Voices in ELT: Exploring Tunisian EFL Teachers' Attitudes Towards English Language Skills Development

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Abstract

This paper highlights the pivotal role of teachers' attitudes in shaping skills development in English language classrooms. It offers valuable insights into how Tunisian EFL teachers' perspectives regarding the importance and classification of the four language skills influence language learning, the assessment process, and the development of the learners' communicative competence in English. The analysis of quantitative data gathered through a questionnaire administered to 150 Tunisian EFL teachers shows that teachers strongly emphasise speaking as the most important skill while listening receives less attention in their English lessons or the English language textbooks in use. The findings, also, reveal some discrepancies in teachers' attitudes towards the hierarchical classification of the four language skills in order of importance, as well as discrepancies between the perceived importance of the four language skills in the language learning process and their sequencing in order of importance in the English textbook in use. The paper highlights the need to reconsider the importance placed on listening in the Tunisian EFL context, underscores the urgent need to reevaluate language skills development in Tunisian EFL classrooms, and suggests the adoption of a more balanced approach that gives equal importance to the four language skills. By addressing these issues, the paper offers valuable insights into developing Tunisian EFL learners' language skills, promoting their communicative competence, and ultimately improving teaching and learning practices in Tunisian EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Attitudes, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English Language Teaching (ELT), Language skills development, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Communicative competence.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the attitudes of Tunisian EFL teachers towards English language skills development. It sheds light on the key factors that hinder the development of the four language skills, namely listening, reading, speaking and writing, in Tunisian EFL classrooms and, consequently, the development of the Tunisian EFL learners' proficiency in English which has become an essential factor for the competitiveness of the learners in the current globalized and modern society (Wu et al., 2020). The central question guiding this paper is: **What are the attitudes of Tunisian EFL teachers towards English language skills development?**

The researcher posited that teachers' attitudes towards the development of the four language skills significantly influence the effectiveness of language teaching and learning and enhance their learners' communicative competence in the English language.

2. Review of the literature

Language serves as a powerful tool for interpersonal communication. It allows individuals to communicate, express themselves, and understand others (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In Second Language Acquisition, learners need to develop a range of skills to communicate proficiently in the target language. Proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills serves as the foundation of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). To communicate effectively in the target language, learners should go beyond the rote memorisation of a list of vocabulary items or grammar rules; rather, they need to strive to develop a range of skills to effectively communicate in the target language. Ellis (2008) emphasizes the importance of developing the four language skills in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and highlights their role in fostering learners' communicative competence in the target language. It is now widely acknowledged that acquiring a foreign language entails acquiring 'communicative competence' (Canale and Swain, 1980) in that language. Canale and Swain (1980) introduced the concept of 'communicative competence' as a framework for understanding the various aspects of language proficiency. They proposed that language learning involves more than just grammar and vocabulary; it also includes pragmatic aspects such as knowing how to use language appropriately in different social contexts. This concept revolutionized language teaching and laid the foundation for communicative language teaching approaches. Hedge (2000) provided further insights into communicative competence, particularly in the context of English language teaching. She expanded on the components of communicative competence, including linguistic, pragmatic, discourse, and strategic competencies, as well as fluency. Hedge's work has been instrumental in guiding language educators in designing effective language teaching programs that address the diverse needs of language learners. Through the insights provided by scholars such as Canale & Swain (1980), and Hedge (2000), educators and researchers gain valuable perspectives on the complex interplay of language skills involved in mastering a foreign language.

