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To cite this version:

Youssef Mezrigui. Communication Difficulties in Learners of English as a Foreign Language : whys and ways out. Linguistics. Université Rennes 2, 2011. English. NNT : 2011REN20057 . tel-00681272

HAL Id: tel-00681272

https://theses.hal.science/tel-00681272

Submitted on 21 Mar 2012

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Sous le sceau de l'Université Européenne de Bretagne

UNIVERSITÉ RENNES 2

EA 3874 LIDILE

Ecole Doctorale - Arts Lettres Langues

Communication Difficulties in Learners of English as a Foreign Language: Whys and ways out

Thèse de Doctorat

Discipline: ANGLAIS

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Soutenue le 19 novembre 2011

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Résumé

Cette étude vise à mettre au jour les écueils de communication auxquels sont confrontés les apprenants tunisiens de l'anglais langue étrangère dans l'enseignement secondaire, et à partir de ces constats, propose quelques recommandations susceptibles de les aider à surmonter ces obstacles.

Ma modeste expérience d'enseignement, ainsi que les réponses aux questionnaires et aux entretiens semblent corroborer le fait que ces difficultés de communication ont pour origine deux facteurs principaux: le manque d'exposition à l'anglais aussi bien sur les bancs de la classe qu'à l'extérieur, et l'inadéquation de certaines méthodes pédagogiques.

Une des raisons principales de ce problème provient du fait que les élèves tunisiens ne pratiquent pas suffisamment l'anglais. En effet, bon nombre de ces élèves ne pratiquent cette langue qu'en classe. Et même dans ce cadre, ils l'emploient peu; leur emploi de temps ne comprenant que trois heures d'anglais par semaine. Conscients de ce manque, la grande majorité des élèves, répondant à un questionnaire portant sur le nombre d'heures d'anglais qu'ils veulent étudier, ont suggéré d'accroitre le nombre d'heures à cinq heures par semaine au moins.

Ce qui rend la situation encore plus alarmante, c'est que le français – première langue étrangère en Tunisie – éclipse ainsi l'anglais et le relègue à une place secondaire bien qu'il soit partout considéré comme la langue la plus utilisée dans le monde. Ceci a pour conséquence que les élèves tunisiens s'intéressent davantage au français qu'à l'anglais.

En outre, un grand nombre d'élèves semblent ne pas avoir conscience de l'importance de l'anglais dans leur carrière. En effet, le résultat d'un questionnaire révèle que certains apprenants déclarent que si l'anglais était une matière à option, ils ne le choisiraient pas.

Cette attitude à l'égard de l'anglais a également des causes psychologiques. D'après mon expérience personnelle, j'ai remarqué que nombre d'élèves de l'enseignement secondaire dont le niveau en cette langue laisse à désirer sont découragés. De ce fait, ils pensent qu'il est trop tard, sinon impossible, pour eux de rattraper leur retard et d'améliorer leur niveau.

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Pour toutes ces raisons, beaucoup d'élèves ont tort de déduire que l'anglais n'est enseigné que pour la forme. Le fait que le coefficient de cette matière diffère d'un niveau à un autre, ou selon que l'élève suit une filière littéraire ou scientifique les conforte dans cette idée.

Pour résoudre ce problème, on doit encourager l'élève à employer l'anglais plus souvent en l'impliquant dans plusieurs situations communicatives. Cet objectif peut se concrétiser en créant un environnement, à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur de la classe, où l'élève se trouve obligé de s'exprimer en anglais. A titre d'exemple, on peut lancer des clubs où il fait des activités de toutes sortes qui sont susceptibles d'améliorer son anglais.

Son niveau peut aussi s'améliorer si certaines matières sont enseignées en anglais. Cette démarche aide l'élève à prendre conscience du rôle de cette matière et l'incite, par conséquent, à lui accorder une grande importance.

On doit, enfin, prendre en considération le rôle primordial des facteurs affectifs concernant les difficultés de communication. Il importe d'expliquer aux élèves que ces difficultés sont normales et que tout apprenant, si brillant soit-il, peut les rencontrer. On peut les convaincre en leur montrant que même dans notre langue maternelle, on peut avoir du mal à nous exprimer.

Les élèves doivent aussi avoir conscience des causes de la faiblesse de leur niveau et des mesures susceptibles de les aider à la surmonter. Outre sa connaissance personnelle des niveaux des élèves, l'enseignant peut leur demander, de préférence à l'aide d'un questionnaire, de dresser une liste des causes supposées de leur faible niveau, ainsi que des solutions qu'ils suggèrent. Se voyant entourés d'attention, ils pourraient redoubler d'efforts afin d'améliorer leur niveau.

De même, les élèves doivent prendre conscience de l'importance de l'anglais. L'enseignant est appelé à leur expliquer que cette langue est devenue une nécessité incontournable dans plusieurs domaines tels que l'emploi, les voyages, et les loisirs.

Il peut également rappeler le fait que l'anglais est, de loin, la langue la plus utilisée du monde, et est donc la langue de communication internationale par excellence. Pour les convaincre de ce fait, il peut avoir recours à des statistiques corroborant ces affirmations. A titre d'exemple, l'anglais est la langue maternelle ou officielle d'un cinquième de la population mondiale, et 80% des informations électroniques sont publiées en anglais.

Outre les facteurs précités, certaines méthodes pédagogiques jugées inadéquates et infructueuses sont aussi à l'origine du niveau médiocre des lycéens en anglais. On peut mentionner l'approche communicative appliquée en Tunisie depuis de longues années. Cette approche n'a pas réussis à atteindre les objectifs d'apprentissage escomptés en raison de certaines contraintes sérieuses qui ont entravé sa mise en application.

Un des principes fondamentaux de l'approche communicative consiste à mettre l'accent sur le sens aux dépens de la forme. Ceci a engendré des conséquences indésirables et a rendu l'objectif escompté encore plus difficile à atteindre. La plupart des élèves sont incapables de s'exprimer correctement que ce soit oralement ou par écrit. Ils ont aussi des difficultés de compréhension des textes authentiques ; leurs bagages grammatical et lexical étant fort limités. Ces faiblesses sont liées à l'approche communicative qui stipule que la grammaire ne doit pas être enseignée explicitement, car elle peut être acquise implicitement au fur et à mesure qu'on emploie la langue communicativement.

Néanmoins, le faible niveau en grammaire peut créer chez certains élèves une sorte d'obstacle psychologique qui peut les empêcher d'apprendre l'anglais et d'y être plus intéressés. Conscients de leur faiblesse en grammaire, ils évitent souvent de communiquer oralement de peur de faire des fautes. Par manque de confiance, ils sont aussi peu enclins à participer aux autres activités. Cet obstacle psychologique souligne à quel point la grammaire est importante, c'est pourquoi une erreur grammaticale est toujours jugée plus sérieuse que les autres types d'erreurs.

Les apprenants doivent, tôt ou tard, se trouver dans des situations où ils sont obligés d'employer un anglais correct comme dans un discours officiel, une conférence, ou bien une recherche académique. Ces situations exigent l'exactitude du sens aussi bien que celle de la forme. Ces deux composantes linguistiques sont en relation d'interdépendance.

