 13 مدرسة حكومية في 5 إمارات في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة فرقاً هاماً بين آراء الطلاب المتفوقين والمنخفضين من حيث إدراك الطلاب ومواقفهم تجاه التعلم في سياق متجانس. أظهر الطلاب المتفوقون مستويات عالية من التفضيل تجاه التعلم في فصول متجانسة، على عكس الطلاب ذوي التحصيل المنخفض حيث أظهروا نسبة تفضيل عالية تجاه التعلم في فصول غير متجانسة (Heterogeneous Grouping). كما أفاد الطلاب ذوي التحصيل المنخفض أنهم يعانون من فقدان الاهتمام ونقص الحافز في بيئة التعلم المتجانس. دعم تصور المعلمين آراء الطلاب، كما أظهر المعلمون المشاركون في هذه الدراسة تفضيلهم للتدريس في فصول غير متجانسة، حيث ذكروا كيف أن وجود الطلاب المتفوقين يقلل العبء على المعلمين من خلال مساعدة زملائهم الأقل إنجازاً. أشار بعض المعلمين إلى تفضيلهم المتساوي لاستخدام المجموعات المتجانسة أو غير المتجانسة، حيث أنهم يرون أن المعلم يلعب الدور الأساسي في تحقيق أفضل استخدام لأي نهج تدريسي.

تم عرض العديد من التحديات من قبل كل من الطلاب والمعلمين، ومن أبرزها مواجهة الطلاب ذوي التحصيل المنخفض لصعوبات في التعلم دون مساعدة الطلاب المتفوقين، كما أوضح المعلمون كيف يمكن أن يكون التدريس في الفصول المتجانسة منخفضة التحصيل أمراً مربكاً ويتطلب وقتاً وجهداً إضافيين لتلبية احتياجات التعلم للطلاب.

تم تقديم مجموعة من الاقتراحات من قبل الطلاب والمعلمين بناءً على تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها، بما في ذلك الحاجة إلى مزيد من مشاركة الطلاب المتفوقين في الفصول الدراسية للطلاب ذوي التحصيل المنخفض، والحاجة إلى مزيد من وقت الإجابة للطلبة ذوي التحصيل المنخفض لتشجيعهم على التعلم وتحسين وزيادة التركيز على الأنشطة الموجهة نحو تنمية المهارات الأساسية لدى الطلاب.

مفاهيم البحث الرئيسية: التعليم المتجانس، التعليم غير المتجانس، التجميع حسب القدرات، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، مناهج التعلم.



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## Dedication

*To my beloved, caring and supportive mother,*

*To my dear father and dear family,*

*To my dearest friends and best companions,*

*To my educators and everyone who supported my journey..*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

MOE	Ministry of Education
P	Participant
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UAE	United Arab Emirates





# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

As students are becoming the center of the educational process, the care of learning quality is increasing among educators. Students showed better learning results through doing, experiencing and practicing in learning through different strategies (Kolb, 1984). Different learning strategies have been developed and applied throughout years (Bremner, 1998), by using trial and error and researching possible improvements and solutions to occurring situations in education and schooling system. Different Assessment strategies and tools are used to assess the effectiveness of each learning strategy, decide on its advantages and disadvantages, and approve its suitability to be used within a specific educational system context.

Teachers are mostly the decision makers inside their classrooms, where they choose the most suitable teaching and learning strategies to apply based on their students' needs and levels. But nowadays, teachers are not left with much space to choose all their teaching strategies, as the higher authorities of education obligate teachers to follow certain teaching and learning strategies, aiming to achieve the highest possible learning quality and fair learning chance to all students. As higher educational authorities have wider range of students and teachers to examine the developed and modified learning strategies, this helps to lessen the error chances and have higher chances of correct application of strategies into schools and educational systems.

One of the most used and examined learning strategies is ability grouping. This strategy involves grouping students in classes or groups based on their abilities or level of achievement (Ansalone, 2003; Dukmak, 2006). The grouping process is categorized into two main types; Heterogeneous (Mixed-ability grouping) and Homogeneous (Same-ability grouping) (Gamoran, 1992). In Heterogeneous grouping, students with different abilities are grouped together, as it is believed that students with lower abilities learn from others with higher abilities through collaborative learning (freeman, 1993). On the other hand, homogeneous group students with similar abilities and achievement levels in the same group. Meaning that students with high abilities (high achievers) will study and work

together, while students with lower abilities (low achievers) will be taught separately (Grossen, 1996; Page & Keith, 1996). Both types of grouping have been extensively studied and examined in the educational context as a tool to improve students' abilities and enhance their learning experiences, such as in the studies of Slavin (1987), Freeman (1993), Grossen (1996), Barati (2012), Kinsey (2017) and many more educational researchers.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) educational system has been adapting the heterogeneous grouping approach in UAE's schools since the establishment of UAE's schooling system. Mixed abilities classrooms were used in teaching all subjects. The only case that was requiring ability grouping was when a specific group of low achieving students needed additional attention or classes; they would be given remedial classes. The application of homogeneous grouping in UAE schools was an educational shift that aimed to enhance the achievement and learning levels among students based on UAE's 2021 educational vision (UAE Vision, 2018).

One of the subjects that are deeply concerned with the application of homogeneous grouping in UAE's governmental schools is English language learning. As it is one of the most commonly taught languages in UAE after the Arabic language (the official first language in UAE), learning English language and mastering English proficiency is a goal for students studying in UAE schools to become world citizens (UAE's Ministry of Education, 2014). Due to its importance in the language learning system in UAE, this study focuses on English Language learning aspects in regard to the homogeneous ability grouping strategy used in UAE's governmental schools.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Nowadays, several learning strategies are taking place in schools all over the world as a tool used by Ministries of Education to enhance students' learning quality and boost the educational system effectiveness. The UAE's Ministry of Education (MOE) used to follow the heterogeneous grouping for long years but started shifting gradually to implement the homogeneous grouping in governmental schools and some of private schools across the UAE, with the rise of the "Emirati School" model in 2017 (UAE's Ministry of Education,

2021). A new policy took its place in schools where school administrations and teachers are required to divide students in certain subjects into categories based on their academic abilities and achievement levels through the assessment of diagnostic tests. Students from each ability group were assigned to different sections in which they study with students of similar ability levels. This approach is applied in alignment with the UAE's 2021 vision of education that focuses on improving students' abilities, applying new teaching and learning strategies, supporting learning by doing and developing research skills among students (UAE Vision, 2018; UAE's Ministry of Education, 2021).

However, shifting from the regular and old strategy to the newly implemented strategy can have its own challenges. Opinions vary regarding the use of homogeneous over heterogeneous grouping in schools, based on the statements of some teachers. Some students and teachers find the use of homogeneous grouping ineffective or have its disadvantages, preferring to follow the heterogeneous grouping, while others support its use. For this reason, this study highlights students' and teachers' perceptions on the application of homogenous grouping in UAE's English language classrooms and focuses on exploring the encountered challenges and possible ways of improvement.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

This study aims at investigating the status of homogeneous grouping application in English language classrooms in the United Arab Emirates public schools. Through conducting questionnaires and interviews, this study focuses on exploring the students' and teachers' perceptions on homogeneous grouping strategy, the faced challenges and their perceptions towards replacing the use of heterogeneous grouping with homogeneous grouping in English Language learning classes. Furthermore, this study is eager to seek for suggestions and improvements from students' and teachers' perspectives (if needed) to improve the application of homogeneous grouping.

### **1.4 Questions of the Study**

This study investigates answers to the following questions:

1. What are teachers' and students' perceptions toward the application of homogeneous grouping in English language learning classrooms?

2. What are the challenges encountered by students and teachers in the homogeneous learning context?
3. What could be the required modifications (if any) that may enhance the current implication of homogeneous grouping in the UAE's educational context?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The importance of this study is due to the need for further studies that explore the application of homogeneous grouping in some English language learning classrooms in UAE. As this strategy is recently applied in UAE's governmental schools, no sufficient number of studies was conducted to explore its application in classrooms or how students and teachers feel about this new experience, to the researcher's best knowledge. The views of teachers and students reflect on the effectiveness of the homogeneous grouping on teaching quality and its effectiveness on students learning and performance. Furthermore, the investigated subject is directly affecting the learning experience and outcomes of learners in UAE's English language learning classrooms. Therefore, it is essential to dive deep into the ability grouping composition to enhance its positive impact and try to limit and avoid any side-effects that may appear in the educational process or affect learners.

The ability grouping practices and initiation of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping goes back to the 1960's where many educators explored the effect of social relations among students and peers' effect on boosting academic achievement (Barrows & Verdeo, 1998). These grouping styles have been used and explored in many foreign educational systems such as USA, Britain and Finland and many researchers have conducted several studies to explore their effectiveness, impact on students' achievement levels and their social impact on students (Hollified, 1987; Slavin, 1990; Gamoran, 1992). Their explorations resulted in using both grouping styles in different situations and in many educational aspects based on the studies' findings and results.

On the other hand, a very limited number of studies have been conducted within the UAE's context (based on the knowledge of the researcher) on the use of heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping before the actual application of homogeneous grouping in schools. One of the studies on this topic in the UAE was conducted by Dukmak (2009) in

which the researcher stated that there was no research conducted in the UAE's schools' context on the impact of using homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in classroom.

Through investigating grouping strategies, decision makers in the educational field, teachers and educators identify the best type of grouping to be applied within the English language learning classes in UAE. Furthermore, this study provides valuable suggestions and modifications that can be used for a better implication of the learning grouping strategies in the future.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the previous research studies that discuss the arguments about the effectiveness of using ability grouping as a learning strategy in classrooms. Furthermore, this chapter discusses several theories, opinions and findings about the advantages and disadvantages of either homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping.

As ability grouping is one of the basic strategies in teaching, it has been debated for long years, and still being debated until today about its effectiveness in classrooms. Ability grouping, as defined by Ansalone (2003), is a learning strategy that groups students in learning groups based on their abilities or level of achievement. The grouping style follows one of two main styles, either homogeneous grouping or heterogeneous grouping (Barati, 2012).

Several educators and teachers have discussed the impact of ability grouping inside classrooms and grouping strategies' advantages and disadvantages (Allan, 1991; Grossen, 1996; Page & Keith, 1996; Dukmak, 2009; Mahmoud, 2011; Stinnett, 2013; Barati, 2012). Many aspects have been considered in the process of evaluating these strategies' effectiveness. Such aspects include how each strategy affects students' perceptions of themselves (Kulik & Kulik, 1987), what psychological impacts do they create on both students and teachers (Allan, 1991), which strategy results in better academic achievements and skills improvement and what are the usage requirements of each strategy based on different educational contexts and criteria (Stinnett, 2013).

As discussed by Francis, Taylor and Tereshchenko (2020) in their book entitled "Reassessing 'Ability' Grouping: Improving Practice for Equity and Attainment", the ability grouping concept can be applied in different forms within the school environment. These different forms of ability grouping include; Streaming (tracking), Setting (Tracking by subject), Within-class Ability Grouping and Banding. In streaming, students are assigned to and grouped in classrooms based on their general ability across all (or most of) subjects that they study. Setting form is the ability grouping form where students are grouped according to their abilities in specific subject, such as English or Mathematics.

Within-class ability grouping highlights grouping students according to their ability levels within the classroom environment, so each group in the classroom has students of the same achieving level. Finally, the Banding form is similar to streaming but is more related to and applied in school admissions, in which ‘ability bands’ are formed in the school for a diverse school community.

## **2.2 Homogeneous Grouping**

The ability grouping strategy is divided into two main types of strategies; homogeneous grouping and heterogeneous grouping. Both strategies have been extensively studied by researchers over years to examine their effectiveness with students and which one helps improve students’ academic achievement better. Although several studies have clearly identified the advantages and disadvantage of both strategies, no one yet can finalize which strategy is better than the other, as they can both be used in different contexts, environments and with different students but with preferences towards one over the other (Barati, 2012; Dukmak, 2009; Kinsey, 2017).

As identified by several educators, homogeneous grouping is a learning strategy that groups students with same abilities together during the learning process (Grossen, 1996; Page & Keith, 1996; Dukmak, 2009; Stinnett, 2013). In this type of grouping, students are assigned to different groups based on their academic levels, which means that students who are considered to be high achievers are assigned to high level groups and students with low achieving abilities are assigned to low level classrooms (Grossen, 1996).

To be assigned into high, medium or low level groups, students are required to take placement standardized tests to determine their language levels and assign them to their most fitting level group. Oakes (2005) discussed different aspects of using standardized tests in relevance to ability grouping, where tests are structured and designed to measure specific criteria in students. Oakes views and discussions presented the different requirements of standardized tests as they are deeply evaluating students and their results will determine the students’ levels in the classroom. Furthermore, he presented how test designers must take into consideration several elements while designing these tests, such as cultural background, previous knowledge, educational context and individual



differences among students. Oakes has also emphasized on reminding teachers that the numeric score indication must not be the only evidence on a student's level. This study's recommendations stressed on test designers to focus on the individual differences and different intelligence aspects, which students use while learning and using their skills. Such recommendations and ideas are very important in the field of test designing and assessment of learning as they highly affect the quality of teaching and learning.

Several studies have presented the results of practical comparison between both strategies use inside classroom context. Many researches compared between both homogeneous and heterogeneous live classroom context and recorded their observations and notices. Barati (2012) have presented in his study several views of different researchers, as he compared between homogeneous and heterogeneous learning groups for the undergraduate non-native students' level. The ideas presented investigated different aspects and compared between both homogeneous and heterogeneous learning strategies. Although he presented both views, Barati has focused on highlighting the significant role that homogeneous grouping played in improving students' learning abilities (Barati, 2019; Dukmak, 2009).

The ideas discussed in Barati's presented and explained how promising the results of applying homogeneous grouping in language learning classroom could be as it presents several solutions to learning difficulties encountered by students and teachers inside the language classroom (Argy et al., 1996). In his findings, Barati presented his test results, which reflected how the ability group significantly outperformed the random group in English language learning classroom. The study results also highlighted how helpful can ability grouping be, as it leads to more successful English learning experience for students through the use of specifically designed curriculum.