In this research study, the researcher refers to the term attitudes or beliefs to teachers' pedagogic beliefs (Borg 2001: 187) manifested in their teaching approaches, materials selection, activities, and classroom behaviours, and argues that teachers' attitudes affect their classroom instruction and ultimately the learning outcomes. Specifically, positive teachers' attitudes regarding the importance of developing the four language skills are deemed essential for fostering EFL learners' language proficiency and communicative competence in the English language. However, it is worth noting that teachers' misconceptions and limited awareness of learners' lack of interest in skill development can pose significant challenges and lead to unfavourable outcomes for both the teachers and the learners. Massari (2020: 59) argues that teachers' attitudes regarding English teaching significantly contribute to the challenges encountered by learners. Zacharias (2003:7) underscores the value of investigating teachers' perceptions, noting its potential to provide profound insights into various educational aspects. This sentiment aligns with the views of Borg (2006), who highlights the significance of understanding teachers' beliefs and how they influence classroom practices. Borg emphasizes that such understanding can lead to more effective teaching approaches. Similarly, Freeman (1996) emphasizes the importance of exploring teachers' beliefs and attitudes, suggesting that these internal factors significantly impact their teaching behaviours. Freeman argues that studying teachers' beliefs can lead to a better understanding of their instructional choices and strategies. Moreover, Kagan (1992) emphasizes the impact of teachers' beliefs on learners' outcomes, suggesting that teachers' perceptions of their learners' capabilities can influence their teaching approaches and the learning environment.

To contextualize this study that focuses on exploring Tunisian EFL teachers' attitudes toward language

skills development, it is crucial to consider the fundamental role of language skills in fostering learners' communicative competence and their acquisition of the English language. Richards (2008) emphasizes the vital roles that speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills play in language proficiency. For him, these skills are foundational pillars, each contributing significantly to the holistic development of learners' communicative competence.

The interconnection of language skills is crucial, as they support and enhance one another. Ur (2020), for example, emphasizes that reading and writing are interdependent skills essential for effective written communication. Reading enhances vocabulary, thus improving writing skills. Similarly, speaking and listening complement each other for effective communication (Grabe, 2009). Thornbury (2017) argues that listening and speaking are closely intertwined, often occurring simultaneously in real-life contexts. To develop these skills, Harmer (2015) suggests that learners need to be exposed to progressively challenging and authentic materials and tasks. To master the four language skills, Lightbown and Spada (2013) argue that it is important to integrate listening and speaking with reading and writing. For them, combining these four skills, helps learners master the language and communicate confidently and fluently in real-life situations (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Understanding the importance of these skills, their interconnectedness and the timing that should be allocated to each skill can enhance language learning outcomes. Nation & Newton (2009: 12) contend that each skill referred to as a strand should have roughly the same amount of time in a well-balanced course and that ideally each skill should occupy about 25 per cent of the course time. They maintain "There are many ways of giving time to the four strands and these will depend on many factors like the skills and preferences of the teachers, the expectations of learners and the school, the time-tabling constraints, and current beliefs about language teaching and learning. What is important is that over a period of time, each strand gets about the same amount of time (Nation & Newton, 2009: 12).

The correlation between teachers' attitudes and their instructional practices has been the subject of extensive research (Johnson, 1992, Karavas-Doukas, 1996). Abid-Mrabet, S. (2006) explored this relationship and focused on the disparities between teachers' attitudes and their actual classroom practices. She explored the cognitive dimensions of how teachers' attitudes influence the nature of language instruction and the learning outcome. She conducted a study on verbal interaction in Tunisian EFL classrooms, surveying both teachers and learners. Her research findings revealed a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions of their classrooms as learner-centred and communicative, and the actual classroom dynamics. She maintained that classroom research could profit from utilizing teachers' and learners' perspectives to provide additional data in the ongoing debate about how to create authentic opportunities for communicative competence development. McDonald and Walker (1975) highlighted the discrepancies between what teachers perceive they are doing, what they report they are doing, and their actual practices, emphasizing a notable gap in understanding and implementation (cited in Powell, 1999). Willis (1990: III) argues that interlanguage theorists like Corder (1967) and Selinker (1972) and classroom researchers like Ellis (1984) have been aware for many years that 'input' does not equal 'intake', and what teachers claim to be teaching bears only a tenuous relationship to what learners are actually learning.

3. Methodological Framework

In this study, a comprehensive sample comprising 150 teachers diligently completed the administered questionnaire. The collected questionnaire data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data underwent rigorous scrutiny through frequencies and descriptive statistics,

facilitating a meticulous examination of the attitudes of Tunisian EFL teachers. This in-depth investigation of teachers' attitudes offers profound insights into various aspects of language skills development in Tunisian EFL classrooms and provides a gateway to address the issues and challenges that impede the development of the Tunisian learners' four language skills and their communicative competence. Thus, by scrutinizing and comprehending these attitudes, ELT professionals and practitioners can effectively address the challenges faced by the learners and devise strategies to cultivate an environment that develops the learners' language skills and communicative competence in the English language.