Une autre particularité de l'approche communicative réside dans la façon de traiter les erreurs commises par les élèves. Selon cette approche, les erreurs sont considérées comme une étape nécessaire de n'importe quel apprentissage. Les enseignants ne doivent pas trop focaliser sur les erreurs des apprenants. La correction immédiate est fort déconseillée, car elle peut interrompre l'élève en pleine production orale. On peut néanmoins affirmer qu'en négligeant de le corriger, on risque de l'encourager

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involontairement à apprendre une langue truffée d'erreurs et d'anéantir tout effort d'amélioration, ce qui contribue à rendre la compétence communicative très difficile à réaliser.

Un autre principe de l'approche communicative, qui est fort critiqué, consiste à donner la priorité à l'expression orale au détriment de l'expression écrite. La langue est, pourtant, un outil de communication orale et écrite. Il serait, par conséquent, peu pertinent de trop se concentrer sur les activités orales et de négliger les activités écrites, car cela pourrait, au mieux, aider les apprenants à s'exprimer oralement, mais il leur serait très difficile de savoir rédiger.

Donc, étant donné que la langue est utilisée pour la communication orale et écrite, on devrait, dans la logique des choses, accorder la même importance à l'expression orale qu'à l'expression écrite. L'enseignant devrait être invité à fournir des activités de toutes sortes, afin de promouvoir la compétence orale aussi bien que la compétence écrite de ses élèves.

A part les spécificités susmentionnées de l'approche communicative, il y a d'autres contraintes qui ont contribué à entraver sa mise en application. On peut noter, à titre d'exemple, le manque de matériel pédagogique, surtout celui qui est indispensable pour l'exécution des tâches communicatives. L'absence de ce matériel peut empêcher d'atteindre les objectifs de la leçon.

Les classes nombreuses posent un autre problème. Il est irréalisable pour l'enseignant, dans des classes encombrées, de faire participer tous les élèves aux différentes activités d'apprentissage, et il ne peut jamais évaluer tous leurs travaux écrits, qu'ils soient faits en classe ou à la maison. Il est également difficile pour l'enseignant et les élèves de se déplacer dans la classe, surtout lorsque ces derniers travaillent en groupes.

Etant donné que le niveau de la majorité des élèves est peu élevé, on prône le rôle actif de l'apprenant. Le succès de beaucoup d'activités d'apprentissage est tributaire d'un certain nombre d'élèves dont le niveau est bon ou du moins satisfaisant. Par ailleurs, le manque de formation pédagogique adéquate des enseignants, aussi rend difficile la tâche de mettre en application l'approche communicative.

Tenant compte de ce qui vient d'être avancé, on pourrait affirmer que l'adoption de l'approche communicative depuis une longue période est parmi les facteurs qui ont contribué aux difficultés de communication des apprenants tunisiens de l'anglais langue

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étrangère. Il est risqué, par conséquent, de recourir à une seule méthode d'enseignement sans prendre en considération le fait que ces apprenants diffèrent sur le plan social, le plan cognitif et le plan affectif, et ainsi que sur le plan de leurs attitudes envers cette langue et de leurs futurs besoins linguistiques. La solution optimale serait, donc, d'adopter une approche éclectique.

Bien qu'on prétende que l'emploi de la langue maternelle dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères est révolue avec la méthode pédagogique connue sous le nom de la Méthode de Traduction-Grammaire (Grammar-Translation Method), on remarque que l'arabe est encore utilisé – parfois fréquemment – par quelques enseignants pour expliquer des mots dont le sens est difficile à comprendre. On peut affirmer que le recours à la langue maternelle, s'il est très fréquent, contribue à un niveau médiocre en anglais.

En fait, le recours à la langue maternelle comme technique d'enseignement d'une langue étrangère est controversé. La controverse réside principalement dans les bienfaits et les inconvénients de cette méthode. Parmi les bienfaits, on pourrait affirmer qu'elle facilite la tâche tant à l'enseignant que l'apprenant. Il y a des mots qui restent toujours ambigus quelles que soient les explications fournies. Ces mots, pourtant, deviennent clairs quand on emploie la langue maternelle des élèves.

Parmi les inconvénients de cette technique on cite:

- Elle minimise les chances de l'élève de s'exposer davantage à la langue étrangère et la pratiquer;
- Elle réduit l'apprentissage de la langue étrangère à un simple exercice de traduction de quelques mots ou quelques structures syntaxiques. Le résultat est qu'il sera difficile pour l'apprenant de bien s'exprimer;
- Pendant une session de compréhension orale, cette méthode peut inculquer chez l'élève la mauvaise habitude d'avoir très souvent une tendance à traduire les mots qu'il entend, ce qui diminue sa concentration et son attention.

Le recours à la langue maternelle pour enseigner une langue étrangère pourrait avoir un impact négatif non seulement sur le niveau des élèves, mais aussi sur celui de

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l'enseignant qui, si habitué à cette technique, peut ne pas avoir la volonté de recourir à d'autres plus efficaces.

L'arabe est également employé d'une façon inadéquate. En d'autres termes, il n'est pas utilisé dans des activités communicatives qui renforcent l'apprentissage, mais tout simplement pour expliquer des termes lexicaux et des structures grammaticales. Ceci m'amène à affirmer que l'emploi de l'arabe dans une classe d'anglais est un autre facteur qui contribue en grande partie à la dégradation du niveau de l'élève tunisien en anglais.

Pour remédier à cette dégradation, il serait impératif d'éviter d'employer l'arabe dans les classes d'anglais, et de n'avoir recours qu'à la langue cible. Son emploi devrait être limité à des situations exceptionnelles, comme en cas des mots abstraits dont le sens reste encore difficile à comprendre lorsqu'on emploie d'autres techniques d'explication, ou quand certains apprenants n'arrivent pas à comprendre les instructions d'une certaine activité d'apprentissage.

Une grande partie de l'étude a été consacrée à la discussion des problèmes et difficultés d'apprentissage liés aux connaissances en langue. Il a été démontré que ces obstacles ont pour origine la nature des connaissances en langues, et comme mentionné ci-dessus – quelques méthodes pédagogiques inadéquates.

Selon les résultats d'un questionnaire rempli par un nombre d'élèves, les difficultés de la compréhension orale se répartissent ainsi: **a.** des difficultés d'ordre phonologique, **b**. des difficultés résultant de la nature des passages de compréhension orale, **c.** des difficultés provenant de la qualité du matériel acoustique utilisé en classe.

L'interférence phonologique est le résultat des caractéristiques phonologiques de l'anglais. En effet, comme cette langue comporte des phonèmes inexistants dans la langue maternelle des apprenants, ces derniers sombrent dans la confusion et rencontrent, par conséquent, des problèmes de compréhension. A titre d'exemple, comme les phonèmes /p/ et /v/ ne sont pas disponibles en arabe, quelques élèves arabes les trouvent difficiles à prononcer correctement. Peut-être, en conséquence, ils prononcent «park» et «veal» respectivement comme «bark» et «feel». Ils peuvent également les entendre ainsi, ce qui peut générer des problèmes de compréhension en cas où ces phonèmes font partie d'un passage de compréhension orale.

Ces difficultés sont également causées par les formes réduites, l'accent tonique et l'intonation. On peut classifier les formes réduites en deux catégories. La première consiste en des formes qui subissent un changement morphologique au niveau des mots et de l'élocution. Cette altération réduit souvent le nombre de syllabes et, partant, la prononciation du mot. La deuxième réduit le nombre de mots d'un message qui, malgré cette réduction, peut être encore compréhensible.