As homogeneous grouping was investigated by several educators through years, different aspect of this grouping strategy was revealed. Some educators have highlighted that the use of homogeneous grouping in language learning classrooms provide multiple opportunities for students to learn according to their own pace and capabilities (Slavin, 1987; Mahnoud, 2011). Additionally, Ediger (2001) debated that students with higher achieving abilities benefit more while learning in homogeneous grouping context as they

receive more high quality instructions and get more attention from the class teacher. Ediger has also discuss that teachers who teach homogeneous group does not need to place more effort in creating variety of teaching aid that suite different abilities students in the same class, and in result less demand in greater skills will be required on the teacher's side. This idea of less effort demand can be noticed inside classrooms with high number of students, where teachers are mostly required to pay attention to larger number of students and prepare teaching materials that satisfy their different needs at the same time (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010).

In spite of the many results and various positive findings that support the use of homogeneous grouping in classrooms, several studies have discussed about the disadvantages of applying homogeneous grouping with students. It is noticed in some scenarios that low achieving students feel less interested in participating and contributing when placed in homogeneous group within low achieving students (Oakes, 2005). Another disadvantage noticed is the negative psychological effect of being placed in low achievers' homogeneous group, as low achieving students develop low self-esteem of their learning abilities (Kinsey, 2017). Students start to be labeled as low achievers and this creates a negative stereotype of their abilities among themselves and their colleagues, which results in lower learning abilities and less productivity. Another negative side of homogeneous grouping reveals additional load on teachers while teaching low-achieving students who are grouped together. This is due to the fact that all students in this group will require additional attention from the teacher at the same time which will require more time and effort to satisfy all their learning needs (Haskins et al., 1983).

To highlight the comparison between homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping, Kinsey (2017) in her thesis, explored several aspects on both grouping strategies and the actual implication of them both inside classroom context. In her study, Kinsey analyzed the best pedagogical practices to be applied by English language teachers in English learning context, specifically in primary. Her study presented many advantages and disadvantages of both strategies and suggested several solutions to overcome difficulties encountered by teachers or students while using either of the grouping strategies. Her

findings highlighted the benefits of using both strategies, each in its own requirement and suitable classroom context.

### **2.3 Heterogeneous Grouping**

Heterogeneous grouping is defined as a learning technique that groups students with different abilities together while learning (Dukmak, 2009; Kinsey, 2017). In other words, heterogeneous grouping aims to mix between high achieving students and low achieving students. In this grouping technique, teachers organize students to be placed in groups according to their ability level, with a plan to mix between students with different abilities in the same group. Heterogeneous grouping was developed and encouraged many decades ago to support cooperative learning, where students support and help each other to learn and develop (Oddo, 1994). The idea of cooperative learning focuses on encouraging students to learn together and learn from each other, through which higher achieving students explain, motivate and assist students with lower achieving abilities. This concept of collaborative learning is also supported by Vygotsky's view of shared language development, which explains that students improve their language skills through sharing language and interacting with each other's (Vygotsky, 1962).

The sense of collaborative learning in heterogeneous grouping supports both psychological and intellectual development in students. Higher achieving students will build better understanding of learned concepts through re-explaining them to their peers and have better self-esteem and feeling good about themselves (Oddo, 1994; Filby & Barnett, 1982). While students with lower achieving abilities can feel more comfortable to understand from their peers rather than from the teacher, and feel more free to ask questions more frequently privately to their peers rather than asking questions in public to the teacher.

One of the presented advantages suggested by Filby and Barnett (1982) about the use of heterogeneous grouping inside classrooms is that it promotes friendship between students, especially those who are from the same ability range. This idea is also supported by Piaget's learning theory, which indicates how important the role of social interaction is

to the success of learning process and how learners can significantly develop when learning together (Gitsaki, 1998).

Haskins et al. (1983) discussed several advantages and preferences of using heterogeneous grouping over homogeneous grouping in learning classrooms. In their discussion, Haskins, Walden & Ramey mentioned that the use of heterogeneous grouping with lower achieving students is more effective and results in better learning outcomes, as students stay focused more on tasks as they do not feel isolated from their higher achieving peers (Mahmoud, 2011). Additionally, their research results discussed that teacher can have better control over the class and better class management when students are grouped heterogeneously (Haskins et al., 1983).

One of the main aims of implementing heterogeneous grouping inside learning classrooms is to support students' differences and allow different abilities to have equal learning chances within the same class environment. When students from different abilities work collaboratively together to solve a task or achieve a goal, they create a supportive atmosphere which supports learning and sharing knowledge (Salas, 2005).

As many advantages can be highlighted in heterogeneous grouping, several educators do not support the use of this grouping strategy inside their classrooms and feel more comfortable while using the homogeneous grouping. Slavin (1987) discussed the role of ability grouping in learning, through indicating that learning can be improved by reducing heterogeneity inside the learning environment. This belief supports the use of homogeneous grouping over heterogeneous grouping as students feel more comfortable learning with peers with similar achievement level. Furthermore, some researchers discussed that placing student in mixed abilities groups only allow higher achieving students to shine and participate within the group, while leaving the lower achieving students neglected without much of participation (Barati, 2019; Argy et al., 1996).

## **2.4 Theories Linked to Ability Grouping**

The choice of the most suitable strategy is always inspired by and linked to the learning theories, which form the true base of the strategy design and shape its usage and dimensions. Theories that are most relating to this study belong to Second Language

Acquisition (SLA) theories that explain and elaborate on how second language is learned and acquired by language learners (Kiyamazarslan, 2002).

Different theories were developed based on various aspects that affects the second language learning process; including social interaction, learning input, environmental impact and inner learning mechanisms (Gitsaki, 1998). One of the main theories that had great impact on developing better understanding of how students learn language is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory. This theory highlighted the impact of social interaction on learning development. In his theory, Vygotsky (1962) has explained how shared language has great impact on learner's lingual abilities and how it can positively affect second language learning process. Vygotsky's ideas of shared language impact support the use ability grouping inside language classrooms, as learners learn much from their peers instead of receiving rigid knowledge and information from the teacher. Furthermore, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory presented learners' development as a social related process, through which learners acquire knowledge and skills from their surrounding culture and learning peers (Vygotsky, 1978). The different aspects presented in Vygotsky's studies discuss the essential role of social interaction on the development of learners' cognitive abilities and skills, which reflect on ability grouping and the role of learners' interaction with each other in their development.

Piaget's Language Acquisition theory is another theory that enriched the educational field with information about how learners learn. Through his extensive studies and deep understanding of the human development, Piaget has developed several theories that helped explaining how students develop, which resulted in many beneficial implications in Psychology and Education (Ellidokuzoglu, 1999). Piaget's theories of cognitive development highlighted the role of external factors and social interaction on learning development (Gitsaki, 1998). These aspects reflect on the ability grouping strategy as it was developed based on the ideas of social interaction impact on learners' language development. Ability grouping strategies focus on the impact of the learning environment and effect of peers on language learning development, where learning can support each other's learning.

The Monitor Model, by Krashen (1976), is an overall SLA theory that drove the

development of several theories, which lead to better understanding of second language learning. The Acquisition-Learning theory was one of the main theories developed by Krashen (1982). Through his researches and studies in this theory about SLA, Krashen explained that second language develops through either acquiring the language subconsciously or learning the language consciously. By developing better understanding of both learning aspects, teachers can imply them in their classrooms to balance between students' acquiring and learning, as they both play effective role in language development (Kiymazarslan, 2002).

Another study that had major impact on developing teaching and learning strategies that support the use of ability grouping is The Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985). His thoughts explain that acquiring second language can only occur through receiving comprehensive input (Gitsaki, 1998). This idea indicates that learners of a second language should be exposed to this language and receives an input to learn it, which supports the use of ability grouping inside the classrooms. When learners work together in groups to complete a task within a second language class, they are required to use the aimed learning language to communicate with their peers and answer questions, which allow them to receive enriching input and get exposed to the aimed learned language.

The most related theory to this study is the sociocultural theory and the work of Vygotsky in understanding learners' cognitive development. Therefore, this study uses Vygotsky's theories as a theoretical framework, which helps understanding the effect of different ability grouping styles on students' learning and how students' interaction results in better learning experience.

## **2.5 Language Learning and Ability Grouping**

Language learning researchers, in particular, are very concerned in studying the ability grouping effects on their students. As language learning is a contextual learning process, it requires interaction with others, social interaction, exchanging ideas and information, improving communication skills and building connections with surrounding and community to achieve best learning results (Salas, 2005). Due to these factors, educators continuously look for the most suitable teaching and learning strategies that allow best

learning opportunities for language learners.

Some educators and teachers believe that students can learn the most about language when they receive individualized teaching, as each student can focus on his/her own learning and gets his sufficient share of learning and information. While others believe that ability grouping helps achieving the best learning outcomes and recommend it to be used in classrooms (Argy et al., 1996) as cooperative learning strategies can play vital role in improving the quality of learning (Mahmoud, 2011).

With specific focus on language learning from the scope of using either homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping, Mahmoud (2011) have discussed several points about the use of grouping inside language classrooms. He mentioned that students can practice language learning better when placed in groups rather that placed in individual learning sitting. Additionally, using heterogeneous grouping techniques can improve students understanding of the language as students work collaboratively together to learn and understand, through which they get simpler explanation from their peers within their own words range (Argy et al., 1996; Mahmoud, 2011).

Furthermore, the discussion of language learning within groups is inspired by the thoughts of Vygotsky's and his Zone of Proximal Development theory, which supports learning language through sharing and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky's studies indicate that students are more allowed to use the targeted language when interacting with their colleagues and sharing language rather than learning individually on their own.

## **2.6 English Language Learning within the United Arab Emirates Educational System**

The focus on teaching English language as a foreign language in the United Arab Emirates have been significantly amplified during the past years, as the English language is almost used as the official second language of the country. The UAE's Ministry of Education have implemented several English language curricula and planned various strategies to improve the students' performance in English language learning over years (Howling, 2017). Several teaching and learning methods and hypothesis were

implemented in trial base, starting from the Grammar Translation method and textbook-driven curriculum at the beginning of the educational journey in UAE (Farah & Ridge, 2009), passing by Direct method and Piaget's theories of learning and moving forward towards more advanced learning methods that focuses on involving students entirely in the learning process.

During the process of improvement, different teaching and learning strategies have been implemented in UAE's public and private schools after careful study and extensive planning (UAE's Ministry of Education, 2018). Before implementing any new strategy, the UAE's Ministry of Education tend to examine its effectiveness on small group of schools for a planned period of time, such as the case in implementing Madares Al Ghad (Schools of Tomorrow) strategy. This new educational experience was implemented in 2007 on a trial basis in some selected public schools across the UAE (Farah & Ridge, 2009). The implemented plan involved the use and establishment of new standard based curriculum that highlighted higher thinking skills and research skills, starting with Abu Dhabi schools and moving to other emirates' selected schools. Different advanced teaching methods, techniques and approaches were carefully chosen to be used in these schools. The selected schools focused on employing more student-centered materials than the traditional old teacher-centered materials (Farah & Ridge, 2009; UAE's Ministry of Education, 2018).

After applying this new system in the selected schools, various analyses and close observations on students' results and achievements were taken into consideration. As a result to this trial experience, many strategies and advanced teaching materials which were used in this trial were fully implemented in all UAE schools later.

Streaming is one of the most common forms of ability grouping that occurs in many educational systems across the world, which also applies to the UAE's educational context. As presented earlier, streaming is a form of ability grouping that group students in different streams based on their ability levels in all or most of subjects studied in each grade (Francis, Taylor & Tereshchenko, 2020). Nowadays, the UAE's governmental schools system shifted from using the Art and Science streams to placing students either in General, Advanced or Elite streams (UAE's Ministry of Education, 2021). The core



difference between both General and advanced streams is the received range of scientific subject, as learners of advanced stream receive more in-depth instruction than students in general stream. While the Elite stream includes selected students who achieved being among the top 10% of UAE’s national tests scores (Emirates Standard Assessment Test EmSAT) and those students study advanced curricula, with special focus on Science and mathematics (UAE’s Ministry of Education, 2021).

To successfully identify students’ level and accordingly identify their most appropriate streams, an official centralized diagnostic test takes place at the beginning of each academic year to identify students’ levels in core subjects such as English, Mathematics, Sciences, etc. The test is designed by professional educators in UAE’s MOE for each grade and applied all across the UAE Public schools (and some private schools) (UAE’s Ministry of Education, 2021). The leveling system used to assess students is developed in collaboration with and based on the Cambridge English level-based approach which the UAE’s MOE adopts in its English language framework. The next table (Table 1) presents the leveling system applied in UAE’s public schools (UAE’s Ministry of Education, 2018).

Table 1: UAE’s English Language Leveling System (UAE’s Ministry of Education, 2018)

Language levels	Sub-level	Suggested grades		
Level 10	EN 10.2			
	EN 10.1			
Level 9	EN 9.2			
	EN 9.1	Grade 12		
Level 8	EN 8.2	Grade 11	Grade 12	
	EN 8.1	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Level 7	EN 7.1	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11
Level 6	EN 6.2	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
	EN 6.1	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
Level 5	EN 5.1	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Level 4	EN 4.1	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7
Level 3	EN 3.2	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
	EN 3.1	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Level 2	EN 2.2	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
	EN 2.1	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Level 1	EN 1.2		Grade 1	Grade 2
	EN 1.1			Grade 1
		Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3

Cycle	Grades
Cycle 1	1,2,3
Cycle 2	4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Cycle 3	9,10,11,12

As presented in Table 1, the level-based approach allows students to expand their learning potentials, so a student is not restricted to studying a specific grade level according only to his age. For example, a student in grade 9 can study the same textbook that is taught to students of grade 10 if his level in English language (according to his score in the diagnostic test) is higher than the average grade 9 textbook. The results of the diagnostic tests help teachers to specify students' levels as high, medium or low. Based on students' scores and levels, they get assigned to classrooms that has majority from the same level of their own (UAE's Ministry of Education, 2018). To avoid teaching two different textbooks inside the same classroom where students are assigned to different levels of textbooks, each group of students with certain level of English textbook are gathered in one section.