4. Subjects of the Study

The participants (n = 150) were randomly chosen. The teacher participants were non-native English-speaking educators with homogeneous backgrounds and varying teaching experience levels. They shared a common adherence to the prescribed Tunisian English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum, which mandated the use of standardized ELT textbooks approved by the Tunisian Ministry of Education. Furthermore, participants were expected and encouraged to adopt the Communicative Approach to Language Teaching (CLT) in their English language instruction, as outlined in the National ELT curricula.

5. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process involved two crucial steps. Firstly, to obtain official authorisation and uphold ethical standards, the researcher sought permission from the Tunisian Ministry of Education to administer the questionnaire which was specifically tailored for Tunisian EFL teachers. Secondly, the researcher obtained explicit consent from the participating teachers to answer the questionnaire questions. These procedures were found to be necessary as they increased the likelihood that the questions in the questionnaire were understood and responded to correctly. Additionally, measures were taken to ensure that each subject filled in the questionnaire individually and to assure the respondents of the confidentiality of their answers.

6. Data Analysis

The rich ethnographic information gathered through the questionnaire survey holds immense significance in profiling the attitudes of Tunisian EFL teachers towards language skills development in the teaching/learning process.

6.1 Tunisian teachers' attitudes towards English language skills development

TQ1[1] "From your practical experience, how important are the following skills in teaching the English language: Speaking, writing, reading and listening?"

In addressing the question in the teachers' questionnaire, the data analysis reveals important findings. A substantial majority of Tunisian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors (83.3%) perceive speaking proficiency as highly significant. Conversely, exactly half of the teacher respondents (50.0%) affirm the importance attributed to writing skills. Furthermore, a majority of participants (54.0%) underscore the importance of reading comprehension, while a notably lower percentage (32.0%) of the surveyed educators accentuate the significance of listening skills. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 1 below:

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[1] TQ1 refers to question number **1** in the teachers' questionnaire.

Skills	Very Important		Important		Not important	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Speaking	125	83.3%	25	16.7%	0	0.0%
Writing	75	50%	75	50.0%	0	0.0%
Reading	81	54,0%	69	46,0 %	0	0.0%
Listening	48	32,0%	87	58.0%	15	10.0%

Table 1. The Importance of the Four Language Skills

Data analysis reveals that, among the four language skills of speaking, reading, writing, and listening, Tunisian EFL teachers predominantly prioritize speaking and reading as the most important skills. In contrast, writing and listening receive comparatively less emphasis. The prioritization of speaking and reading skills may signify a pedagogical orientation that aligns with the goal of fostering effective communication in Tunisian English language classrooms. Consequently, the observed emphasis on speaking can be perceived as an intentional strategy employed by the teachers to enhance their learners' overall communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) argue that meaningful communication involves not just the accurate use of language but also the ability to express oneself effectively. Through speaking practices, learners can improve their ability to convey meaning clearly and cohesively.

Another notable finding is the EFL teachers' awareness regarding the importance of the reading skill which is classified as the second most important skill (54%). Grabe (2009) maintains that in modern societies, being a skilled reader is crucial for success. He emphasizes that success is significantly more challenging to achieve without strong reading abilities. Grabe further asserts, "A person's future opportunities for success and prosperity will be even more entwined with skilled reading abilities. It is therefore an important societal responsibility to offer every person the opportunity to become a skilled reader, and in many cases, this means becoming a skilled L2 reader" (Grabe, 2009: 6).

Aligned with this perspective, numerous research studies (Krashen,1993; Mason and Krashen,1997; Horst, 2005), underscore the necessity for teachers to improve learners' language proficiency in a second or foreign language by fostering their reading abilities. Krashen (1993), for example, contends that engaging in free voluntary reading or sustained independent reading is instrumental in enhancing various aspects of language proficiency, including reading comprehension, writing proficiency, vocabulary acquisition, spelling, and grammatical development. Mason and Krashen (1997) underscore the positive correlation between extensive reading and enhanced reading comprehension skills among language learners. Additionally, Horst (2005) provides further support by elucidating the profound impact of extensive reading on vocabulary expansion in the language acquisition process.