Les formes réduites peuvent causer beaucoup de difficultés de compréhension aux élèves qui ne sont pas suffisamment exposés aux différents aspects phonologiques de l'anglais, ainsi qu'à ceux qui ont été familiarisés seulement avec les formes écrites en toutes lettres. Le premier type des formes réduites pose plus de problèmes, car il demande assez de pratique et d'exposition. Le deuxième, au contraire, est surmontable à condition que les élèves apprennent à prendre en compte le contexte.

L'accent tonique a deux fonctions: la première montre la prononciation correcte des mots; la deuxième – la plus importante – concerne la compréhension. Elle consiste à mettre l'accent sur des mots bien définis dans une phrase. Ces mots comprennent généralement l'information ou le sens que le locuteur désire communiquer.

L'importance de l'intonation réside dans l'expression de multiples fonctions communicatives d'une seule phrase. Prenons à titre d'exemple, «Where have you been?». Prononcé avec un ton descendant en focalisant sur le terme « where », cette phrase peut exprimer une simple question neutre sur le lieu où se trouvait la personne interrogée. Prononcée avec un ton ascendant, elle exprime le reproche et la contrariété de la part d'un locuteur qui, excédé, a trop attendu.

Il est impératif, par conséquent, que l'enseignant de l'anglais soit bien informé des caractéristiques phonologiques précitées et familiarise ses élèves avec elles, aussi bien théoriquement qu'en pratique, afin de leur éviter des difficultés de compréhension pendant les leçons ou les examens de compréhension orale ou la communication avec les locuteurs natifs.

Les difficultés relatives aux passages oraux résident, selon les résultats de l'étude, dans la façon de prononcer les textes, l'abondance des mots difficiles, la longueur des passages et les thèmes qu'ils traitent.

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La rapidité d'élocution ainsi qu'un accent peu familier aux apprenants peuvent entraver la compréhension. Les élèves faibles en sont les premières victimes. Ceux-ci ne peuvent pas se concentrer, surtout s'ils essayent de comprendre tous les mots du passage. Un grand nombre d'apprenants affirment qu'il est trop difficile de comprendre un texte lu par un Anglais car ce dernier, pensent-ils, parle avec une telle rapidité qu'ils manquent une grande partie du passage.

Le problème de compréhension s'aggrave de plus en plus si ces textes contiennent certaines formes de prononciation, telles que les coups de glotte et les formes réduites qui entrainent plus de rapidité et qui complexifient le message.

Pour contourner ce problème, Buck (1995) propose la séparation des unités-idées par des pauses plus longues. Il propose également la technique de la redondance. Ces pauses, néanmoins, ne devraient pas être trop longues pour ne pas nuire aux autres activités de la leçon. La redondance ou reformulation ne devrait pas être une répétition des mêmes expressions, mais plutôt une explication ou une simplification des idées, des termes lexicaux et structures grammaticales qui rendent le contenu du passage plus compréhensible.

L'enseignant peut également familiariser les élèves avec les aspects phonologiques précités avant de les faire écouter ces passages lus par des locuteurs natifs avec une rapidité de plus en plus grande.

L'abondance des termes nouveaux dans un passage est un autre obstacle à la compréhension. Il est déconseillé à l'enseignant d'expliquer tous les mots nouveaux dans la phase première de la leçon de compréhension orale ou celle de la lecture. Seuls les termes clés doivent être introduits. L'objectif est d'aider les élèves à avoir une idée globale du texte sans comprendre tous les mots qui s'y trouvent en comptant sur le contexte.

Les expressions idiomatiques et les verbes à particule devraient être expliqués dans la première phase de la séance en raison de leur nature trompeuse, dans la mesure où les élèves tendent à focaliser sur le sens des mots individuels qui les composent.

Les faux amis, tels que le verbe Anglais *assist* et le verbe français *assister* tout comme les faux amis intralingual, tels que «flammable» et «inflammable», «patch» et «dispatch», etc. nécessitent une attention particulière. Pour dépasser ce problème,

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l'enseignant peut fournir aux élèves une liste des faux amis les plus connus accompagnée de leurs équivalents en français et en anglais avec des exemples pertinents. L'objet est d'aider les apprenants à éviter des problèmes de compréhension. A ce propos, on devrait attirer l'attention des élèves au fait que beaucoup de mots commençant par «in», «im», «dis» et «de» n'ont pas un sens négatif, car ceux-ci ne sont pas des préfixes négatifs, mais font partie intégrante de la racine.

Les textes authentiques qui contiennent des termes rarement utilisés et des structures syntaxiques complexes peuvent être simplifiés sans pour autant en dénaturer le contenu ou le style.

Selon un gros pourcentage d'élèves, la longueur des textes de compréhension orale représente aussi un problème. En effet, ces textes ne sont pas fructueux quand ils sont exploités uniquement pour des activités orales. Ainsi exploités, ils deviennent source d'ennui et de fatigue, ce qui a une influence négative sur la capacité d'attention des apprenants. Un long texte ne devrait, donc, pas être entièrement exploité pour des activités de compréhension orale. On peut le diviser en deux ou trois parties à exploiter pour diverses autres activités, telles que la prononciation, l'accent tonique et l'intonation.

Le type du thème traité par un extrait de compréhension orale est l'un des facteurs déterminants qui influent sur le côté psychologique et physique des élèves, leur désir d'y prêter attention et d'y réagir, et leur capacité d'interpréter les messages qu'il englobe. Les élèves se plaignent souvent de l'aspect ennuyeux et insipide des textes. D'après mon expérience professionnelle, on peut affirmer que les livres scolaires contiennent des passages qui ne répondent pas aux intérêts affectifs des apprenants. Les textes devraient être méticuleusement choisis afin de les motiver, attirer leur attention, et assurer leur concentration. Les auteurs de ces manuels sont, donc, invités à consulter les enseignants et les élèves afin de proposer des thèmes intéressants qui peuvent contribuer à garantir le succès des leçons.

Un autre problème est le manque ou l'indisponibilité d'équipement acoustique. Cet équipement se limite à des magnétoscopes usés dont le nombre est inférieur à celui des enseignants. Ces derniers se voient parfois contraints de lire eux-mêmes le passage de compréhension orale au lieu d'exposer leurs élèves à un accent de locuteur natif. Ils leur arrivent également de transformer la séance orale en une séance de lecture.

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La solution est pourtant simple. Elle consiste à fournir un matériel pédagogique sophistiqué et suffisant. S'il n'est pas possible de construire un laboratoire de langues dans chaque lycée, il est illogique, voire absurde, de ne pas être en mesure de fournir des magnétoscopes en nombre suffisant. D'autres matériels, comme les vidéocassettes devraient eux aussi être disponibles. Ces dernières sont, bien entendu, plus bénéfiques car elles permettent aux élèves de regarder le locuteur, ainsi que ses mouvements qui reflètent ses intentions, les aidant ainsi à mieux comprendre.

En plus du problème technique, l'enseignant fait face au problème du bruit. Ceci vient la plupart du temps de l'intérieur de la classe. Il vient aussi de l'extérieur: un marché qui regorge de marchands qui crient à gorge déployée ou une rue bruyante qui jouxte l'établissement.