## **2.7 Ability Grouping in the United Arab Emirates English Language Classrooms**

One of the recently implemented strategies in UAE's public schools is the ability grouping learning strategy. As presented earlier, students get assigned to different sections of the same grade with different English Language textbooks to study according to their levels, based on their results in diagnostic tests. Therefore, students tend to be paired with others from similar levels, so elite students are grouped together in classes to study higher level of curricula that satisfies their learning needs and boost their high abilities. The same applies to high achieving students with high grades (ranging between 80-100%) who are mostly placed in advanced stream and grouped with higher achieving students, and lower achieving students (ranging between 50-79%) are assigned to general or average textbook level that answer their learning needs according to their level.

Due to the recent application of the ability grouping strategy in UAE's schools, very limited number of researches has investigated the use and application of ability grouping in UAE's educational context. Although both grouping strategies were vaguely used in schools on a daily bases, schools and teachers were not clearly identifying the techniques as ability grouping, but just implementing them. The most applied design in language classrooms in UAE was the heterogeneous grouping since the establishment of UAE's educational systems. The only case where teachers used to implement homogeneous grouping was as assessing extra-sessions for low achieving student, in which low

achieving students from language learning classes are gathered to enhance their language abilities.

Dukmak (2009) is one of the few researchers who investigated the application of ability grouping strategies in the UAE. His research, which was conducted in UAE's schools context, explored the impact of using ability grouping in UAE's public school. He deeply investigated how these strategies can be used in different UAE classroom contexts and what are the different factors that might affect its implications in UAE schools; such as students' gender, level of achievement, different teaching techniques and used teaching materials. Dukmak applied his study on a sample population to intensely examine the interaction between students and the teacher in different grouping situations, as some groups were mixed-abilities groups and others were homogeneous groups.

The findings of Dukmak (2009) highlighted the role of ability grouping in increasing interaction between students and their teachers. Additionally, the study supported the implementation of ability grouping inside UAE's school context, as his study results presented more interaction between homogeneous groups and their teachers than heterogeneous groups. On the other hand, the results of Dukmak's study were mainly highlighting the impact of different ability grouping techniques on student-teacher relation, without focusing on the educational progress that result from either grouping styles on students learning. Moreover, the study was focusing on the student-teacher interaction, without shedding the light on student-student interaction, which can support students learning. For that, this study is going to highlight these missing aspects and spot the light on further details of ability grouping on the learning quality in the UAE's schools.

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 presented a set of previous studies related to this study's focus, in which a detailed comparison between homogeneous grouping and heterogeneous grouping is offered, along with a presentation of theories linked to ability grouping. Furthermore, this chapter explored English language teaching and learning in the UAE's educational system through years and investigated of the application of ability grouping in English language classrooms in the UAE's public schools.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the status of homogenous grouping in UAE's public schools' context by exploring teachers' and students' perceptions towards its effectiveness and investigating challenges faced by participants in the process.

This study aims at investigating answers to the following main questions:

1. What are teachers' and students' perceptions toward the application of homogeneous grouping in English language learning classrooms?
2. What are the challenges encountered by students and teachers in the homogeneous learning context?
3. What could be the required modifications (if any) that may enhance the current implication of homogeneous grouping in the UAE's educational context?

This chapter presents and discusses the research methodology applied for the creation of this research design, selected study sample, data collection instruments and researching procedures. Several aspects were taken into consideration while choosing the methodology and procedures to be followed in this study, including UAE's Ministry of Education applied rules and regulations in relation to the use of ability grouping in UAE's classrooms; teachers' actual use of the grouping style inside English language teaching classrooms in UAE as well as students' learning gained through the application of the homogeneous grouping.

### **3.2 Research Design and Methodology**

This research followed the mixed method with sequential explanatory design, which provides extensive details about the examined topic. This research is presenting a description and analysis of the use of ability grouping inside examined classrooms of UAE. The research focus is more driven towards examining the cases in UAE's governmental schools that have applied the regulations of homogeneous grouping of students based on their achievement levels and placement tests results. The research followed the mixed method for data collection and analysis, through combining both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews and short-essay questions) data

collection tools. As this research focuses on highlighting the different practices used inside English language classrooms and presents detailed information about how ability grouping affects students' learning, mixed method is the best approach to be followed as it provides extensive details about the examined topic (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

### **3.3 Data Collection**

This study applies various data collection instruments (quantitative and qualitative) to make sure that all possible opinions, factors and outcomes of using homogeneous grouping are collected and taken into consideration while analyzing data and finalizing research findings. Data collection instruments used in this study include the use of Likert-scale questionnaires, Short-essay questions and one-to-one interviews. Each tool of the previously mentioned tools helps exploring and revealing how students and teachers reflect on the use of homogeneous grouping inside language classrooms. These tools also help understanding what are the teachers' and students' perceptions toward the use of these ability grouping styles in the learning classroom, what challenges are encountered in the homogeneous English language classrooms and what are the suggested modifications that might improve the learning process through the ability grouping style.

#### *3.3.1 Questionnaires*

Questionnaires used in researches as a tool of data collection are well-known for providing rich information about the examined topic from larger number of participants (Sofaer, 2002). Questionnaires usually involve short answer or essay questions along with the numeric questions, as they all combine together to provide informative details about the participants' opinions, beliefs and practices.

This study used two questionnaires designed by the researcher (See Appendix 2 & Appendix 3). The questionnaires targeted the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, as they included likert-scale items and short-essay items. Each questionnaire included 3 main sections. Each section in both questionnaires included items that target data collection within specific domain related to ability grouping, as the first section collects numerical data about learning and academic achievement, the second section collects numerical data about psychological impact, and the third section collects verbal

data about challenges and further comments of participants. Both questionnaires used a 5-point Likert-scale formatting in the first two sections to introduce 13 items for participants to answer, followed by 2 short-essay questions in the third section about challenges and additional comments on any item as participants prefer. Therefore, the total number of questions is 15 questions in each questionnaire (See Appendix 2 & Appendix 3).

The first questionnaire targets data collection from teachers about their experience of teaching English language with the use of homogeneous grouping to students, how far students benefit and improve through this grouping style and what challenges are faced during the process (See Appendix 3). The second questionnaire aims at collecting data from students who experienced learning in homogenous English language classrooms, to know how far did homogeneous learning helped improving their various knowledge and skills, the impact it had on them psychologically and what challenges they may face while learning in homogeneous classrooms (See Appendix 2). The outcomes of the questionnaires' analysis help answering the research's main questions as they provide specific details about the students' and teachers' views and opinions regarding homogenous grouping in relation to English language learning.

A total number of 630 questionnaire responses are collected, 30 teachers' questionnaires and 600 students' questionnaires. Each questionnaire includes a consent page (See Appendix 2 & Appendix 3 – First page) that provides participants with a summary about the purpose of this study and explains their participation role through answering the questionnaire questions. The consent form clarifies to participants that their participation is voluntarily and they are free to ask any questions related to the purpose of the questionnaire or the study. Additionally, the consent form clarifies to participants that their answers and enclosed information are safely collected and analyzed for the purpose of applying this study and information obtained from them will remain confidential. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher used a numeric coding system where names and personal information are replaced by numbers so identities of participants are fully secured and confidential.

The researcher prepared paper-based and digital copies of both questionnaires to be applied in targeted schools, yet paper-based questionnaires were used the most to collect

reflective sample from schools. The researcher planned personal visitation to all 13 schools across 5 emirates to distribute questionnaires and collect responses from teachers and students.

As the questionnaires used in this study include quantitative and qualitative data, different approaches and tools of data analysis were used. For the quantitative data collected from Sections A and B with 13 items of 5-point Likert-scale questions, descriptive analysis and one-way ANOVA test were applied through the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. For the qualitative data collected in Section C through 2 short-essay questions, collected data were analyzed by using Thematic Analysis approach, in which themes were identified and responses were categorized in themes accordingly.

### *3.3.2 Interviews*

Interviews are one of the most used qualitative data collection tool across different kinds of researches, as they are known for their capability of producing large amount of data with great depth (Cassel & Symon, 1994). Therefore, to get more detailed responses about students' perceptions towards learning in ability groups, semi-structured interview is designed and scheduled with a number of high school students (both males and females) to know more about what they think of learning in homogenous groups (See Appendix 1). A number of 15 interviews were conducted and audio-recorded for the purpose of collecting data to this research. Seven interview questions were developed based on the study questions and purpose, and accordingly were asked orally to interviewees in a private one-to-one interview with the researcher. Interview sessions took about 5-8 minutes each to be completed and the interviews were recorded through a voice recording device for the purpose of later decoding.

Thematic Analysis approach was used to analyze data collected from participating students. This approach is a commonly used approach in qualitative data analysis, as it supports a systematic identification of beneficial and usable data. The researcher follows a three-stage procedure to fully prepare data for interpretation and usage in this study, which is suggested by Miles & Huberman, (1984). After audio recording of interviews,

researcher transcribed each interview, highlighted and coded the most relevant ideas and key words into themes and presented the data in the study. Numeric coding system is used to code interviews, and the transcription of the recorded interviews is privately manually done by the researcher without sharing or mentioning personal information of the interviews in the research. Real names of interviewees were replaced with code numbers of participants used in the research document to insure the privacy of participants.

Interviewees were informed prior to their participation in the interviews that their answers will not affect them in any negative way, all their answers are confidentially kept with the researcher and their answers will be used for academic purposes to improve learning qualities in schools. Participants were allowed to ask any questions related to the study and the interview questions to have full understanding of their role and purpose of participation (See Appendix 1).

### **3.4 Study Sample and Participants**

To get a representative sample of the examined study subject and allow maximum possible generalization of the study results, Stratified Random Sampling technique is applied to define the study sample. The data collection process targeted UAE's Governmental schools as the main source of data, as the recent formed regulations by UAE's Ministry of Education about applying homogeneous class grouping in English language classes were applied in these schools. To be more specific and have better quality of data, secondary governmental schools (grades 9-12) were specified to conduct the study questionnaires and interviews, as students are more mature, aware of their progress, views and capabilities, can express their ideas and beliefs in a better way and teachers deal with higher level of abilities in their classes.

Participating schools are located in 5 different emirates to cover more than one educational zone, including schools in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah. The total number of Educational zones in the UAE is ten educational zones among the seven emirates of the UAE, as each emirate has its educational zone, in addition to Al Ain Education Zone and Western Education Zone,



which follow the emirate of Abu Dhabi and the Sharjah Education Office (for East Coast areas of Sharjah) that follows the emirate of Sharjah (UAE's Ministry of Education, 2021).

To legally and ethically collect data from schools, an ethical approval was claimed from the United Arab Emirates University to approve the researcher's research topic and data collection tools (See Appendix 5) and an official approval was claimed from the UAE's Ministry of Education with all details about the study and the educational purpose of the study, to allow the research to have access to students and teachers in schools (See Appendix 4). A list from the Ministry of Education was provided to the researcher with public schools that the researcher can access for data collection. The school contact details are confidential; therefore the list is not attached in the study's appendices. The selection of schools and participants was random without any interference from the researcher.

The researcher collected data from 13 public schools with a total number of 645 participants in different emirates. A number of 30 English language teachers participated in answering the teachers' questionnaire. Teacher participants in this study are both male and female teachers who are working in UAE's governmental schools, in any of the previously mentioned emirates. All participating teachers are specialized in teaching English language, as the main focus of this study is to explore the status of using homogeneous grouping specifically in English learning classrooms in UAE. Furthermore, the study sample includes teachers with different range of ages, varying from 23 to 60 years old, different range of teaching experiences ranging between 0 to +15 years and different taught grades in a high school, either grade 9, 10, 11 or 12. Teachers answers of the questionnaire reflect on their beliefs of the effectiveness of using either homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping inside their language classrooms. Furthermore, the teachers' questionnaire includes an open-ended question about the best grouping practices that teachers would suggest to overcome any difficulties faced in either grouping styles.

Student participants in this study helped the researcher to develop better understanding of students' learning progress and their own views and perceptions towards their English language learning. Students' participants include 600 high school students (9, 10, 11 and 12 graders) who belong to some of the governmental schools across UAE, both male and female students. Participating students' ability levels in English vary between A, B (higher

achievers) and C, D (lower achievers). Before participating in the study, the researcher has explained to students the main aim of this research, what their role would be and the benefits that can be gained from the applications of this research in their language learning classrooms. The following figure (Figure 1) presents in brief the study sample.

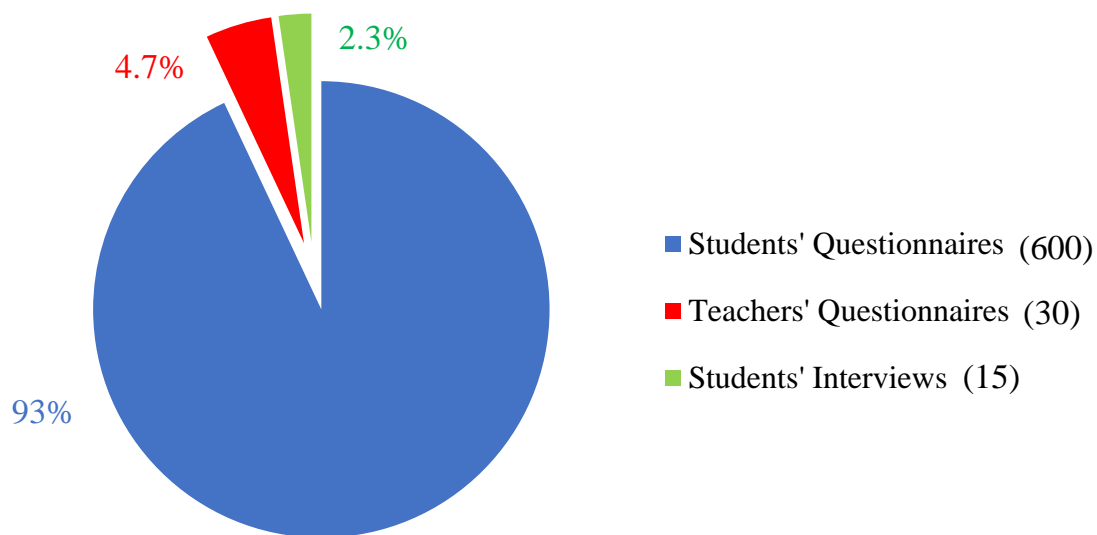


Figure 1: Study Sample

### 3.5 Discussion of Confidentiality of Collected Data

The gathered data are highly confidential and secured by the researcher and the supervising Doctor from the UAEU. Participants in this research paper, including teachers and students, are informed about the confidentiality procedures followed by the researcher. Their personal information and their answers will not be shared with other teachers, school administration, parents or students, and will only be used for the research purpose to help improve the English language learning quality in the UAE. Participants had the full freedom to choose not to answer the questionnaire, any of the mentioned questions or any of the interview questions. They are also informed that they have the right to stop answering the questionnaire at any time without any circumstances based on their choices.