It is, therefore, imperative to acknowledge the pivotal role of teachers in developing proficient reading skills among EFL learners. By exposing EFL learners to diverse cultural perspectives through reading, they can develop empathy and understanding for people from different backgrounds (Kramsch, 1993) and this exposure to cultural diversity can broaden learners' perspectives and enhance their ability to communicate effectively in multicultural settings (Byram, 1997). Additionally, by adopting pedagogical strategies that foster both intensive and extensive reading practices (Harmer,2015), Tunisian EFL teachers can empower learners to become independent and proficient readers able to analyse and engage critically with texts (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Anderson, Krathwohl, & Bloom (2001) maintain that critical reading can improve learners' ability to question, interpret, and evaluate information, which are essential skills for

effective communication, and helps them develop their ability to think creatively and problem-solve, which are important skills for academic and professional success.

6.1.2 Classification of the Four Language Skills in Order of Importance

TQ2 "Please Classify the skills of reading, speaking, writing and listening in order of importance."

Surprisingly, the teacher respondents' reactions to the second question, which solicited their classification of reading, speaking, writing, and listening in order of importance, show that a significant majority (67.8%) of the participants ranked speaking as the most important skill, but the subsequent order of importance of the three other skills differed. Specifically, writing, which garnered a third level of importance in question one (50%) but gained a second level of importance in question two (22.1%), followed by listening (7.4%), and lastly, reading (6.7%).

To put it differently, the data presented in Table 2. indicates a strong emphasis among Tunisian EFL teachers on teaching and improving the learners' speaking skills. This prioritization of speaking is evident in both questions one and two. Interestingly, a shift in the ranking of reading is observed in question two, where it emerges as the least important skill. This contrasts with the teachers' perception in question one, where reading was ranked as the second most important skill. This inconsistency suggests a potential difference in how teachers view the significance of reading skills in the EFL classroom. Henceforth, this finding which provides valuable insights into Tunisian EFL teachers' perspectives on skill prioritization, indicates a preference for focusing on speaking and writing over reading and listening.

Skills	1		2		3		4	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Speaking	101	67.8%	30	20.1%	15	10.1%	3	2.0%
Writing	33	22.1%	53	35.6%	46	30.9%	17	11.4%
Reading	10	6.7%	48	32.2%	59	39.6%	32	21.5%
Listening	11	7.4%	16	10.7%	27	18.1%	95	63.3%

Table 2. Classification of the Four Language Skills in Order of Importance

The author believes that Tunisian ELT professionals and practitioners need to be aware that teaching speaking and writing not only improves language accuracy and fluency but also enhances critical thinking, stimulates cultural awareness and develops the learners' communicative competence in the English Language. Bygate (1987) emphasizes the cognitive intricacies underpinning spoken discourse, suggesting that speaking tasks prompt learners to arrange their thoughts logically and present them persuasively. This cognitive engagement in structuring arguments cultivates analytical prowess, thereby enhancing their critical thinking and communication efficacy. Nunan (1991) highlights the role of speaking in promoting interactive communication, suggesting that speaking tasks that require learners to engage with complex ideas and defend their opinions can help them develop their analytical skills. This type of interaction encourages learners to interpret and evaluate information, leading to more meaningful communication and fostering critical thinking skills. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) elaborate on how role-plays and similar exercises nurture empathy and understanding towards differing viewpoints. Encouraging learners to navigate alternative perspectives and justify their stances fosters critical inquiry and enriches communicative competence across various contexts. In parallel, Kramsch (1993) underscores the transformative potential of writing tasks that prompt learners to engage with cultural themes or

introspectively explore their cultural backgrounds. This heightened cultural awareness enriches communicative competence by sensitizing learners to the cultural nuances intrinsic to language use. Similarly, Flower and Hayes (1981) advocate for the cognitive benefits of writing, positing that it engenders critical thinking by compelling learners to dissect information, construct cogent arguments, and engage with diverse viewpoints.