Seul un enseignant chevronné est en mesure de travailler dans des salles bondées et de maintenir l'attention des élèves. Ceci ne peut s'accomplir que si ce dernier a une bonne relation avec toute la classe ou que si les élèves sont si motivés et intéressés qu'ils arrivent à ignorer les nuisances. Un nombre d'activités motivantes peuvent aussi être mises en place. L'enseignant peut avoir recours à des chansons qu'apprécient ses élèves au cours de la séance ou à la fin en récompense pour le calme et pour leur bonne performance.

Les difficultés de la production orale a principalement pour origine le fait que les élèves ne vivent pas dans un environnement typiquement anglophone. Comme l'indiquent les questionnaires, un gros pourcentage de ceux–ci n'entendent parler l'anglais qu'en classe. Ils n'ont pas la possibilité ou l'occasion de communiquer avec des locuteurs natifs anglophones. Les activités orales qui se font en classe sont, la plupart du temps, seulement celles proposées dans le programme officiel.

Outre ces difficultés, il y a lieu de mentionner l'existence d'autres obstacles psychologiques. Ces obstacles sont occasionnés par la peur éprouvée par un grand nombre d'apprenants qui n'ont pas envie de s'engager dans des activités orales, car ils ont honte d'être corrigés par leur enseignant ou leurs camarades.

Leur appréhension de commettre des erreurs et leur répugnance à communiquer en anglais sont aggravées par les natures différentes des activités écrites et orales. En effet, alors que s'exprimer par écrit laisse aux apprenants le temps de penser et repenser au sujet

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à aborder et le temps de faire tout changement nécessaire avant de présenter leur travail, ce n'est pas possible lorsqu'il s'agit de s'exprimer oralement. Donc, ils pensent qu'ils n'arrivent pas à développer leur compétence communicative orale.

Le problème est aggravé par l'attitude négative de beaucoup d'élèves, surtout ceux qui suivent des filières scientifiques, envers la langue anglaise. Malgré leur compétence communicative généralement satisfaisante, ils sont peu enclins à participer aux activités orales croyant, à tort, que cette langue ne représente aucun avantage. Le manque de pratique, par conséquent, engendre la dégradation de leur niveau.

Pour remédier à cette faiblesse, l'enseignant devrait faire appel à quelques stratégies de communication afin d'encourager les élèves à pratiquer l'anglais. Deux types de stratégies se présentent dans ce cas. Le premier type comporte des stratégies, comme l'appel à l'aide (*appeal for assistance*) et la circonlocution *(circumlocution*), qui peuvent aider à parfaire la compétence orale. Ces stratégies poussent les élèves à négocier le contenu des messages avec l'interlocuteur, ce qui les aide à enrichir leur répertoire lexical.

Le deuxième type de stratégies, bien qu'il ne facilite pas l'apprentissage, vise à surmonter les écueils de communication. Il comporte des stratégies, telles que l'évasion du sujet (*topic avoidance*), l'abandon du message (*message abandonment),* la mimique *(miming*), la translittération *(transliteration*) et la traduction mot à mot *(literal translation*).

Employé judicieusement, le premier type de stratégies peut être fort bénéfique. Il consolide la confiance des élèves en eux-mêmes et stimule leur désir d'apprendre, ce qui les aide à améliorer leur niveau.

Le développement de la compétence communicative orale peut également être réalisé par le recours à des activités comportant les chansons, le jeu de rôles, la simulation, et la lecture à haute voix. Employées dans des activités, telles que l'expression orale, la lecture, la compréhension orale, et l'expression écrite, les chansons ont un rôle instructif qui renforce l'apprentissage. En effet, une chanson bien travaillée sur le plan lyrique, mélodieux, et thématique peut être aisément mémorisée par les élèves, leur permettant d'enrichir leur répertoire lexical et syntaxique, et d'améliorer leur prononciation. Grâce à ces chansons, ils peuvent également acquérir le style familier lexical, syntaxique, et

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pragmatique de la langue cible. Les chansons permettent aussi aux élèves d'avoir une idée sur la culture des locuteurs natifs, ce qui peut vaincre des difficultés de communication.

Les chansons jouent aussi un rôle affectif. Elles permettent à l'enseignant et ses élèves de travailler dans une atmosphère détendue. En outre, grâce aux chansons, l'élève turbulent peut devenir tranquille et attentif.

Les simulations et le jeu de rôles peuvent également développer la compétence orale à condition que les situations simulées reflètent les besoins communicatifs de la vie quotidienne des élèves. A titre d'exemple, les activités de jeu de rôles peuvent être sous forme de conversations entre un épicier et un client, et entre un médecin et un patient, ainsi qu'un entretien entre le directeur d'une société et un demandeur d'emploi, etc. Les simulations peuvent être une discussion entre des enseignants et des parents sur les causes des lacunes scolaires des élèves et leurs solutions idoines, ou bien encore un débat entre des syndicalistes et des responsables gouvernementaux à propos d'une augmentation salariale ou l'amélioration des conditions de travail.

De même, la mémorisation des poèmes et la lecture à haute voix, bien qu'elles ne stimulent pas la production, peuvent offrir plus de chances à un grand nombre d'apprenants, surtout ceux qui sont timides et moins brillants, de pratiquer la langue cible et améliorer leur compétence communicative.

Dans le même but de parfaire la compétence communicative des élèves, l'enseignant peut recourir à quelques approches, telles que l'approche de la langue-expérience (*Language-Experience Approach*), l'approche de la lecture extensive (*Extensive Reading Approach*) et l'approche de la libre communication orale *(Free-Speaking Approach*).

A part le fait que la première approche est utilisée pour enseigner la compréhension écrite, elle peut être appliquée pour développer la communication orale. Pour ce faire, l'enseignant est appelé à entraîner et encourager ses élèves à parler de leurs expériences personnelles et des événements dont ils étaient témoins. Pour que les apprenants entreprennent ces activités avec succès, ils devraient être aidés par leurs enseignants, ainsi que par leurs camarades brillants. Cette aide consiste à leur fournir des signaux paralinguistiques qui sont en mesure de les aider à bien s'exprimer sans pour autant interrompre le flot de leur discours.

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Il est tout aussi motivant et agréable – selon Hamayan (1989) – d'emmener les élèves en excursion et leur demander de raconter ou décrire ce qu'ils ont fait ou vu soit pendant l'excursion ou de retour en classe.

Comme son nom l'indique, l'approche de la lecture extensive a pour but essentiel de développer la compréhension écrite. Etant donné que les grands liseurs font de grands orateurs, la lecture peut être un moyen de promouvoir la communication orale. On peut atteindre cet objectif en encourageant les apprenants à lire des textes courts et les résumer oralement en classe. Cette activité peut être faite individuellement, ou de préférence en groupes. A la tête de chaque groupe, un élève brillant se charge d'élucider auprès de ses camarades l'idée principale du texte et de leur expliquer les mots difficiles avant de présenter le résumé en classe.

Par analogie avec l'approche de la production écrite libre, on pourrait adopter l'approche de la production orale libre dans le but d'enseigner l'expression orale et la développer chez les élèves. Cette approche consiste à donner libre cours aux élèves de s'exprimer sur n'importe quel sujet de leur choix : raconter une blague, une petite histoire, une anecdote, un événement; discuter un problème qui touche les gens de leur âge; etc.