Collected personal information such as participants name, age, years of experience and school name are confidentially stored. A numeric coding system is used in this research to replace names with code numbers to assure full security of data. All participants in this study have agreed willingly to answer the questions and participate in the study.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis of the collected data along with the results and discussion of findings of the study. This mixed-method study was conducted in the United Arab Emirates, with data collected across 13 governmental schools distributed in 5 emirates (6 educational zones). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 30 teachers and 615 students enrolled in these public schools, with the use of 5-point Likert-scale questionnaires, short-essay questions and one-to-one interviews.

For the quantitative data, descriptive analysis was applied to the Likert-scale items, along with one-way ANOVA test. The one-way ANOVA test was used to examine the significant difference in students' perceptions of homogeneous learning based on their proficiency level in English subject. While for the qualitative data, thematic analysis approach was applied to analyze data collected through interviews and short-essay questions. Themes within data were identified, and collected information were categorized under these themes. A detailed discussion of findings and answers of the min research questions are presented later in this chapter.

### **4.2 Quantitative Data: Questionnaires**

This section presents the results and findings of the quantitative data collected through using questionnaires. The questionnaires aimed at collecting data from both teachers and students to help answering the three research questions. Students and teachers were asked to reflect on their perceptions on homogeneous learning through answering 13 question items that provide data to answer the first research question. A 5-point Likert-scale was used in both students' and teachers' questionnaires in sections A and B, where 1 stands for "Strongly Disagree" and 5 stands for "Strongly Agree" (See Appendix 2 & Appendix 3).

Collected data were analyzed through the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 26.0. Descriptive analysis of the collected questionnaires' sample was conducted to calculate the mean and the standard deviation of students' and teachers' answers on the 13 Likert-scale items in the questionnaire. The

results of the descriptive analysis helped determining students' and teachers' perceptions towards homogeneous grouping, which led to answering the first research question.

#### 4.2.1 Students' Questionnaires

The physical collected sample from students was 790 questionnaires, but after filtering students' responses and discarding incomplete and invalid questionnaires, the remaining qualified number was 600 questionnaires.

The personal information of participants presents specifications about the collected sample. Students' questionnaire sample is based on total number of 600 students, who vary in gender between males (325 participants) and females (275 participants). Furthermore, participants vary in grades between 9, 10, 11 and 12 and vary in their achievement levels in English Language between A, B, C and D levels. As the UAE's public school system categorizes students into classes and streams based on their achievement levels to either General or Advanced, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the students are categorized in this study into two main categories (based on their achievement level) High Achievers (including students with A and B levels) and Low Achievers (including students with C and D levels). Participating students' levels were identified by the students' themselves in the questionnaire, based on their grades in English subject. The table below (Table 2) presents the numbers of students in each category and their grades.

Table 2: Students' Sample

Grade	High Achievers		Low Achievers		Num. of students	Percentage %
	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D		
9	19	18	14	6	57	9.5
10	41	37	28	12	118	19.7
11	97	93	62	16	268	44.7
12	61	51	35	10	157	26.2
Total	218	199	139	44	600	100
	417		183			
Percentage %	69.5		30.5			

As presented in Table 2, 69.5% of the students' study sample is higher achieving students, while 30.5% of the sample is lower achieving students. It was very important to

identify participating students based on their achievement levels in English language for the purpose of this study, as it was proved by the one-way ANOVA test later that there is a significance difference between opinions of high achieving students' and low achieving students' in some questionnaire items, in regard to their preferences of learning in homogeneous English language classrooms. The results of the one-way ANOVA test are presented later in this section.

The following table (Table 3) presents the descriptive analysis of students' responses to the questionnaire numeric items. Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) were calculated for both students' categories along with the total mean of the full study sample.

Table 3: Students' Questionnaires Descriptive Analysis

No.	Items	High Achievers (A, B)		Low Achievers (C, D)		Total Mean
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1.	I learn better when I work with colleagues from the same ability level of mine	4.17	0.957	3.51	1.195	3.97
2.	I gain more knowledge and skills when working with a colleague at my same level	4.03	1.029	3.46	1.152	3.86
3.	Learning in groups supports my academic progress	2.61	1.300	2.68	1.329	2.63
4.	My English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) develop when I interact with colleagues who are higher than my academic level	4.05	0.948	3.63	1.076	3.92
5.	Being in a same-abilities classroom encourage me to learn more	3.20	1.326	2.92	1.184	3.12
6.	I develop more skills when I learn in the same class with students who are lower than my academic level	2.88	1.390	2.90	1.318	2.89
7.	I enjoy learning with colleagues from different abilities level in the English language classroom	3.91	1.119	4.03	0.975	3.95
8.	I feel more secured when interacting and learning with students from my same ability level	3.91	1.008	3.51	1.074	3.79
9.	Working in groups of mixed-ability students makes me feel motivated to participate and learn	3.68	1.199	3.74	1.021	3.70
10.	I feel comfortable working with a colleague who is higher than my level in English language	2.79	1.273	2.84	1.198	2.81
11.	I feel shy to participate in front of my other colleagues whose level in English is better than mine	2.90	1.316	3.43	1.233	3.06
12.	Being with colleagues of higher level in English than mine makes me more challenged and enthusiast to improve and learn more	4.05	0.978	3.64	1.139	3.93
13.	I receive full attention of my teacher when I learn and work in mixed abilities classroom	3.69	1.083	3.43	1.202	3.61

Based on the descriptive analysis, the highest mean of the full students' sample is noticed in item 1 ( $M = 3.97$ ) where most students agree towards learning in same-level

groups, and the lowest ( $M = 2.63$ ) is the mean for item 3 that reflects on students perception on their preferences of learning in groups. Yet, it is important to pay attention to the difference in participants' number in each group (High Achievers = 417 and Low Achievers = 183). Therefore, for more accurate measurement of students' perceptions in each item, each group's mean and standard deviation are calculated separately and presented in Table 3.

Results present differences between higher achieving and lower achieving students' perceptions in most items. Generally, the results of students' questionnaire reflected that higher achieving students seem to agree more towards items that support learning in same ability grouping, such as in item 1 ( $M = 4.17$ ), item 2 ( $M = 4.03$ ), item 5 ( $M = 3.20$ ) and item 8 ( $M = 3.91$ ) in comparison to their lower achieving colleagues' answers of item 1 ( $M = 3.51$ ), item 2 ( $M = 3.46$ ), item 5 ( $M = 2.92$ ) and item 8 ( $M = 3.51$ ). These items share a common theme that reflects on students' preferences of learning in homogenous groups over heterogeneous groups. As the higher achieving students' answers tend to agree more with these items, this suggests that they learn better and feel more relaxed towards learning with colleagues from their same achievement levels in comparison to lower achieving students. This same idea was also highlighted by the research work of Mahmoud, (2011), Ediger (2001), Ellidokuzoglu, (1999), Gitsaki, (1998) and Slavin, (1987); in which they all agreed that higher achieving students have higher level of preference toward learning in same ability groups.

Additionally, it is also noticed that higher achieving students have higher level of agreement toward items that encourage learning with colleagues who are higher than their level in English language classes; such as in items 4 ( $M = 4.05$ ) and 12 ( $M = 4.05$ ) in comparison to results of lower achieving students of same items 4 ( $M = 3.63$ ) and 12 ( $M = 3.64$ ). Another item that higher achieving students agree more with is item 13, which clarifies that higher achieving students receive more attention from their teachers than their lower achieving students ( $M = 3.69$  compared to  $M = 3.43$ ). This draws our attention as educators to the importance of paying attention equally to all students, as students sense it, and it reflects back on their enthusiasm and engagement in the classroom.

On the other hand, lower achieving students seem to agree more with items that support learning in mix ability grouping; such as in item 7 ( $M = 4.03$ ), item 9 ( $M = 3.74$ ) and item

10 ( $M = 2.84$ ). This result reflects on the principals of Vygotsky's sociocultural theories that explain the essential impact of social interaction on students' learning and development. The statistics show how lower achieving students learn better when interacting with higher achieving students, as they get inspired by them and affected by their motivation to learn. The results of Mahmoud (2011) and Salas (2005) align with the results, as they discussed the preferences of lower achieving students to learn in mixed ability environment. Yet, it is noticed in the same items that the difference between answers' means of higher achieving and lower achieving students is not extreme (ranging between 0.05 and 0.12), which highlights that higher achieving students still support learning in mixed ability groups but more toward supporting learning with students from their same level. Additionally, it is noticed from the results that lower achieving students feel shy to participate in English class in front of other colleagues who have higher grades in English, item 11 ( $M = 3.43$ ) in comparison to their higher achieving colleagues ( $M = 2.90$ ).

For items 3 and 6, results of descriptive analysis present low means for both higher achieving and lower achieving students' answers, as they both are least favorable to agree with items 3 and 6. Item 3 states that learning in groups support their academic progress (Higher Achievers'  $M = 2.61$ , Lower Achievers'  $M = 2.68$ ) and item 6 states that students develop more skills when learning with colleagues of lower level in English (Higher Achievers'  $M = 2.88$ , Lower Achievers'  $M = 2.90$ ).

#### *4.2.1.1 One-way ANOVA Test*

The one-way ANOVA test is a statistical test that is used to determine if there is a statistically significance difference between means of two or more groups (Ross & Willson, 2017). The test is applied in this study to determine if there is a significance difference between the students' perceptions of different items in the questionnaire based on their English language achievement levels (High Achievers and Low Achievers), where the p-value is 0.05. The null hypothesis is that there is no significance difference between the perceptions of higher achieving students and lower achieving students concerning the homogeneous learning in English language classes. The one-way ANOVA test presented a significance difference between high achievers and low achievers perceptions to most of

the questionnaire items (8 items), while showing no significance difference in the remaining items (5 items).

The results of the one-way ANOVA test shows significance difference between the high achieving student group and the low achieving student group perceptions of items 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12 and 13 where the significance p-value is  $p < 0.05$ . These items present core differences in relation to knowledge and comfort aspects of ability grouping. The results of one-way ANOVA test deviate away from the null hypothesis. Therefore, it is proved from the one-way ANOVA test that higher achieving students and lower achieving students have different perceptions and believes toward their learning experience in same ability classrooms. The item with the highest difference of perception between both students' groups is item 1 ( $F= 52.038$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), which presents the difference between both groups perceptions in regard to their learning effectiveness when they learn within a same ability group. The same applies to the rest of the 8 items. The results of the one-way ANOVA test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA Test for Students Questionnaire

No.	Items	Sum of Squa.	df	Mean Squa.	F	Sig.
1.	I learn better when I work with colleagues from the same ability level of mine	55.749	1	55.749	52.038	0.000
2.	I gain more knowledge and skills when working with a colleague at my same level	41.636	1	41.636	36.506	0.000
3.	Learning in groups supports my academic progress	0.651	1	0.651	0.380	0.538
4.	My English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) develop when I interact with colleagues who are higher than my academic level	22.644	1	22.644	23.160	0.000
5.	Being in a same-abilities classroom encourage me to learn more	9.996	1	9.996	6.058	0.014
6.	I develop more skills when I learn in the same class with students who are lower than my academic level	0.047	1	0.047	0.025	0.875
7.	I enjoy learning with colleagues from different abilities level in the English language classroom	1.643	1	1.643	1.416	0.235
8.	I feel more secured when interacting and learning with students from my same ability level	20.910	1	20.910	19.766	0.000
9.	Working in groups of mixed-ability students makes me feel motivated to participate and learn	0.454	1	0.454	0.344	0.558



Table 4: One-way ANOVA Test for Students Questionnaire (continued)

No.	Items	Sum of Squa.	df	Mean Squa.	F	Sig.
10.	I feel comfortable working with a colleague who is higher than my level in English language	0.228	1	0.228	0.145	0.703
11.	I feel shy to participate in front of my other colleagues whose level in English is better than mine	36.378	1	36.378	21.809	0.000
12.	Being with colleagues of higher level in English than mine makes me more challenged and enthusiast to improve and learn more	20.918	1	20.918	19.735	0.000
13.	I receive full attention of my teacher when I learn and work in mixed abilities classroom	8.371	1	8.371	6.672	0.010

The third section of the students' questionnaire targeted the collection of students' perceptions about the challenges they might have faced during their learning in homogeneous classrooms and the comments they have about the study topic in the form of short-essay questions. Therefore, the participants' answers of this section are analyzed and used in the qualitative analysis section to help answering the second and third research questions.

#### 4.2.2 Teachers' Questionnaires

The participating sample of teachers in this study is 30 English language teachers from 5 different emirates (6 educational zones). In spite of the researchers' personal visitation to all 13 schools included in the data collection process, participating teachers come from 10 schools, as the data collection was applied in the final examination period and many teachers were occupied. The teachers' sample consists of males and females, teachers of grade 9, 10, 11 and 12, teachers of high achieving students (Level A and B), low achieving students (Level C and D) or both categories, and teachers with different range of teaching experiences. Table 5 presents the teachers' study sample.

Table 5: Teachers' Sample

Category	Gender		Levels of Students to Teach			Years of Experience				
	M	F	Levels A & B	Levels C & D	Levels A, B, C & D	< 1	2-5	6-10	11-15	> 15
Frequency	15	15	6	5	19	0	4	9	8	9
Percentage %	50	50	20	16.7	63.3	0	13.3	30	26.7	30

Teachers' perceptions and responses toward the application of homogeneous learning in English language classrooms vary between agreement and disagreement. 30 teachers participated in answering 13 items of 5-point Likert-scale questions that target asking teachers about their and their students' perceptions toward the application of homogeneous grouping in their classrooms. The Likert-scale items were divided into two main sections; the first section targets asking questions to know more about teachers' perception of their students' learning, and the second section targets asking questions to investigate the psychological impact of applying homogeneous grouping on students from teachers' perspective.