It should be noted here that the incorporation of speaking and writing instruction in the Tunisian EFL pedagogy shouldn't be intended to improve EFL learners' language proficiency but it should also develop their critical thinking and cultural awareness. An issue that should be further explored. Moreover, the relatively lower emphasis on listening skills necessitates greater attention, as this skill is equally indispensable for language acquisition and effective communication.

Furthermore, listening, which is considered by Nunan (2015: 34) as the gasoline in the engine of second language acquisition and by Rost (2001: 7) as the most widely used skill, is considered by 63.3 % of the Tunisian teacher respondents as the least important skill in the curriculum and the learning process. This discrepancy raises questions about whether teachers' perceptions align with their actual classroom practices. If this is the case, the researcher wonders if the teacher respondents are aware that such a perspective does not help them assist their learners develop their learners' communicative competence and acquire the English language. In other words, this apparent neglect of listening skills among Tunisian teacher respondents suggests a potential lack of awareness regarding the significance of aural input in fostering the communicative competence of EFL learners. Listening, as Rost (2001) maintains, is a complex process which involves both 'bottom-up' processing and 'top-down' processing. Richards, (1990) in Nunan (2015: 39) explains these processes as follows: "Bottom-up processing refers to the use of incoming data as a source of information about the meaning of a message. From this perspective, the process of comprehension begins with the message received, which is analysed at successive levels of organization – sounds, words, clauses and sentences – until the intended meaning is arrived at. Top-down processing, on the other hand, refers to the use of background knowledge in understanding the meaning of a message. Background knowledge may take several forms. It may be previous knowledge about the topic of discourse, it may be situational or contextual knowledge, or it may be knowledge stored in long-term memory in the form of "schemata" or "scripts" – plans about the overall structure of events and the relationship between them".

This goal-oriented skill is considered, by scholars such as Nunan, 2015, Richards, 1990, Rost, 2001, Goh, 2017, and Wilson, 2018, vital because it assists learners in improving their language performance and acquiring the target language. Rost (2001:7) argues "Listening is not only a skill area in language performance but is also a critical means of acquiring a second language (L2)". Developing EFL learners' listening skills is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, listening is an essential skill for effective communication and language proficiency (Nunan, 2013). Secondly, it enhances learners' ability to comprehend spoken English, which is vital for academic and professional success (Goh, 2017). Additionally, improving listening skills can lead to better speaking and pronunciation (Vandergrift, 2007). Moreover, in today's globalized world, where English serves as a lingua franca, proficient listening skills are crucial for intercultural communication and understanding (Seidlhofer, 2011). Furthermore, developing listening skills can enhance learners' motivation (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Effective listening instruction can actively engage learners and make the language-learning process more meaningful and enjoyable (Wilson, 2018). Rost (2001) and Kurita (2012) argue that a major difference between more successful and less successful learners is related to their ability to use listening as an instrument of learning

because listening comprehension provides the appropriate situation for the acquisition and expansion of other language skills.

By bringing attention to this aspect, the study underscores the need for EFL practitioners to reevaluate the prominence assigned to listening within language learning contexts. It offers a valuable point of reflection for educators to incorporate listening activities into their English language lessons. Recognizing the paramount importance of listening in English Language Teaching (ELT) is instrumental in fostering the development of learners' listening comprehension skills, enhancing their overall language proficiency, and refining their ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations.

Additional discrepancies will emerge when juxtaposing these findings with the data gathered from the subsequent questions regarding the description of the importance of the four language skills in Tunisian English language textbooks in use in Tunisian basic and secondary school classrooms.

6.1.3 Classification of the Four Language Skills in the Textbooks-in-Use

TQ 3 "Please classify in order of importance these skills in the textbooks according to the following rating scale: Extremely low- low - fair – high- extremely high?"

Question three of the survey aims to gather information regarding the perceived importance of the four language skills as presented in the English language textbooks in use in the Tunisian EFL basic and secondary schools. The summarized data is provided in Table 3 below.