Bien que les résultats d'un questionnaire remis à des élèves et des enseignants révèlent que les activités de lecture soient de loin plus préférées que toutes les autres activités et que les enseignants, tout comme les élèves, estiment que l'art de lire est plus facile à développer, on remarque que le niveau des élèves dans ce domaine reste faible. La majorité accuse une lenteur flagrante en lisant. Ils suivent des stratégies qui, au lieu de les aider, entravent leur progrès. A titre d'exemple, ils ont tendance à s'arrêter à chaque mot ou expression difficile afin de comprendre sa signification. Ils n'arrivent pas, en conséquence, à lire le texte dans le temps imparti, et ne réussissent pas même à ressortir son idée générale. En plus, ceux qui lisent lentement tendent à diviser les phrases en des fragments dépourvus de sens, ce qui endommage l'unité syntaxique et rend le message encore plus difficile à sonder. Ce problème est exacerbé par le fait que certains apprenants, en s'efforçant de lire un long texte, deviennent si frustrés qu'ils arrêtent la lecture.

Pour améliorer la rapidité de lecture, l'enseignant peut, par exemple, consacrer un peu de temps à faire de la lecture modèle. Après quoi, les élèves sont appelés à l'imiter.

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En dehors de la classe, les élèves devraient pratiquer la lecture à haute voix tout en se chronométrant et essayant de faire mieux.

Une autre façon d'améliorer la rapidité de lecture des élèves consiste à leur offrir des poèmes et des passages en prose et leur demander de les apprendre par cœur et les réciter en classe. Cette activité les aide non seulement à lire rapidement, mais aussi à améliorer leur compétence orale.

On peut également recourir à la lecture compétitive. L'enseignant, dans ce cas, offre aux élèves un extrait à préparer chez eux et leur demande de le réciter en classe en un temps record. L'élève qui finit la récitation le premier sera récompensé. Celui qui n'a pas atteint la rapidité escomptée devrait être encouragé et offert plus de temps, sans toutefois sous-estimer son effort surtout au vu ou au su de ses camarades.

Puisque les examens pourraient stimuler l'apprentissage, l'enseignant peut, afin d'améliorer le niveau des élèves, accorder une note sur la lecture à haute voix en considérant cette activité comme un discours oral non-improvisé.

Dans une partie précédente de ce résumé, on a noté que les termes lexicaux occasionnent des difficultés aussi bien dans les activités de compréhension orale que celles de la lecture. En sus des recommandations déjà proposées pour contourner les difficultés de compréhension causées par ces éléments linguistiques que les élèves rencontrent, l'enseignant est invité à fournir un glossaire dans la marge du texte comme suggère Widdowson (1978).

Le glossaire permet aux apprenants de découvrir de nouveaux termes qu'ils rencontrent pour la première fois ou bien des mots qu'ils ont déjà rencontrés, mais qui sont employés dans un contexte différent. Pour cette raison, les élèves ont besoin d'être familiarisés avec les différents types de sens: dénotatif, connotatif, contextuel et pragmatique afin d'éviter des difficultés de compréhension. Il est impératif, dans ce cas, de sensibiliser les élèves à ce qui suit: **a.** outre leur sens littéral, beaucoup de termes ont des connotations qui diffèrent d'une culture à une autre, **b**. un grand nombre de termes de différentes catégories grammaticales, quoiqu'ils s'épèlent de la même façon, ont des sens différents, **c**. le sens d'un grand nombre de mots et expressions dérive des conventions sociales et culturelles de la langue et dépendent des émotions et des intentions du locuteur ou de l'écrivain.

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A part les termes lexicaux difficiles, les structures grammaticales complexes dans des textes authentiques peuvent, à leur tour, être une pierre d'achoppement à la compréhension. Outre la simplification du texte, l'enseignant peut avoir recours à l'enseignement explicite de la grammaire. Cette méthode pourrait aider les élèves à mieux assimiler les structures difficiles, et de là vaincre les problèmes de compréhension tout en leur permettant d'employer un anglais correct tant bien oralement que par écrit.

Les apprenants devraient également être familiarisés avec les connecteurs logiques et les références anaphoriques et cataphoriques avant d'entreprendre des activités de lecture pratiques. Pour atteindre cet objectif, un cours théorique suivi par des exercices pratiques est, à mon sens, indispensable.

Les connecteurs logiques expriment des relations différentes entre les propositions et les phrases et communiquent des fonctions langagières particulières lorsqu'ils sont utilisés dans des contextes divers. Le connecteur «*and*», par exemple, est souvent employé pour marquer des informations supplémentaires. Pourtant, il peut être aussi employé pour exprimer d'autres types de relations et des fonctions communicatives spécifiques. A titre d'exemple, il peut exprimer:

a. L'intention ou le but exprimé par le locuteur comme dans: *Please, come along and see how the machine functions.*

b. La conséquence: *He hasn't paid the least amount of his debts, and now nobody will lend him any more money.*

c. Une promesse (dans une phrase conditionnelle implicite): *Finish the work today, and I will pay you double.*

Les élèves font aussi face à un autre défi. Il s'agit d'une absence totale ou quasi-totale de cours théoriques traitant quelques aspects relatifs à la lecture avant qu'ils ne commencent à apprendre à lire.

L'absence de ces cours s'explique par le fait qu'ils sont estimés superflus et que les élèves peuvent entreprendre des activités pratiques sans y avoir recours, se contentant de quelques explications orales de la part de l'enseignant. On peut soutenir, néanmoins, que si l'enseignant ne met pas en exergue certains points, ses élèves risquent de les oublier et

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n'arrivent pas, partant, à réaliser les résultats escomptés. Prenons l'exemple des activités qui se font dans une séance de lecture. Si les apprenants ne connaissent pas bien les types de texte, l'objectif du texte, les techniques à suivre pour lire efficacement, ils se voient obligés d'adopter n'importe quelle technique gaspillant un temps fou juste pour trouver un détail qu'on peut localiser en peu de temps.

Un questionnaire remis à des élèves de baccalauréat portant sur quelques aspects relatifs à la lecture et à l'expression écrite révèle qu'un gros pourcentage d'entre eux n'en ont aucune idée. On pourrait alors affirmer qu'il est pédagogiquement inadéquat d'engager les élèves directement dans des activités d'apprentissage pratiques avant d'entamer des cours théoriques sur ces aspects. Il est donc recommandé que l'enseignant fournisse un petit livret contenant quelques informations théoriques et exercices pratiques à propos des aspects relatifs à la lecture et l'expression écrite auxquels les élèves peuvent se référer en classe ou ailleurs. Quels sont alors ces aspects dont les élèves ont grand besoin?

Parmi ces aspects, on cite notamment les types de texte. Il y en a principalement quatre: les textes descriptifs, narratifs, argumentatifs, et informatifs.

- Les textes descriptifs: ce sont des textes qui, comme leur nom l'indique, décrivent une personne, un objet, un lieu, un phénomène, etc. Ils se distinguent par l'emploi abondant des adjectifs et des adverbes, dans le but de bien peindre ce qui est en question.

- Les textes narratifs: ces textes racontent une histoire sur une personne, rapporte un incident, un événement, etc. On peut les identifier souvent par la présence des personnages et le cadre spatial et temporel.

- Les textes argumentatifs: ce sont des textes où l'auteur traite un certain sujet tout en exprimant son point de vue qu'il s'efforce de justifier usant des arguments solides afin de convaincre. Ces textes peuvent être aussi sous forme de débats entre des interlocuteurs qui s'expriment sur un sujet quelconque.

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- Les textes informatifs: Généralement, leur fonction réside dans l'explication. Ils peuvent, par exemple, définir un phénomène, analyser des statistiques, ou faire une comparaison, etc.