Teachers' answers presented the highest level of agreement to item 2 ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 0.626$ ), where teachers believe that higher achieving students learn more while working with colleagues from their same ability level in English language class. This outcome matches the findings of Ediger (2001) who discussed how higher achieving students benefit more and prefer to learn in same ability context. Additionally, other high means appear in teachers' responses to items 4 ( $M = 4.10$ ), 9 ( $M = 3.93$ ) and 1 ( $M = 3.8$ ), in descending order. All these items share common beliefs about the benefits of applying mixed abilities grouping, which reflects on participating teachers' preferences of students' learning in heterogeneous context over homogeneous learning. Mahmoud (2011) and Haskins et al. (1983) support the views presented in these items, as they discussed in their studies how students benefit more and stay focused on tasks when being heterogeneously grouped, as they do not feel isolated from their peers in different levels. Additionally, they explained that teachers have better control over the classroom and better class management when students are grouped heterogeneously. This is due to the assistance of higher achieving students who help the teacher in organizing the class along with helping other students' from lower level by explaining difficult points and sharing information.

The findings of Haskins, Walden & Ramey (1983) align with teachers' answers of item 13 ( $M = 3.77$ ), which is another high mean in the list. Teachers from this study sample feel that teaching students of low achieving students homogeneously is tiring and requires additional work in the classroom.

On the other hand, it is interesting to notice that the lowest mean of answers appear in items 10 and 12 ( $M = 3.07$ ). Teachers seem to agree the least with the idea that higher achieving students feel motivated to exchange knowledge and experience with lower achieving students, which is a challenge that teachers can face in a heterogeneous classroom. Additionally, The same low mean applies to teachers' answers about their preferences of teaching all higher achieving students in separation of lower achieving students, which indicates that teachers prefer to merge students from different abilities levels together. The next table (Table 6) presents the descriptive data analysis of teachers' questionnaire results.

Table 6: Teachers' Questionnaire Descriptive Analysis

No.	Items	Mean	SD
1.	My students learn better when they are placed in mixed-abilities groups	3.80	1.186
2.	Higher achieving students learn more while working with students of their same level	4.43	0.626
3.	Lower achieving students learn better when interacting with more advanced students	3.73	0.944
4.	Students exchange information and experiences when working together within mixed-abilities groups	4.10	0.885
5.	Students' lingual skill (e.g. reading, writing, listening, speaking) improve when interacting with other student of a different ability level	3.47	1.137
6.	Students develop better social skills while interacting with other students in mixed abilities groups	3.67	1.124
7.	My students like to work in mixed-abilities groups	3.50	1.167
8.	Lower achieving students feel comfortable learning and working with higher achieving students	3.27	1.202
9.	Lower achieving students feel encouraged and challenged to participate and learn while being placed in mixed-abilities classrooms	3.93	1.048
10.	Higher achieving students feel motivated to exchange knowledge and experience with lower achieving students	3.07	1.337
11.	I feel comfortable teaching in same-ability English language classrooms	3.57	1.455
12.	I prefer to teach all higher achieving students in the same classroom rather than mixing them with students of different abilities	3.07	1.530
13.	I feel that teaching students of same ability (low achieving students) is tiring and requires more work	3.77	1.135

### 4.3 Qualitative Data: Interviews and Short-essay Questions

This section presents the findings of the qualitative data collected through using interviews and short-essay questions (in Section C of students' and teachers' questionnaires). The interviews targeted data collection from students (See Appendix 1), while the short-essay questions targeted data collection from both students and teachers in the questionnaires (See Appendix 2 & Appendix 3 - Section C). The findings of this section help answering the three study questions, as data from interviews are used in answering all three questions of the study, and short-essay questions are used to answer the second and third study questions.

Both tools of qualitative data collection are analyzed through the use of thematic analysis approach, where specific themes are identified across each tool. Participants' answers in interviews and short-essay questions are categorized in the identified themes. The thematic analysis helps identifying and categorizing answers from participants and the shared perceptions from teachers and students about the homogeneous grouping, the challenges they face and the suggestions they have to make their learning or teaching experience better.

#### 4.3.1 Interviews

One-to-one interviews were conducted with 15 high school students with different ability levels in English (both high and low), varying between grade 9 to 12. Figure 2 presents the study sample of interview.

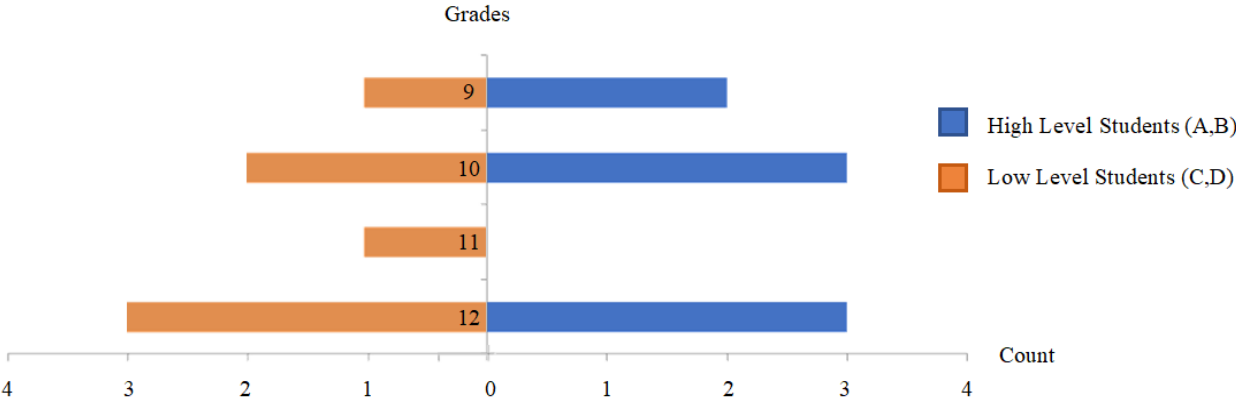


Figure 2: Interviews Sample

The results of the conducted interviews presented students' perspectives toward learning in homogeneous English language classroom. After the process of transcribing and reviewing all interview answers, the researcher identified 4 main themes for the data analysis, which are divided into sub-themes for more detailed overview of the participant's responses. The codebook of the interview and number of students' responses in each theme are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Students' Interview Codebook

Themes	References	
	High Sts.	Low Sts.
1. Views regarding learning in groups		
a- Prefer learning in groups	4	5
b- Prefer learning individually	5	1
2. Views about homogeneous grouping		
a- Learning better in homogeneous classroom	6	2
b- Learning better in heterogeneous classroom	2	5
c- Working with same level student helps improving skills	7	0
d- Feeling comfortable with same level students	8	1
e- Feeling comfortable with different level students	3	5
f- Feeling shy to participate	0	4
3. Challenges encountered		
a- Limited group activities	6	5
b- Lower achieving students disturb class	7	2
c- Lower achieving students do not help in answering	8	5
d- Less motivation and self confidence	2	5
e- No student from higher level to help understand	1	5
4. Suggestions for improvement		
a- More group activities	4	5
b- More time to learn and practice basic language skills	5	6
c- More attention from my teacher	3	6
d- Be placed in heterogeneous group	3	6
e- Be placed in homogeneous group	5	1

The codebook in Table 7 consists of the 4 main themes of the interviews analysis and 18 sub-themes that reflect on specific concepts within the main themes. The references column refers to the frequency of participants' responses in each sub-theme. The responses were collected from high and low achieving students to differentiate between their perceptions of homogeneous learning based on their ability levels.

The first theme in the codebook highlights students’ general perception of working in groups, which splits into 2 sub-themes that highlights students’ perceptions toward learning in groups. The second theme focuses on participants’ views of learning in homogeneous context, which is branched into 6 sub-themes that spot the light on participants’ preferences of learning in homogeneous classroom, feelings toward learning with students’ from same ability level and feelings about class participation. The third theme concentrates on the challenges that participants’ encounter in their English classrooms with 5 sub-themes. The last theme presents students’ suggestions to improve their learning and have better experience in English language classrooms, with 5 sub-themes. All the themes that the researcher developed in the interviews’ analysis process are further discussed separately. Figure 3 presents the distribution of participants’ responses within the identified themes and sub-themes.

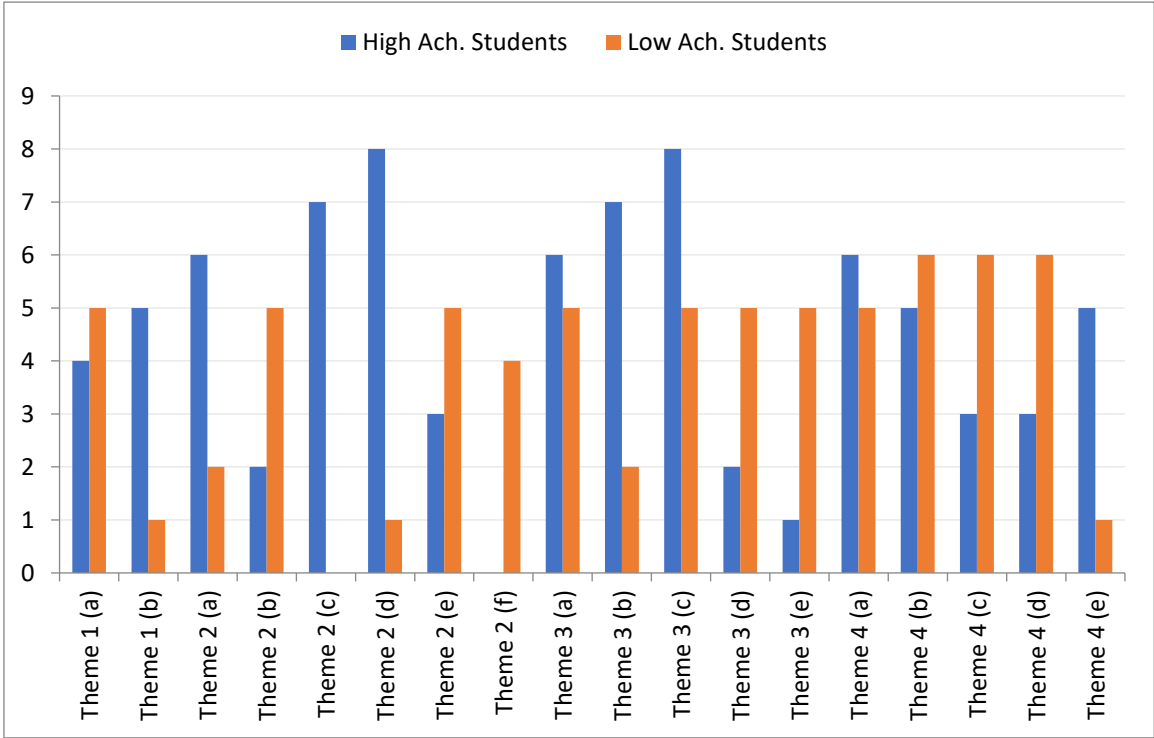


Figure 3: Interview Participants’ Responses within Codebook Themes

4.3.1.1 Theme 1: Views regarding learning in groups

The first theme presents students’ views about their preferences about group work. Based on students’ answers, two views were stated; either preference to learn in group, or preference to learn individually. Participants’ responses showed that higher achieving

students prefer to learn individually, while lower achieving students' responses of the same theme present their preferences to learn within a group. Participant 9 (P9), a high achieving student, stated that *"I like to work and learn alone. Other students interrupt me and I lose my focus while reading or thinking"*, supported by P6, a high achieving student, stating that *"Working with others in group require lots of time to share ideas and answer together, and it takes from the class time... I can do the task on my own without the help of others"*. On the other hand, P4, a low achieving student, responded to the first interview question saying *"...Umm, in fact I like to be in group, because I learn from others and I understand more when my friend explain to me"*. Another low achieving participant (P11) added *"Working in groups makes me practice English more, and learn from others who are better than me"*. These statements suggest that higher achieving students believe they learn better on their own, while lower achieving students prefer to learn with other to receive help and guidance to develop their skills.

#### *4.3.1.2 Theme 2: Views about homogeneous grouping*

Theme 2 present different views and perceptions of the interviewed students about learning in homogeneous English language classrooms. Several sub-themes follow this main theme, as students presented and discussed different aspects within homogeneous learning. In regard to learning and improving language skills, high achieving students shared views about how they prefer to learn in homogeneous groups in comparison to low achieving students' responses that indicated that they learn more in heterogeneous groups. *"I prefer to work on tasks and projects with colleagues of my same high level. I develop many skills with them like speaking and writing. I feel challenged to think more and become better than them"* (P12, high achieving student). Participant 2, a high achieving student, added to the same point, saying *"...When my partner is from the same level we support and understand each other and think similarly. Working with someone less than my level makes me learn less as we don't exchange information... Sometimes, that student don't want to learn and let me answer everything by myself"*. Many high achieving students discussed with the researcher how lower achieving students can be disturbing or refuse to participate in the learning process, as they depend on them for answering tasks. Yet, some high achieving participants clarified that they do not refuse to help and work with someone less than their level, as long as they co-operate and are willing to learn, "...

*I like helping others and never refuse to assist anyone less than my level, as long as they want to learn and accept my help”* said P6, a high achieving student.

On the other hand, lower achieving students showed fewer acceptances toward learning in homogeneous groups, as they do not feel challenged to learn and do not get enough assistance to develop their skills. As stated by P15, a low achieving student, “... *In my class we are all in very similar levels, I don't feel that I benefit a lot. My level in English is the same*”. Another participant discussed that the homogeneous arrangement do not allow a space for informative exchange of information or skills, as students are from the same level (P7, Low achieving student). Additionally, another low achieving student (P4) added “*I prefer to learn with someone who has better level than me in English, because I will talk to him, improve my skills and learn more from his high level*”.