Textbook	Extremely low	Low	Fair	High	Extremely high
1. Speaking skill focus	2.7 %	4.0 %	32.7 %	40.0 %	20.7 %
2. Reading skill focus	0.0 %	2.7 %	21.3 %	38.7 %	37.3 %
3. Writing skill focus	0.7 %	6.0 %	42.0 %	43.37 %	8.0 %
4. Listening skill focus	1.3 %	20.0 %	54.7 %	17.3 %	6.7 %

Table 3. Classification of the Four Language Skills in the Textbooks-in-Use

Table 3 displays the distribution of percentages assigned by teachers to the four language skills in their English language textbooks in use. Notably, the highest percentage (37.3%) was assigned to the reading skill focus, indicating a relatively strong emphasis on reading. In contrast, the lowest percentage (6.7%) was allocated to the listening skill focus, suggesting a lesser emphasis on this skill. This emphasis on reading suggests that Tunisian course designers recognize the importance of developing reading skills in Tunisian EFL classrooms. They appear to understand that prioritizing reading instruction enables Tunisian EFL teachers to enhance their learners' communicative competence and overall proficiency in the English language (Anderson & Anderson, 2010).
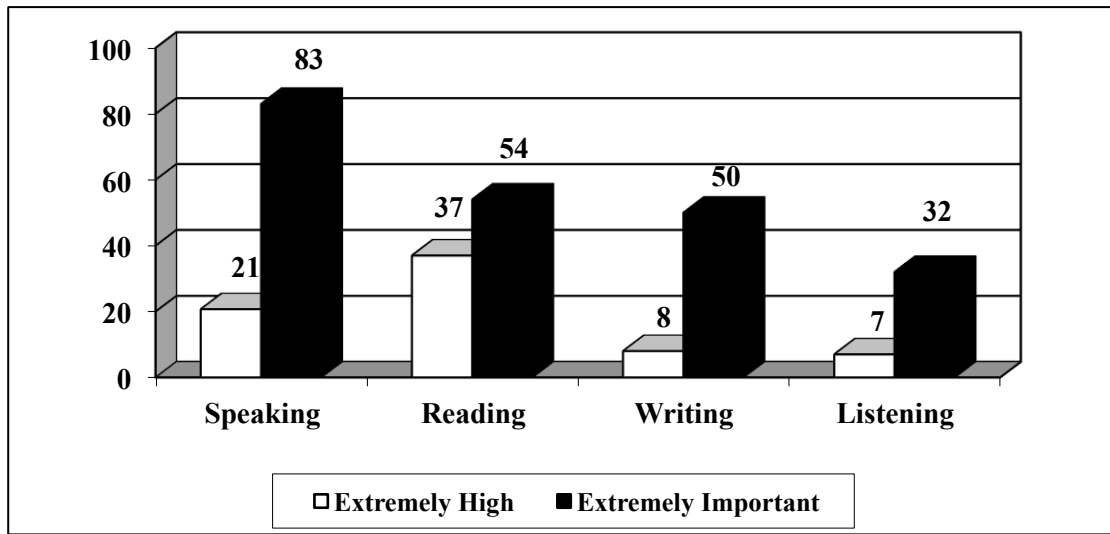
Figure 1. Comparison of the Informants' and the Textbooks-in-Use Classification of the Four Language Skills

When comparing these findings with the respondent teachers' previous responses to questions one and two, significant disparities emerge between teachers' perceived importance of language skills in the learning process and their representation in English language textbooks.

Despite the high value placed on speaking, as indicated in earlier responses, only 20.7% of teachers rated the speaking skill focus in textbooks as extremely high. In contrast, 37.3% of the respondents believed that the reading skill focus was extremely high. Additionally, only 6.7% of the respondents considered the listening skill focus in the Tunisian EFL textbooks as extremely high. These findings highlight a notable discrepancy between the attention devoted to reading in the Tunisian English language textbooks in-use and its perceived importance in the learning process. This disparity suggests a lack of balance among the four language skills and a potential misalignment between the curriculum and the teachers' instructional priorities. Furthermore, this misalignment between the classification of the four language skills by the teacher informants and those presented in the textbooks-in-use could be attributed to various factors (see Abid-Mrabet, S. 2006).