L'enseignant est appelé à attirer l'attention de ses élèves sur le fait que, pour identifier le type de texte, ils devraient compter sur quelques indices tels que le titre, l'auteur (s'il est connu), et surtout les questions de compréhension.

Dans le but de familiariser davantage les élèves avec les différents types de textes, l'enseignant peut recourir aux exercices pratiques suivants:

a. Demander aux élèves de lire des passages courts et identifier leurs types;

b. Demander aux élèves de lire une série de titres et décider à quels types de discours ces titres conviennent;

c. Demander aux élèves de lire quelques questions de compréhension et les classifier selon le type du texte sur lequel elles peuvent être posées;

d. Fournir des passages accompagnés de questions et demander aux élèves d'ajouter d'autres questions pertinentes.

La connaissance de différents types du discours peut aider les élèves à garantir une meilleure compréhension du texte. Pour atteindre ce but, l'enseignant pourrait leur fournir un tableau contenant les types de textes accompagnés de questions convenables.

Ci-dessous citées sont les quatre techniques de lecture que les apprenants doivent aussi connaître bien:

- La lecture parcourue (*skimming)*: cette technique consiste à lire pour identifier l'idée générale du texte.

- La lecture rapide (*scanning)*: le fait de parcourir un texte pour découvrir des détails bien spécifiques.

- La lecture extensive (*extensive reading*): elle consiste à lire un texte long pour la compréhension globale, souvent pour le plaisir.

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- La lecture intensive (*intensive reading*): elle consiste à lire un passage généralement court pour l'exploiter d'une façon profonde et détaillée afin de relever des informations spécifiques.

Ce qui suit est un d'exercices qui peut renforcer la familiarisation des élèves avec les techniques de lecture ci-dessus décrites.

a. Quelles techniques peut-on utiliser dans les situations suivantes:

    - Un horaire de vol: tu es à l'aéroport ; tu attends un ami qui va arriver d'un autre pays;
    - Une lettre de la part d'un(e) petit(e) ami(e);
    - Tu veux savoir le résultat final d'un jeu sportif annoncé dans un journal;
    - Un conte de fée;
    - Une histoire d'amour;
    - Un poème écrit par ton poète préféré;
    - Un article sur le réchauffement de la planète;
    - Un récit.

La connaissance de ces techniques amène les élèves à savoir comment lire et sur quelle partie du texte ils doivent focaliser.

Pour inculquer chez les élèves l'habitude et le désir de lire efficacement et indépendamment, l'enseignant peut mettre en place un programme de lecture extensive. Ce programme est à exécuter en classe et ailleurs. Les textes devraient, pour assurer la motivation, répondre aux intérêts des élèves, sans toutefois dépasser leur niveau linguistique. Pour que ce programme soit durable, il faut que les textes soient courts, faciles, et variés.

L'enseignant a un rôle capital dans la réalisation de ce programme. Etant considéré un exemple à suivre, il lui faut lui-même beaucoup lire pour que les élèves fassent de

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même. L'exécution de ce programme nécessite également qu'on fixe quelques objectifs bien précis. Ces objectifs devraient inclure les points suivants:

- Inculquer chez l'élève l'habitude de lire;
- Encourager l'élève à lire d'un œil critique;
- Développer la rapidité de lecture;
- Enrichir le répertoire linguistique;
- Lire correctement prenant en considération la prononciation, l'accent tonique et l'intonation. Cet objectif peut être réalisé si les élèves – selon Nuttall (1996) – lisent des textes enregistrés par des locuteurs natifs pour qu'ils puissent imiter l'enregistrement et le répéter tant de fois que nécessaire;
- Améliorer l'orthographe.

L'expression écrite, comme connaissance en langue, est généralement considérée plus difficile que les autres connaissances en raison du fait qu'elle est typifiée par l'exactitude linguistique et l'organisation rhétorique.

Comme est le cas pour la compréhension écrite, les élèves sont souvent engagés dans des activités d'expression écrite pratiques sans être enseignés des cours théoriques préalables sur les aspects relatifs à l'expression écrite. Selon mon expérience professionnelle et le résultat d'un questionnaire, bon nombre d'élèves de baccalauréat n'ont pas la moindre idée à propos des termes *purpose*, *audience*, et *topic sentence*. Dans le même contexte, les ressources linguistiques dont les élèves ont grand besoin pour parfaire leur art d'écrire ne sont pas bien assimilées. Ces ressources comportent les connecteurs logiques, la ponctuation, la capitalisation et l'orthographe.

A part les facteurs susmentionnés, une parmi les causes de difficultés que les élèves rencontrent dans les activités de production écrite provient du principe de l'approche communicative qui met l'accent sur l'expression orale au détriment de l'expression écrite, comme il a été expliqué plus haut, ce qui a amené un nombre d'enseignants à accorder moins d'importance à l'expression écrite dont le rôle est devenu secondaire par rapport

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aux autres connaissances en langue. En plus, il est très difficile, si ce n'est impossible pour l'enseignant de corriger les exercices de rédaction de tous les élèves, au moins chaque semaine ou chaque quinzaine.

En conséquence, il s'ensuit qu'un grand nombre d'apprenants accusent une faiblesse sérieuse en rédaction. Leur répertoire linguistique est si pauvre qu'ils sont incapables de s'exprimer sur quoi que ce soit en anglais.

S'adressant aux enseignants qui semblent ne pas accorder suffisamment d'importance aux activités théoriques et pratiques de rédaction, on doit soulever les questions suivantes:

a. A quel point l'expression écrite, comme forme de communication, est elle importante?

b. Quels sont les aspects relatifs à l'expression écrite que les apprenants doivent bien connaître avant et pendant la phase d'apprentissage?

c. Quelles mesures pratiques doit-on prendre afin d'améliorer le niveau des élèves en expression écrite?

Pour inciter les apprenants à améliorer leur niveau, ils devraient être sensibilisés au fait que la rédaction revêt d'une grande importance. En effet, beaucoup de gens communiquent entre eux par écrit. Ceci s'explique, d'une part, par le fait qu'on n'a pas toujours l'occasion de communiquer oralement et d'autre part, certaines communications – pour une raison ou une autre – ne peuvent pas avoir lieu oralement. A titre d'exemple, les œuvres littéraires ne peuvent être communiquées aux lecteurs que par écrit. De même, pour des raisons culturelles, un demandeur d'emploi ne peut poser sa candidature à un poste que par écrit.

Avant de s'engager dans des activités écrites à proprement parler, il faut que les apprenants aient une ample connaissance théorique de certaines ressources linguistiques, telles que la ponctuation et les connecteurs logiques qui contribuent à communiquer les messages clairement. L'enseignement théorique et les exercices qui y sont relatifs doivent couvrir tous les aspects des activités d'expression écrite, tels que le type du sujet,

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l'objectif de l'essai, et l'audience à qui on s'adresse. Tous ces éléments accompagnés de recommandations sur leur enseignement sont présentés ci-dessous.

Comme on l'a noté, les connecteurs logiques sont employés afin de lier les propositions, les phrases et les paragraphes et les rendre, selon O'Grady et ses co-auteurs (1996: 707), «un tout bien organisé». L'absence de ces mots de liaison, au contraire, endommage l'essai au point qu'il devient maladroitement écrit. Ses parties deviennent mal liées, peut-être truffées de répétitions, et la transition d'un paragraphe à un autre devient peu claire.