In regards to the psychological impact of homogeneous grouping and students' feelings towards its application, the interview results showed that the majority of high achieving students feel more comfortable when interacting or learning with students from similar level. Low achieving students share different views about the same aspect, while most of the students stated that they like working with higher achieving students to learn more from them, some of these students elaborated to mention that they feel shy at times or not comfortable to speaking English in front of their better achieving colleagues. “*I like learning from my higher level colleagues and feel motivated to become like them, but sometimes not everyone would like to help*” (P5, low achieving student). “... *Sometimes I need more support from my teacher and my friends, they are helpful but I feel shy sometimes to make mistakes in front of them*” (P11, low achieving student).

#### 4.3.1.3 Theme 3: Challenges Encountered

The challenges' theme presented several challenges that students mentioned in their interview discussion. One of the highlighted challenges was the limited number of group activities in the English learning classroom, especially highlighted by lower achieving students. “*I feel that we don't work that much in groups, most tasks are individual and I can't get help from my friends when I don't understand something*” said P15, a low achieving student. Furthermore, some of the high achieving students discussed a challenge



that appears when they work with less achieving students, where some of the less achieving students make noise or refuse to participate in group work. This negatively affects the high achieving students as they get disturbed and lose their focus. *“I feel annoyed and disturbed sometimes by those students who are less than my level when they don’t participate in answering the exercises and keep talking together. I just lose my concentration because of their noise.”* (P1, high achieving student).

Some low achieving students discussed that they miss the existence of an excellent student in their class. Students mentioned that all of their colleagues are from similar achieving levels in the class, and they need motivation and assistance from better achieving students to help them understand and develop. Participant 10, a low achieving student, explained that *“when I learn in a same ability class, I don’t get much help from my colleagues... Umm, we are all from the same low levels”*. Others explained how they care less about their progress and development in the current time as they are already in the general stream, placed with students from their same low level. Participant 14, a low achieving student, elaborated by stating *“... When I used to be in mix ability class, I used to see others with very high level, so I get motivated to become like them. Now we are all the same, why would I work harder if I always get grade C?”*. This aspect was also highlighted in the findings of Oakes (2005) and Kinsey (2017), in which they mentioned how lower achieving students experience lack of self-esteem and lose of interest in learning when being placed in homogeneous learning context.

#### *4.3.1.4 Theme 4: Suggestions for Improvement*

This theme presents interviewee suggestions based on their homogeneous learning experience in English language classrooms. As discussed by many students, additional group activities are required to be used in the classroom. The benefits of such activities apply to both high and low achieving students, as they both mentioned the need for more group activities, with differences in frequency between both students’ categories. Additionally, both categories suggested the need to learn and practice basic skills more during the English language classes. As presented by P6, a high achieving student, *“We learn a lot in our English classes, but we still need to learn more... It is true that I always get A in my certificate, but I feel that I lack some English basics. We need to practice the*

*language basics more often*". Furthermore, P4, a low achieving student, explained that *"I need my teacher to give us more exercises that focus on writing, speaking, listening as skills.. Practicing the language more will help me to improve better than just answering textbook questions"*.

A number of lower achieving students suggested that they need more attention from their teachers, especially to their learning needs. They mentioned how teachers focus a lot on following the curriculum teaching timeline and finish lesson as scheduled by the ministry, while not focusing the most on the development of their learning needs. P8, a low achieving student, elaborated by saying *"My teacher always focuses on finishing lessons before the end of the semester, she give us lots of activities in the class but very quickly... Also, sometimes I don't understand something in the lesson but the teacher don't check if I got it or not so she moves to the next point.. I need more explaining"*.

The last sub-theme presents the students' suggestions for better learning experience. Higher achieving students showed more preferences toward suggesting the use of homogeneous grouping in English language classrooms. On the other hand, lower achieving students suggested learning in heterogeneous classrooms. Each group supported their suggestions with a reflection of their learning needs and their views of the ideal classroom. P2, a high achieving student, stated that learning with students from his same level always keeps him motivated and challenged. P10, a low achieving student, suggested *"I really want to learn with others from higher levels in English. I learn more from them and they encourage me to develop my skills and get better"*.

#### 4.3.2 Short-Essay Questions

The short-essay questions are a qualitative data collection tool that the researcher used in Section C of teachers' and students' questionnaires. The aim of these questions was to collect participants' responses and views about the challenges that teachers or students may face in an English language homogeneous classroom and their comments about their questionnaires' answers or about the study topic. Each questionnaire included 2 short essay questions, the first asks participants to identify the challenges encountered (if any), and the second allow participants to write comments.

The total number of questionnaires used in this study is 630 questionnaires, including 30 teachers' questionnaires and 600 students' questionnaires. Although participants have fully answered Sections A and B, that contain 5-point Likert scale questions, many participants skipped answering Section C that includes the 2 short-essay questions or wrote irrelevant answers. Therefore, the researcher filtered the participants' responses of the short-essay questions for reflective analysis results. The total number of students' valid responses of Section C in the students' questionnaire is 52 responses (34 high achieving students and 18 low achieving students), while the number of teachers' responses of Section C in the teachers' questionnaire is 20 responses. The researcher used a numeric coding system to refer to participants in the data analysis to protect their identities' privacy.

The researcher followed the thematic analysis approach to analyze the collected responses of the short-essay questions. As Section C includes 2 short-essay questions, and based on the gathered responses of participants, 2 main themes were identified for each questionnaire. The first theme in the students' questionnaire is challenges encountered by students, and the second theme is comments. For the teachers' questionnaires, the first theme is challenges faced by English language teachers, and the second theme is comments. Sub-themes of each theme were developed to categorize and analyze participants' responses through.

#### *4.3.2.1 Students' Short-Essay Responses*

Based on students' responses to the short-essay questions, Challenges and Comments themes were identified and branched into sub-themes for more detailed analysis of participants' responses. In the challenges section, students' responses showed differences in the encountered challenges based on their achievement levels. Low achieving students complained from the lack of help received from their peers as their learning in homogeneous classrooms does not support such aspects. Student 20, a low achieving student, mentioned in his response that as all his colleagues in the class are from similar proficiency level in English language, he does not get the chance to learn from them or improve his skills. Additionally, Student 37 mentioned his need to have a role model from their age range with better level in English to encourage them to develop. These statements were also discussed in the findings of Oddo (1994). On the contemporary, high achieving

students did not reflect on learning in a homogeneous classroom as a challenge, but a chance to develop their skills and exchange information with peers from similar thinking levels. Interestingly, some high achieving students presented that they prefer to work with and help less achieving students, as they develop tutoring skills while helping others. Filby & Barnett (1982) discussed in their studies how high achieving students can benefit from helping their less achieving colleagues and develop several skills in the process.

Another challenge raised by students is the lack of practice of basic skills in their classrooms. This challenge was mentioned by both high and low achieving students, as they see that the curricular activities target themes and content understanding rather than language skills development. Student 15, a high achieving student, presented that *“We do not practice or develop basic skills of language a lot, the activates in our lessons and what the teachers give to us does not support that”*.

Furthermore, low achieving students mentioned how they feel less appreciated by their teachers, and less encouraged to participate or learn. Student 18, a low achieving student, responded with *“I do not enjoy learning with my friends with same level. I feel we are all from same level so no need to put more effort in studying harder”*. Low achieving students generally shared responses against learning in homogeneous classrooms. Kinsey (2017) and Oakes (2005) presented in their studies findings how homogeneous learning can cause negative self-image and low self-esteem for low achieving students.

In the comments theme, students shared different views about their responses of their questionnaires' answers and views about the study topic. Some low achieving students expressed their need to learn in mix ability groups to develop more skills. Other students focused on the importance of having more group activities. High achieving students indicated their general satisfaction of learning in homogeneous groups.

The following table (Table 8) briefs students' responses frequency to each theme in the short-essay questions, from high achieving students and low achieving students.

Table 8: Students' Short-Essay Questions Codebook

Themes	References	
	High Sts.	Low Sts.
1.Challenges		
a- Less motivation to learn	1	14
b- No student from higher level to help understand	4	17
c- Limited answering time	12	15
d- Limited group activities	9	16
e- Limited attention from teacher	10	13
f- The need to learn more language skills	22	18
g- Feeling shy to participate	4	17
2. Comments		
a- Be placed in homogeneous group	28	17
b- Need for more group activities	19	16

#### 4.3.2.2 Teachers' Short-Essay Responses

Based on teachers' responses to the short-essay questions, challenges and Comments themes were identified. Teachers have extensively explained their perceptions of homogeneous grouping, students' views and challenges they face in their classrooms.

One of the main highlighted challenges by some teachers identified is the need to use heterogeneous grouping at times in their classes. Teacher 14 explained that based on her experience in teaching both high achieving and low achieving students, she feels the need to merge students from different abilities together, to boost social skills. She elaborated by writing that *"When working together, higher achieving students feel responsible to assist and support lower achieving students, and lower achieving students feel grateful and more willing to learn. Students learn to work with and accept each other"*. Another participant, Teacher 6, stated that *"Higher achieving students motivate lower achieving students, by setting an example in a group"*. In addition to the positive impact of heterogeneous grouping on students' learning and social skills, Teacher 11 clarified that high achieving students help teachers in the classroom. *"When lower achieving students need additional explanations, I assign higher achieving students to help and explain. In this way, I put in less effort and get more time to explain new concepts"*.

Furthermore, some teachers expressed how teaching low achieving students'

homogeneously can be time consuming and exhausting. *“Working with lower achieving students consumes much time and require additional effort to prepare appropriate material and address to their needs. But after all, it is rewarding”* said Teacher 2. *“The impact of mixing groups is most of the time positive and conducive to learning”* (Teacher 10). In such case, teacher expressed their feeling about the additional load they have on them while teaching low achieving students homogeneously.

Another challenge is low achieving students’ loss of interest to learn. As stated by Teacher 3, *“Students with less proficiency levels in English do not enjoy learning alone, as they do not find other source than the teacher to learn from or get feedback from”*. Another teacher further explained that when students receive basic learning, they think basic about themselves and find no interest in working harder (Teacher 20), also supported by the findings of Kinsey (2017). While on the other hand, some teachers clarified that higher achieving students are more demanding, as they always look for learning more and need variety of exercises to challenge them and answer they needs (Teacher 12).

In the comments, teachers presented several ideas in regard to the study topic. Some teachers stated how they find no significance difference between using different ability grouping styles in classrooms with students, as it depends mainly on the teacher. Other teachers explained *“Higher achieving students prefer to work in homogeneous groups”* (Teacher 3; Teacher 9). *“Elite students feel more comfortable learning together, but they do not reject working with students from less proficiency level”* (Teacher 4).

The next table (Table 9) presents teachers’ responses frequency to each sub-theme.

Table 9: Teachers’ Short-Essay Questions Codebook

Themes	References
1.Challenges	
a- Time limitation	16
b- More effort needed with low achieving students	15
c- Low achieving students’ lack of interest in learning	12
d- High achieving students high learning demands	8
2. Comments	
a- High achieving students’ preference of learning homogeneously	14
b- Teachers’ role in class	7

#### **4.4 Discussion and Summary of Findings**

The results provided by the analyzed data presented invaluable insights about students' and teachers' perceptions toward the homogeneous learning in English language classrooms. The quantitative data (students and teachers questionnaires (Sections A, B)) and the qualitative data (students' interviews, students' short-essay questions and teachers' short-essay questions (Section C)) provided variety of detailed information to answer the study questions.

In the quantitative data, students' questionnaires results presented significance difference between high and low achieving students' perspectives in several aspects of homogeneous learning by applying the one-way ANOVA test to the data. Descriptive analysis was used to determine students' different perceptions toward their learning experience in homogeneous classes. In regard to learning, higher achieving students presented high agreement level toward learning in homogeneous groups over heterogeneous groups, as they learn better and challenge themselves to develop skills. Low achieving students showed higher agreement level towards learning in heterogeneous classrooms. The descriptive statistics presented less agreement level toward items that support learning through homogeneous grouping.

From the psychological aspect, high achieving students' responses presented high levels of agreement to items that indicated feeling comfortable when learning with colleagues from their same level. On the other hand, low achieving students' responses showed general sense of comfort and feeling secured toward learning with others from higher achievement level. In spite of the high level of agreement in low achieving students' responses toward feeling encouraged and motivated to learn when studying in heterogeneous groups, it was also noticed that low achieving students showed high level of agreement towards feeling shy to participate in front of students from higher level.

Teachers' questionnaires descriptive analysis revealed teachers' highest level of agreement towards item 2, which states that High achieving students learn more while working with students from their same level. Most of participating teachers agreed that high achieving students benefit more and feel comfortable to learn in homogeneous

context. Additionally, teachers viewed general agreement toward several items that reflects on benefits of heterogeneous learning. Furthermore, teachers' responses showed that many teachers feel that teaching low achieving students requires more effort from teachers. On the contemporary, teachers showed the highest level of disagreement towards teaching high achieving students in separation from low achieving students.

The collected qualitative data included students' interviews and short-essay questions for both teachers and students that focus on highlighting encountered challenges and further comments.

Interviews were conducted with 15 students from both high and low achieving levels. Four main themes and several sub-themes were developed based on participants' answers. Students shared different views and perceptions of learning in homogeneous context based on their achievement levels. In the first theme, students reflected on their preferences toward group learning, where low achieving students showed more acceptances toward learning in groups than high achieving students. In the second theme, students shared their perceptions in regard to homogeneous learning. High achieving students shared views about how they prefer to learn with colleagues from same level, as they share similar mentalities and understanding that positively affects their grades and academic development.

Some high achieving students stated that lower achieving students can be disturbing or refuse to participate in group activities, therefore prefer learning with students from their own level. Yet, it was also stated by some high achieving students that they do not refuse to work collaboratively with low achieving students, as they like to help and improve their skills in the process.

On the other hand, low achieving students shared ideas about their need to study in heterogeneous classrooms. Their views presented how they learn better and develop more skills when interacting with students from higher achievement levels and better lingual skills.

The third theme included mentioning challenges encountered by high achievers and low achievers. Low achieving students presented how they find difficulties learning and



developing in homogeneous groups, where all students are from similar low levels and no one to help them understand or learn from. Additionally, low achievers mentioned their lack of interest and motivation in learning English while being in homogeneous classrooms. On the other hand, high achieving students expressed their perceptions about learning with students from less achievement level, as they refuse to co-operate at times. Both groups of students shared that one of the encountered challenges in their English language classes is the lack of group activities.