Firstly, they may stem from the teachers' dissatisfaction with the lack of adequate resources in Tunisian EFL schools that support the development of all four language skills as required in their English language textbooks. Richards & Rodgers, 2001 maintain that The lack of resources could hinder the implementation of a balanced language curriculum.

Secondly, the misalignment between the Tunisian ELT curricula and the baccalaureate exams may also contribute to the discrepancy and the lack of balance allocated to the four language skills in the Tunisian EFL context. That is to say, the emphasis placed on the reading and writing skills in the Tunisian baccalaureate exams may influence Tunisian teachers' instructional focus, neglecting the speaking and listening skills which are not deemed as relevant to the baccalaureate exams (Brown, 2001; Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Given this context, the author wonders when ELT professionals, practitioners and decision-makers at the Ministry of Education will become aware of the necessity of a more balanced approach in the teaching and learning of the four language skills, and of the necessity of achieving equilibrium in the assessment of the four language competencies within the Tunisian baccalaureate exams. She argues that this recognition has become urgent and indispensable not only because of the role played by the four language skills in developing learners' communicative competence, which is a cornerstone principle and

a foundational pillar upon which all Tunisian ELT curricula and textbooks in use are based but also because Tunisian learners need to function effectively in a competitive world that relies on high-stakes standardized exams, which widely acknowledge the importance and significance of the four language skills in the learning and assessment processes.

Thirdly, learners' lack of motivation to develop their speaking and listening skills may also play a role. If learners do not perceive the immediate relevance or utility of these skills in their lives, they may prioritize other activities or subjects (Dörnyei, 2001).

Fourthly, the issue of large class sizes can present a challenge for Tunisian EFL teachers, as it hinders their ability to provide individualized attention and practice opportunities for each learner, particularly in tasks that require active participation and interaction, such as speaking and listening tasks (Freeman, 1996).

Finally, it is important to consider the teachers' limited understanding of the theoretical and pedagogical principles of communicative language teaching. Without a solid grasp of these principles, teachers may struggle to implement a balanced approach that effectively develops all language skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Additionally, inadequate teacher training in effective teaching and assessing the four language skills may further contribute to the observed imbalance (Nunan, 2003).

Recognizing and tackling these challenges can empower Tunisian EFL teachers to cultivate a more holistic approach to language skills development. This approach can equip learners with a broader range of skills essential for success in academic and real-world settings. Moreover, it can enhance the development of learners' language proficiency and communicative competence in English.

Conclusion

This paper highlights the pivotal role of Tunisian EFL teachers' attitudes in shaping skills development. It offers valuable insights into how teachers' attitudes regarding the importance and classification of the four language skills influence language learning and even the evaluation processes. The findings reveal some discrepancies and mismatches in Tunisian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the hierarchical classification of the four language skills in order of importance, as well as discrepancies between the perceived importance of the four language skills in the language learning process and their sequencing in order of importance in the English textbook in use. Additionally, it indicates that there is a discernible preference among Tunisian EFL teachers for prioritizing speaking and writing in the learning process while the predominant emphasis within the English language textbooks is placed on speaking and reading. This mismatch shows that teachers' attitudes and practices do not align with the language skills development principles endorsed by the Tunisian English language textbooks in-use. Moreover, this paper argues that the relatively lower emphasis by the Tunisian EFL teacher respondents on listening skills necessitates greater attention, as this skill is equally indispensable for language acquisition and effective communication. It calls attention to the need for EFL practitioners and course designers to reassess the prominence given to listening and provides Tunisian EFL teachers with a valuable opportunity for reflection, encouraging them to incorporate more listening activities into their English language lessons and textbooks to enhance learners' language proficiency and communicative competence in English language.

The author draws EFL teachers, professionals, and decision-makers to the importance of adopting a more balanced approach (Nation & Newton, 2009) that enables learners to equally master all four language skills and equip them with essential communication skills crucial for both academic and real-world contexts.

Moving forward, it is hoped that the ethnographic insights provided by this paper on language skills development will be complemented by data from video recordings of actual ELT lessons This juxtaposition aims to compare teachers' attitudes with real classroom practices, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics influencing language skills development which could be further explored through a learner attitude survey to gain deeper insights into the challenges faced in teaching and developing the four language skills in Tunisian EFL classrooms.

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