Pour travailler sur les connecteurs, l'enseignant devrait commencer par les phrases. Il peut donner aux élèves quelques phrases non-liées et leur demander de les connecter en employant des mots de liaison appropriés. Quand les élèves gagnent assez de confiance en eux, l'enseignant peut procéder aux passages courts, et puis aux passages longs.

Ces connecteurs, cependant, ne devraient pas être trop employés pour que le lecteur ne détourne pas son attention des idées que les élèves ont présentées. Ces derniers devraient, donc, savoir qu'on peut remplacer quelques connecteurs par des signes de ponctuation spécifiques.

Avant de commencer à faire des exercices de rédaction, les apprenants devraient également maîtriser l'emploi des signes de ponctuation. Ceux-ci ne reçoivent généralement pas l'attention qu'ils méritent dans les cours d'anglais en Tunisie. Il s'ensuit que même après des années d'apprentissage du français et l'anglais, nombre d'élèves ont encore de la difficulté sérieuse à employer la ponctuation correctement.

Les signes de ponctuation sont importants car ils permettent à l'écrivain d'exprimer clairement ses idées et aider le lecteur à les bien comprendre. Quand on parle, on a tendance à recourir à des signaux paralinguistiques et non-linguistiques qui sont en mesure de clarifier le message. Ses signaux, néanmoins, n'apparaissent pas dans les textes écrits. La ponctuation, justement, vient combler ce vide, facilitant la tâche à la fois de l'écrivain et du lecteur. L'enseignant est, par conséquent, appelé à consacrer suffisamment de temps pour l'enseigner théoriquement ainsi que pratiquement. Les livres scolaires aussi doivent contenir – soit au début, soit à la fin – un guide de ponctuation et de capitalisation pour que les élèves s'y réfèrent le cas échéant. Ceux-ci doivent être entraînés à les employer à bon escient. Pour ce faire, l'enseignant devrait mettre en place une série d'exercices de

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consolidation à développement progressif procédant ainsi: il s'agit de ponctuer des phrases simples, des phrases complexes, des phrases composées, et finalement des paragraphes. L'enseignant peut, également, donner aux élèves des passages non-ponctués ou mal ponctués et leur demander d'insérer les bons signes de ponctuation.

L'orthographe est un autre facteur qui aide les apprenants à développer leur niveau en expression écrite. Toutefois, tout comme la ponctuation et la capitalisation, elle n'est pas accordée suffisamment d'attention dans les cours d'anglais dans l'enseignement secondaire en Tunisie. On verra ci-dessous les raisons pour lesquelles l'orthographe n'est pas enseignée indépendamment comme une matière scolaire, pourquoi et comment on doit l'enseigner.

Il y a deux raisons principales pour lesquelles l'orthographe n'est pas enseignée. Premièrement, l'enseigner d'une façon indépendante nécessite le recours à la dictée, une technique souvent mal vue. L'enseignant l'évite car elle demande plus d'effort de sa part car il/elle doit corriger les copies d'un grand nombre d'élèves. L'élève, pour sa part, la déteste car elle nécessite plus de concentration et de révision surtout que l'orthographe anglaise est très complexe. Deuxièmement, on estime que l'élève est censé apprendre l'orthographe à travers les activités de lecture et d'expression écrite.

L'une des tâches d'un devoir d'anglais en Tunisie consiste à corriger des fautes de certaines sortes, y compris des fautes d'orthographe intentionnellement insérées dans un passage. Les élèves sont également pénalisés pour ce genre d'erreurs.

Il est alors tout à fait illogique de tester les élèves sur des points linguistiques – comme l'orthographe – qu'ils n'ont pas étudiés en classe. Il est, donc, impératif que l'orthographe fasse partie intégrante du processus d'apprentissage en raison de son rôle fondamental dans la communication écrite.

Une autre raison pour laquelle on devrait enseigner l'orthographe est qu'un grand nombre d'élèves sont faibles en cette compétence. Cette faiblesse a principalement pour origine le fait que le système de l'orthographe de la langue anglaise est si compliqué qu'il entraîne des difficultés tant pour les apprenants étrangers que pour les apprenants natifs eux-mêmes. Ce fait est attribué notamment au fait que la forme écrite ne correspond pas à la prononciation. Par exemple, une seule lettre peut représenter plusieurs phonèmes différents, et un seul phonème peut être représenté par plusieurs lettres différentes.

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Par ailleurs, il est à noter qu'enseigner l'orthographe peut aider les apprenants à:

a. employer un anglais correct dans les activités d'expression écrite;

b. prononcer la langue correctement, car lorsque l'enseignant dicte un passage, les élèves ont l'occasion de l'imiter;

c. améliorer la compétence orale, car quand ils entendent l'enseignant prononcer correctement, ils peuvent deviner le sens des mots nouveaux ou se souviennent du sens de ceux qui les ont oubliés.

Pour améliorer le niveau des élèves en orthographe, l'enseignant peut lancer un programme qui consiste à découvrir les sources de difficultés afin d'aider les apprenants à éviter les erreurs orthographiques.

Il y a généralement deux sources d'erreurs. Le fait que l'orthographe ne correspond pas à la prononciation, comme on l'a mentionné ci-dessus, et le fait que les élèves ignorent les règles orthographiques, c'est pourquoi ils épellent beaucoup de mots comme ils se prononcent.

Les erreurs d'orthographe proviennent également de l'interférence linguistique. À titre d'exemple, à cause de l'influence de la langue française, un apprenant tunisien ou français tend à écrire *«responsibility»* et *«pronunciation»* respectivement comme *«*responsability»* et «**prononciation*», c'est-à-dire, presque comme ils s'écrivent en français.

Dans ce programme, l'enseignant devrait fournir quelques règles d'orthographe en focalisant sur les exceptions, et en se basant sur les techniques suivantes:

a. Dresser une liste contenant les erreurs les plus fréquentes pour attirer l'attention des élèves sur la nécessité de les éviter au futur;

b. Mettre l'accent sur les mots problématiques, tels que les homophones comme *knew/new; right/write/rite; you/ewe/yew* et les homographes comme *record (verb)/ record (noun); separate (verb) / separate (adj), etc*.

c. Traiter les erreurs d'orthographe causées par l'interférence. Dans une classe tunisienne, l'enseignant peut demander aux élèves de trouver les équivalents

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français de certains mots anglais, comme *independence*, *responsible*, *example*, *exercise*, *measure*, etc.

En bref, on peut affirmer que l'orthographe joue un rôle important dans l'apprentissage de n'importe quelle langue. L'enseigner comme une matière scolaire indépendante est fortement recommandé, voire nécessaire au développement de la compétence linguistique de l'élève.

En sus des idées précitées, afin d'aider les apprenant à bien s'exprimer par écrit, l'enseignant devrait les familiariser avec le type de la composition, son objectif, et l'audience. Ecrire sans savoir à qui ou pourquoi on écrit est synonyme de délirer. Cette familiarisation peut se faire comme suit:

- Distribuer un nombre de sujets et demander aux élèves d'en identifier le type (descriptif, narratif, argumentatif, informatif, etc.), l'objectif et le lecteur qu'on adresse;

- distribuer des paragraphes et demander aux élèves d'identifier le sujet, l'objectif et l'audience;

Afin de porter les élèves à rédiger fréquemment, il faut toujours leur choisir ou leur permettre de choisir eux-mêmes des sujets répondant à leurs intérêts affectifs ou sociaux, ainsi qu'à leurs besoins professionnels futurs. Les sujets proposés par l'enseignant doivent être compréhensibles et clairs au niveau du vocabulaire et de la structure syntaxique, en particulier quand il s'agit d'un examen où il est interdit de leur expliquer le sujet.