The fourth theme presents students suggestions to improve their learning experience. High achieving students stated how they would like to have more work with colleagues from their same level of achievement to feel more challenged and develop better skills. Both high and low achieving students suggested more practice of basic skills, as the exercises that they answer in their textbooks usually focus on content rather than skills. On the other hand, low achieving students revealed their need to have more attention from their teachers toward their learning needs. Also, they suggested being placed in heterogeneous groups where they can learn from higher achieving students and be more encouraged to learn and develop.

The short-essay questions (Section C of the questionnaires) provided the researcher with perceptions of teachers and students about the challenges they face in homogeneous classroom and the further comments they have on the study topic of their previous answers. Thematic analysis was used to analyze teachers' and students' responses. In students' responses, several challenges were identified, and differences were spotted between high achievers responses and low achievers responses. One of the challenges was lack of communication with higher achieving student, in which low achieving students reflected on their need to interact with and learn from higher achieving students. Furthermore, low achieving students explained how they become less motivated to learn when learning with similar level students, due to the lack of learning opportunities. They also reported the need for additional attention from the class teacher toward their learning needs. On the other hand, high achieving students reported less challenges encountered in the homogeneous classroom, as they have high preference level of learning with same ability students. In general, students reported the need for more group activities and additional

skills-oriented tasks. Additionally, students explained their learning preferences in general in the comments section.

Teachers' responses to the short-essay questions (Section C in teachers' questionnaire) reflected on several challenges and comments by from teachers' point of view in homogeneous classrooms. Teachers identified time and effort as one of the main challenges faced in teaching, Participants explained how low achieving students require placing more time and effort to prepare suitable teaching aids and answer their needs in homogeneous classrooms. They explained how having high achieving students in the class can decrease the load on the teacher and make the teaching process easier. Additionally, teachers highlighted how high achieving students require more attention toward their high learning needs. Other challenge such as low achieving students' loss of interest in learning in homogeneous groups was also reported by teachers. Students feel less motivated when they do not have a colleague as a role model.

In the comments theme, teachers' responses presented how high achieving students prefer learning in homogeneous groups, while low achieving students prefer learning in heterogeneous groups. Additionally, many teachers highlighted how teachers play the main role in preparing students to learn and collaborate in either homogeneous or heterogeneous contexts through the use of proper activities and teaching strategies.

#### **4.5 Findings by Research Question**

The study included 3 main research questions that investigated the homogeneous learning status in the UAE's English language classes. A detailed discussion is presented next to each question and its answers based on the analysis outcomes of the used data collection tools.

##### *4.5.1 Question 1: What are Teachers' and Students' Perceptions Toward the Application of Homogeneous Grouping in English Language Learning Classrooms?*

The first question explored teachers' and students' perceptions toward the use of homogeneous grouping in English language classrooms. Overall, the analysis of questionnaires (Sections A and B) and interviews answer this question.

Students presented their views and perceptions about their learning efficiency and their comfort level in homogeneous groups. The analysis results showed more general preference of high achieving students towards learning in homogeneous classes, as shown in the high descriptive analysis results of the questionnaire items and the thematic analysis of students' responses of interviews. The highest level of agreement in questionnaire items from high achieving students' perspective was identified toward better learning experience, challenging learning, more comfort in the classroom and feeling motivated. Yet, results also presented moderately high level of acceptance towards helping other students' from less achieving levels and learning in heterogeneous classrooms. The interviews presented more detailed responses from high achieving students reflecting on how they prefer to learn with students from their same level, yet not refuse working with others from less achievement levels.

Additionally, the results showed how low achieving students have less agreement level towards learning in homogeneous classes. The highest recorded results of low achieving students in the questionnaires targeted aspects of better learning in heterogeneous context, feeling more secured to learn with a higher achieving colleague and feeling motivated. The answers of low achieving students in the interview supported the questionnaires' results. The thematic interviews' analysis presented detailed explanation of students' perception of homogeneous learning. Students explained how they learn more when interacting with higher achieving students and feeling motivated to develop their skills. Yet, students mentioned how they feel shy at times and prefer not to participate in front of higher achieving colleagues.

The teachers' perceptions toward homogeneous learning showed the highest level of agreement towards high achieving students' preferences of learning in homogeneous context, while low achieving students learn better in heterogeneous learning environment. In regard to teachers' preferences of teaching, results relatively showed higher preference level to teach in heterogeneous classes and mix students from both high and low levels over heterogeneous teaching. Generally, teachers reflected on how teaching low achieving students requires additional effort and more time, comparatively to the case in high achieving students' classes.

#### 4.5.2 *Question 2: What are the Challenges Encountered by Students and Teachers in the Homogeneous Learning Context?*

The second study question investigated the challenges that students' and teachers' encounter in their homogeneous learning classes from their perspectives. The analysis of questionnaires (Sections A, B and C) and interviews answer this question.

Students' questionnaires' revealed how low achieving students find it challenging and less beneficial to learn in homogeneous classrooms. This is reflected by low achieving students' least agreeing responses toward questionnaire items that support learning and feeling comfortable in homogeneous classrooms. Additionally, low achieving students revealed in their interviews and short-essay responses how they see homogeneous learning as a challenge for them, where they learn less and feel less confident. Furthermore, low achieving students expressed in the short-essay questions that they face time challenges. Students explained how they need additional answering time to work on tasks in the class and ask teacher to further clarify certain points.

Other challenges stated by students included the mention of limited number of group activities. Students clarified how having less group activities negatively affect their learning, as they learn more when interaction with each other and exchanging information in tasks. Low achieving students agree more toward the need for more group activities in comparison to high achieving students, yet they both mentioned the need for it in general. Some high achieving students stated in their interview responses that they feel confident enough to answer tasks on themselves as their high proficiency levels in English helps them, as well as feeling more comfortable to work individually. This perception is supported by the challenge stated by high achieving students, in which they complain from less achieving colleagues who refuse to work collaboratively or disturb the class in group activities.

Teachers' responses to the 3 sections of the teachers' questionnaire revealed the several challenges encountered by teachers in homogeneous classrooms. The descriptive analysis of the questionnaires' Likert-scale items showed a relatively high level of agreement toward item 13, which discusses how teachers find teaching lower achieving students tiring and requires more effort from the teacher. Furthermore, the responses of short-essay

questions in the challenges theme supported the same belief about the effort needed for teaching low achieving students homogeneously. Teachers explained how explaining concepts and aligning with students' needs is demanding and require much time and effort.

Additionally, teachers discussed how low achieving students' loss of interest in learning is challenging for them. Teachers place more effort to apply different strategies that would attract students to learn and feel motivated to participate in homogeneous classes. Teachers mentioned how the placement of high achieving students among less achieving students can be encouraging and motivating. Moreover, teachers stated that teaching high achieving students homogeneously can be demanding, as students need to be challenged continuously and teachers have to satisfy their high learning needs.

#### *4.5.3 Question 3: What Could be the Required Modifications (if any) That may Enhance the Current Implication of Homogeneous Grouping in the UAE's Educational Context?*

The third question presents the suggested modifications to the applied homogeneous grouping system. Based on participants' responses to the questionnaires, interviews and short-essay questions, and the researcher's analysis of the collected data, a number of suggestions are introduced to improve the application of homogeneous grouping in UAE's classrooms.

Students clarified in several positions (including questionnaires and interviews responses) that they need to work in groups more often to improve their language skills. Moreover, students suggested dedicating more answering time to allow them better opportunity to understand and work on assigned tasks. Therefore, teachers need to allow more answering time to students and pay more attention to students' needs to understand. Additionally, low achieving students revealed their need to have higher achieving colleagues in their classes to learn from and feel motivated by. Low achieving students revealed their need for more attention from their teacher, in which a teacher can explain more and involve students through interesting activities. A modification that can help overcoming such difficulty can appear when assigning higher achieving students in the role of assisting teacher, where they can help other students from less achieving levels and explain difficult concepts to them.

Teachers discussed several suggestions through which the application of homogeneous grouping can be more beneficial for students. In the short-essay answers, teachers suggested merging high achieving students with low achieving students, even if partially, in which they can help them in group activities and set a role model in the class for others to follow.

Based on the researchers' analysis of the participants responses, it is viewed that the application of homogeneous grouping is less encouraging for low achieving students, yet more beneficial for high achieving students. A need to involve higher achieving students in lower achieving classes is essential to help them improve and get motivated to learn. Additionally, students need to practice basic skills more to fill in the learning gaps they have and improve their lingual skills.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The development of educational systems to provide students with better learning experience is always the aim that drives educators to develop better learning strategies and overcome existing challenges. In the current situation of applying homogeneous grouping in UAE's public schools, many advantages appeared to support students' learning, such as grouping high achieving students together in Elite classrooms where they receive advanced learning that boosts their English language proficiency level. Yet, disadvantages of its application appear in the system, where low achieving students seem to dislike, and additional load on teachers exist.

Low achieving students are obligated to study with students from their same levels in homogeneous classrooms. As reported by low achieving students, the experience of learning in homogeneous classes does not help them to develop their language skills, as they lack the interaction with higher achieving students who can help, inspire and motivate them. In such case, a teacher is required to pay more attention to individual needs of these students to help improving their skills. This places an additional load on teachers where they are required to meet all learning needs, without having high achieving students to help assist less achieving students.

High achieving students find learning in homogeneous context more appealing and beneficial for them as they interact with colleagues from similar mentality level. The homogeneous learning encourages high achieving students to challenge their limits and compete with their peers to become the best in the class. The high level of competition in the class can cause stress and anxiety for students, as presented by Oakes (2005). Nevertheless, high achieving students need to develop social skills and accept learning with others from different levels. When high achieving students interact with low achieving students, they share information with them, explain difficult concepts and set a role model for them to develop and become better. Such interaction between students helps developing both groups, as high achieving students build on knowledge when passing it to others and gain social skills, while low achieving students will develop their language

skills and learn from their colleagues.

Teachers play essential role is students' acceptance of a strategy, as teachers can modify activities and teaching material to fit students' levels and needs. The support and attention that teachers provide to students help motivating them to perform better and become motivated to learn. Individuality in learning has a measure effect on students' progress. Therefore, teachers need to pay additional attention to students' needs, especially to low achieving students when placed in homogeneous groups. The lack of having higher achieving peer requires more focus from teachers to fill in the gap and answer to students learning needs.

To conclude, it is very important for the policy makers to pay attention to all categories of students when applying educational strategies. The application of homogeneous grouping in UAE's English language classrooms do support the development of high achieving students, yet it takes away many learning opportunities from low achieving students. The teaching load on teachers and the need to fulfill all job requirements with the best efficiency to answer different students' needs require much effort and time to achieve. Deep study to the current learning situation in schools and follow-up with the new policies application can improve the application of homogeneous grouping in UAE's schools and allow better achievement results for all students and teachers.

## **5.2 Limitations and Recommendations**

In spite of the researcher's efforts to collect large sample for the study and cover several aspects related to the homogeneous grouping system in the UAE's schools, limitations and recommendations for further studies need to be taken into consideration. One of the limitations of this study is the limited number of local resources. Due to its recent application in the UAE's educational system, limited number of related studies to homogeneous grouping within the UAE's educational context was found. It would be very useful to have more studies conducted in the UAE's context about homogeneous learning, as it is directly affecting students' learning experience.

Furthermore, the study sample is limited to a certain number of UAE's governmental schools that were distributed across the country. The researcher tried to collect samples of



data from schools across all 7 emirates of the UAE as the ability grouping is applied across the UAE's centralized educational system, but only samples from 5 emirates were collected. Likewise, the scope of this study only includes samples from governmental schools in the UAE's educational context, which may not be applied or generalized to private schools in UAE or other countries' educational contexts. Further studies of the same scope can extend to cover private schools and schools from all the 7 emirates of the UAE for more inclusive results.

The researcher conducted interviews with students to collect responses about their perceptions, but due to the limited time of data collection and teachers' occupation in final examination, teachers' interviews were not conducted. It would be interesting if other researches in the same field are conducted in future with the inclusion of teachers' interviews as a source of information.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Students' Interview

#### Consent Form for Participating in Interview for a Scientific Research

*Kindly read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of the study.*

You are being asked to take part in thesis research aiming at: The Status of Homogeneous Grouping Implication in English Language Classrooms in the United Arab Emirates. This study is conducted by a Master's Program graduate student at the College of Education at the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, under the supervision of Dr. Badreyya Al Khanboli and Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction.

This study plays a very important role in developing the quality of English language education in the United Arab Emirates. The outcomes of this study will help educators to have a better understanding of the different grouping styles used in their English language classrooms and will support students learning in a better progressive way.

This interview aims at getting English language learners' responses and feedback on the views, benefits and uses of both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in their language learning classrooms.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether to or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your school or the United Arab Emirates University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Your participation is highly appreciated by the researcher and the supervising Doctor at the United Arab Emirates University.

Dear participant, be sure that:

- All information obtained from you will remain confidential. No information about you, or provided by you as an interviewee in this research study will be disclosed to any other entity (whether public or private) and for whatever reason unless they are directly involved in the named study.

**I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Personal Information

**Please answer the following questions with your personal information, by marking or writing the appropriate answer:**

<b>1.</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>2.</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 10 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 12
<b>3.</b>	<b>Your Level in English Class</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> A (90-100 %) <input type="checkbox"/> B (80-89 %) <input type="checkbox"/> C (70-79 %) <input type="checkbox"/> D (60-69 %)
<b>4.</b>	<b>School</b>	.....
<b>5.</b>	<b>Emirate (Place of your school)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Abu Dhabi <input type="checkbox"/> Ajman <input type="checkbox"/> Fujairah <input type="checkbox"/> Dubai <input type="checkbox"/> Umm Al Quwain <input type="checkbox"/> Sharjah <input type="checkbox"/> Ras Al Khaimah
<b>6.</b>	<b>Native Language *Main language used in home</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Arabic <input type="checkbox"/> Other Language .....

## Study Interview Questions

Dear participant,

Please read the following questions carefully, and answer them according to your experience of learning in your English classroom context:

1. Do you usually learn through working in groups in your English class? Explain what advantages and disadvantages you face.
  
2. In most cases, are you placed in a group with students of your same academic level or different mixed academic levels? How do groups be organized and formed? Elaborate on your answer.
  
3. When you get placed with a group of your colleagues who are all from the same academic level of yours, how do you feel? Comfortable or not comfortable? How does working with colleagues from different levels feel like?
  
4. What is the reflection of working in a group of your same ability students on your grades and academic progress? Does it benefit you? Provide further explanation.
  
5. How would you describe your experience of working with your colleagues in groups to answer exercises and solve problems in your English class?
  
6. Do you think you should only work with students who have same academic level and abilities like you? Or would you rather work with mixed abilities groups? Explain your answer and share reasons behind your choice.
  
7. What challenges do you face when learning in same-level groups? What would you suggest your teacher to make the learning environment more enjoyable and beneficial for you and your colleagues?

**Thank You for Your Valuable Participation and Answers**



## Appendix 2: Students' Questionnaire

### Consent Form for Participation in a Scientific Research

Kindly read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of the study.

You are being asked to take part in thesis research aiming at: The Status of Homogeneous Grouping Implication in English Language Classrooms in the United Arab Emirates. This study is conducted by a Master's Program graduate student at the College of Education at the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, under the supervision of Dr. Badreyya Al Khanboli and Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction.

This study plays a very important role in developing the quality of English language education in the United Arab Emirates. The outcomes of this study will help educators to have a better understanding of the different grouping styles used in their English language classrooms and will support students learning in a better progressive way.

The enclosed questionnaire aims at getting English language learners' responses and feedback on the views, benefits and uses of both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in their language learning classrooms.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether to or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your school or the United Arab Emirates University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Your participation is highly appreciated by the researcher and the supervising Doctor at the United Arab Emirates University.

Dear participant, be sure that:

- All information obtained from you will remain confidential; the researcher will use a coding system where your name and personal information will be replaced by numbers so as to ensure full confidentiality. No information about you, or provided by you as a participant in this research project will be disclosed to any other entity and for whatever reason unless they are directly involved in the named project.

**I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Students Questionnaire Form

**Dear student,**

You are invited to take part in a questionnaire that is designed to collect data for the purpose of a Master's Degree Thesis Research conducted by a Master's graduate student at the College of Education in the United Arab Emirates University. This study plays a very important role in developing the quality of English Language Education in the United Arab Emirates schools. The outcomes of this study will help educators to have a better understanding of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping techniques used in language learning classrooms.

The enclosed questionnaire aims at getting your responses and feedback on the grouping activities, learning that you gain from working in groups, your personal opinions and benefits of the uses of both same ability (homogeneous) and different ability (heterogeneous) grouping in your English language classroom with your teacher.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are totally free to be part of the sample responding to this questionnaire. Your participation is highly appreciated by the researcher and the thesis supervising Doctor at the United Arab Emirates University, which is the first established Higher Education Institution in UAE and one of the leading universities across UAE with various powerful programs. All your information, responses and feedback are confidential.

Kindly, read this form carefully. Answer according to what you practice inside your classroom with your colleagues and teacher, not according to what should be done. Feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of this study.

## Personal Information

Please answer the following questions with your personal information, by marking or writing the appropriate answer:

<b>1.</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>2.</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 10 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 12
<b>3.</b>	<b>Your Level in English Class</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> A (90-100 %) <input type="checkbox"/> B (80-89 %) <input type="checkbox"/> C (70-79 %) <input type="checkbox"/> D (60-69 %)
<b>4.</b>	<b>School</b>	.....
<b>5.</b>	<b>Emirate (Place of your school)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Abu Dhabi <input type="checkbox"/> Ajman <input type="checkbox"/> Fujairah <input type="checkbox"/> Dubai <input type="checkbox"/> Umm Al Quwain <input type="checkbox"/> Sharjah <input type="checkbox"/> Ras Al Khaimah

Please indicate your level of agreement related to the following statements on a scale from 5 to 1, based on your learning experience in English language classrooms:

Scale: 5 = Totally Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Moderate 2 = Disagree 1 = Totally Disagree

### **A. Learning and Academic Achievement**

Domains		Level of Agreement				
1.	I learn better when I work with colleagues from the same ability level of mine	5	4	3	2	1
2.	I gain more knowledge and skills when working with a colleague at my same level	5	4	3	2	1
3.	Learning in groups supports my academic progress	5	4	3	2	1
4.	My English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) develop when I interact with colleagues who are higher than my academic level	5	4	3	2	1
5.	Being in a same-abilities classroom encourage me to learn more	5	4	3	2	1
6.	I develop more skills when I learn in the same class with students who are lower than my academic level	5	4	3	2	1

Please indicate your level of agreement related to the following statements on a scale from 5 to 1, based on your learning experience in English language classrooms:

Scale: **5** = Totally Agree **4** = Agree **3** = Moderate **2** = Disagree **1** = Totally Disagree

## **B. Psychological Impact**

<b>Domains</b>		<b>Level of Agreement</b>				
<b>7.</b>	I enjoy learning with colleagues from different abilities level in the English language classroom	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>8.</b>	I feel more secured when interacting and learning with students from my same ability level	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>9.</b>	Working in groups of mixed-ability students makes me feel motivated to participate and learn	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>10.</b>	I feel comfortable working with a colleague who is higher than my level in English language	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>11.</b>	I feel shy to participate in front of my other colleagues whose level in English is better than mine	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>12.</b>	Being with colleagues of higher level in English than mine makes me more challenged and enthusiast to improve and learn more	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>13.</b>	I receive full attention of my teacher when I learn and work in mixed abilities classroom	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

## **C. Challenges**

**14. What challenges you may encounter while learning in a same-ability classroom:**

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**15. Add your comments:**

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### Appendix 3: Teachers' Questionnaire

#### Consent Form for Participation in a Scientific Research

*Kindly read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of the study.*

You are being asked to take part in thesis research aiming at: The Status of Homogeneous Grouping Implication in English Language Classrooms in the United Arab Emirates. This study is conducted by a Master's Program graduate student at the College of Education at the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, under the supervision of Dr. Badreyya Al Khanboli and Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction.

This study plays a very important role in developing the quality of English language education in the United Arab Emirates. The outcomes of this study will help educators to have a better understanding of the different grouping styles used in their English language classrooms and will support students learning in a better progressive way.

The enclosed questionnaire aims at getting English language teachers' responses and feedback on the practices, benefits and uses of both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in their language classrooms with students.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether to or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your school or the United Arab Emirates University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Your participation is highly appreciated by the researcher and the supervising Doctor at the United Arab Emirates University.

Dear participant, be sure that:

- All information obtained from you will remain confidential; the researcher will use a coding system where your name and personal information will be replaced by numbers so as to ensure full confidentiality. No information about you, or provided by you as a participant in this research project will be disclosed to any other entity (whether public or private) and for whatever reason unless they are directly involved in the named project.

**I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Teachers Questionnaire Form

## Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a questionnaire that is designed to collect data for the purpose of a Master's Degree Thesis Research conducted by a Master's graduate student at the College of Education in the United Arab Emirates University. This study plays a very important role in developing the quality of English Language Education in the United Arab Emirates schools. The outcomes of this study will help educators to have a better understanding of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping techniques used in language learning classrooms.

The enclosed questionnaire aims at getting English language teachers responses and feedback on the practices, benefits and uses of both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in their language classrooms with students.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are totally free to be part of the sample responding to this questionnaire. Your participation is highly appreciated by the researcher and the thesis supervising Doctor at the United Arab Emirates University, which is the first established Higher Education Institution in UAE and one of the leading universities across UAE with various powerful programs. All your information, responses and feedback are confidential.

Kindly, read this form carefully. Answer according to what you practice inside your classroom with your students, not according to what should be done. Feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of this study.



## Personal Information

Please answer the following questions with your personal information, by marking or writing the appropriate answer:

<b>1.</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>2.</b>	<b>Education Grade you teach</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 10 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 12
<b>3.</b>	<b>Level/s in English Class You Teach</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> A (90-100 %) <input type="checkbox"/> B (80-89 %) <input type="checkbox"/> C (70-79 %) <input type="checkbox"/> D (60-69 %)
<b>4.</b>	<b>School</b>	.....
<b>5.</b>	<b>Emirate (Place of your school)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Abu Dhabi <input type="checkbox"/> Ajman <input type="checkbox"/> Fujairah <input type="checkbox"/> Dubai <input type="checkbox"/> Umm Al Quwain <input type="checkbox"/> Sharjah <input type="checkbox"/> Ras Al Khaimah
<b>6.</b>	<b>Years of experience in teaching</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2-5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 <input type="checkbox"/> More than 15

Please indicate your level of agreement related to the following statements on a scale from 5 to 1, based on your teaching experience in English language classrooms:

Scale: **5** = Totally Agree **4** = Agree **3** = Moderate **2** = Disagree **1** = Totally Disagree

### **A. Learning and Academic Achievement**

Domains		Level of Agreement				
1.	My students learn better when they are placed in mixed-abilities groups	5	4	3	2	1
2.	Higher achieving students learn more while working with students of their same level	5	4	3	2	1
3.	Lower achieving students learn better when interacting with more advanced students	5	4	3	2	1
4.	Students exchange information and experiences when working together within mixed-abilities groups	5	4	3	2	1
5.	Students' lingual skill (e.g. reading, writing, listening, speaking) improve when interacting with other student of a different ability level	5	4	3	2	1
6.	Students develop better social skills while interacting with other students in mixed abilities groups	5	4	3	2	1

Please indicate your level of agreement related to the following statements on a scale from 5 to 1, based on your learning experience in English language classrooms:

Scale: **5** = Totally Agree **4** = Agree **3** = Moderate **2** = Disagree **1** = Totally Disagree

## **B. Psychological Impact**

Domains		Level of Agreement				
<b>7.</b>	My students like to work in mixed-abilities groups	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>8.</b>	Lower achieving students feel comfortable learning and working with higher achieving students	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>9.</b>	Lower achieving students feel encouraged and challenged to participate and learn while being placed in mixed-abilities classrooms	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>10.</b>	Higher achieving students feel motivated to exchange knowledge and experience with lower achieving students	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>11.</b>	I feel comfortable teaching in same-ability English language classrooms	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>12.</b>	I prefer to teach all higher achieving students in the same classroom rather than mixing them with students of different abilities	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>13.</b>	I feel that teaching students of same ability (low achieving students) is tiring and requires more work	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

## **C. Challenges**

**14. What challenges you may have encountered while teaching in a same-ability classroom:**

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**15. Add your comments:**

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## Appendix 4: UAE's Ministry of Education Letter of Approval

 <p>مؤسسة الإمارات للتعليم المدرسي EMIRATES SCHOOLS ESTABLISHMENT</p>	 <p>United Arab Emirates</p>
<b>Facilitating a researcher's study Eman Abdelwahab from UAEU</b>	<b>تسهيل مهمة الباحثة إيمان عبدالوهاب من جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة</b>
<p>Dear School Directors ,</p> <p>The Emirates Schools Establishment is pleased to extend its best wishes.</p> <p>The researcher Eman Abdelwahab is completing her postgraduate studies for a Master's degree from UAEU University. The researcher is currently collecting data for his final research dissertation entitled " The Status of Homogeneous Grouping Implication in English Language Classrooms in the United Arab Emirates "</p> <p>We would like attached list to facilitate the task to collecting data for her final research. Please note that all information will be kept confidential as well as it will be used for scientific research and development purposes only.</p> <p><b>For further information, please contact :</b> Eman Abdelwahab : <a href="mailto:201970033@uaeu.ac.ae">201970033@uaeu.ac.ae</a></p> <p>Best Regards</p>	<p>السادة/ مديرو المدارس ورياض الأطفال المحترمين السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته يسر مؤسسة الإمارات للتعليم المدرسي أن تهديكم أطيب التحيات. تقوم الباحثة ايمان عبدالوهاب باستكمال الدراسة العليا للحصول على درجة الماجستير من جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة حيث ان الباحثة حالياً بصدد جمع البيانات للأطروحة البحثية النهائية بعنوان: "وضع التجميع المتجانس في صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية بمدارس دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. حيث أنه سيتم تنفيذ الدراسة عن طريق توزيع الاستبانة ورقياً على الطلبة. وعليه ندعو جميع المدارس المرفقة اسمائهم بتسهيل مهمة الباحثة لتنفيذ الدراسة في المدرسة وتعتبر المشاركة مجهولة وجميع إجاباتكم ستكون سرية وستضيف قيمة إلى نتائج هذا البحث الذي سيتم استخدامه لأغراض البحث العلمي والتطوير الأكاديمي</p> <p>لمزيد من المعلومات يرجى التواصل مع : ايمان عبدالوهاب <a href="mailto:201970033@uaeu.ac.ae">201970033@uaeu.ac.ae</a> مع وافر الشكر والتقدير</p>

## Appendix 5: Ethical Approval from the United Arab Emirates University



Date: 28/03/2022

ERS No. ERS\_2022\_8473

### Social Sciences Ethics Sub-Committee

#### Approval Letter

This is to certify that research proposal No: ERS\_2022\_8473, titled: "Heterogeneous and Homogeneous Grouping Impact on English Language Learning.", submitted by Eman Abdelwahab has been reviewed and approved by the UAEU subcommittee for research ethics in social sciences.

Sincerely



Prof. Hala Elhoweris

Email: [halae@uae.ac.ae](mailto:halae@uae.ac.ae)

Chair of the UAEU Research Ethics Sub-Committee for Social Sciences

Associate Provost for Research Office

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WSC  
Social Sciences  
Ethics Committee

جامعة الإمارات  
The University of the Emirates

UAEU

جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة  
United Arab Emirates University



## UAE UNIVERSITY MASTER THESIS NO. 2022:117

This thesis is concerned with the status of homogeneous grouping implication in English language classrooms in the United Arab Emirates public schools. The study aims at exploring students' and teachers' perceptions toward homogeneous learning in English language classrooms, encountered challenges and possible suggestions of improvement, through the use of mixed method.

**Eman Mohamed Abdelwahab** received her Master of Education from the Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction, College of Education at UAE University, UAE. She received her BA of Teaching English as a Foreign Language from the College of Education at Ajman University, UAE.

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