Avant d'engager les apprenants à rédiger, il faut commencer par un «brainstorming». Mais, afin d'aider les élèves, dont le bagage lexical n'est pas assez riche, à trouver les idées nécessaires, on doit commencer par des mots simples, des expressions, des bribes de phrases avant de générer des phrases complètes, pendant qu'ils copient tous ceux-ci sur une feuille de brouillon. Cette phase finie, les apprenants, en groupes, s'engagent à:

- faire des phrases complètes en employant des mots simples, des expressions et des bribes de phrases;

- barrer les idées superflues et ajouter d'autres idées pertinentes;

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- joindre les phrases et les lier entre elles à l'aide de connecteurs logiques;
- déterminer la phrase clef *(topic sentence)*, les phrases d'explication *(supporting sentences)* et la phrase de conclusion *(concluding sentence).*

Cela fait, les apprenants commencent à rédiger une version finale du sujet assigné. Concernant l'évaluation, bien que ce soit le travail de l'enseignant, les élèves peuvent échanger leurs copies et les corriger en groupes. Comme – faute de temps – il est difficile de corriger toutes les compositions, les élèves peuvent compléter la tâche plus tard chez eux.

Outre, le développement de niveaux des élèves en matière d'expression écrite devrait aussi se faire à travers une série d'activités dont le degré de difficulté va en ascendant en employant une variété de techniques et d'approches dont voici quelques exemples:

- Mettre en ordre une série de phrases embrouillées pour obtenir un paragraphe cohérent;
- Ecrire un paragraphe en imitant un passage modèle;
- Copier des textes authentiques ou des textes de bonne qualité écrits par des écrivains non-natifs;
- Faire des activités de paraphrase afin de parfaire la compétence de rédaction;
- Résumer des textes;
- L'application de l'approche d'expression libre: Le fait que les élèves se sentent libres d'écrire sur n'importe quel sujet de leur propre choix, et que leur travail sera évalué et accepté par leur enseignant ou leurs camarades aiguisent leur désir d'écrire plus fréquemment que lorsqu'ils sont contraints d'écrire sur un sujet imposé.

En plus, les apprenants doivent être conscients du fait qu'apprendre à rédiger est un processus d'étapes théoriques et pratiques en corrélation. L'apprenant doit toujours passer

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par ces étapes avant de présenter finalement une composition pour être évaluée par l'enseignant.

Outre les recommandations déjà présentées, en voici d'autres d'ordre général. Elles visent à perfectionner la communication en anglais:

- L'emploi fréquent de l'anglais afin d'y exposer les élèves autant que possible;
- La création d'un milieu doté du matériel nécessaire à la disposition des élèves afin que ceux-ci, aidés par leur enseignant, puissent consolider leur acquis;
- La focalisation sur l'enseignement, plutôt que sur les examens pour montrer aux élèves que l'anglais n'est pas étudié uniquement comme matière scolaire;
- L'encouragement du travail collectif, pour que l'élève le plus brillant aide celui qui accuse une faiblesse quelconque. Ceci ne doit pas se faire en classe seulement, mais aussi ailleurs: au sein de la bibliothèque, dans un club d'anglais, ou bien chez les élèves. Le but étant de développer l'approche de l'apprentissage coopératif;
- L'établissement des chaines de télévision consacrées à des fins instructives;
- Permettre aux élèves de choisir des sujets ou des activités orales ou écrites de leur choix, afin de les aider à être responsable de leur propre apprentissage.

Enfin, étant donné qu'un bon apprentissage est tributaire d'un bon enseignement, les inspecteurs pédagogiques sont appelés à conjuguer leurs efforts en augmentant le nombre des séances de formation à l'échelle nationale et internationale pour tenir les enseignants au diapason des techniques et méthodes pédagogiques modernes.

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Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks and deep gratitude are due to my honorable thesis director, Professor Martine-Sarra Schuwer for having been a real guiding force to me through her worthy, continuous assistance, her invaluable pieces of advice, and her patience to help me produce a respectable piece of work.

For the constructive data they have supplied through interviews, I acknowledge with many thanks and a lot of gratitude Mrs. Sue Griffiths as well as MM. Chris Bonnington, Ali Souli, and my student Hadeer Maâmouri. Also, as a source of such data through questionnaires, and who deserve my thanks, are many secondary school Tunisian students.

I am equally indebted to the ELT Inspector, Mr. Nasser El Fadhlawi, and a number of colleagues of mine, namely MM. Ibrahim Sdiri, Salah Chaâbi, Youssef Soltani, Faicil Aroua, Faicil ben Hamida, Mohammed Salem, as well as my sisters-in-law Fatma and Noura Dekhili, and my 'special' brother Lamjed for the various types of assistance they offered.

Mr. Tariq Fezai is, in turn, worth a special note of thanks and is due a lot of gratitude for having proof-read this academic work and helped with its summary in French.

Last but not least, I should express my deep appreciation to my wife Leila for assisting me in typing this thesis, and especially for having been a most valuable psychological support to carry out this work, and for encouraging me to seek further knowledge.

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Introduction

The learning difficulties facing foreign-language students are a most common fact of life. However, the nature of such difficulties and their effects on the process of learning usually differ from one context to another.

This study is carried out in the Tunisian context, and is conducted into the communication difficulties in EFL secondary school students. As is the case in many parts of the world, English is taught in Tunisia as a foreign language with the object of helping learners achieve a level of proficiency that can enable them to use the language communicatively. The achievement of this objective has, however, been a formidable challenge. Therefrom stems the background of the study. In point of fact, it is a personal professional experience as an EFL teacher that a high percentage of secondary learners of English have not acquired the desired level of proficiency, and hence find it seriously difficult to communicate in the language even after years of formal instruction.

The research, therefore, attempts to answer the following broad questions:

- What are the various aspects of the difficulties and problems the learners encounter with the four language skills?
- What factors lie at the root of those complications?
- What courses of action could be taken to overcome those hindrances, and to achieve the learners' communicative competence?

No wonder, exposing the individual constantly to adequate language input through mere hearing and attentive listening, as well as offering them enough opportunities to practice any language are key factors that help them acquire it as a first language or learn it as a foreign language.

Where Tunisian learners of English as a foreign language are concerned, the EFL learning of a great many of them takes place only in the classroom. Even in the classroom, the amount of time devoted to learning English is not sufficient at all to the extent of allowing the students to practice the language amply. Additionally, despite the availability of numerous English satellite radio and T.V stations, as well as the Internet, a great many students do not listen to or read any English on those mass media.

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The prevalent use of French as the first foreign language in the country is an added factor. It has apparently caused English not to be given the significance it deserves as a means of international linguistic communication, and is thus taught as a mere curricular subject. Therefore, it could be claimed that one major reason behind many EFL learners' serious communication difficulties is the absence or the severe lack of exposure to and practice of English.

Undoubtedly, offering students a diversity of situations inside and outside the classroom, where they are helped and encouraged to use language as active listeners, fluent speakers, and effective learner readers and writers is of paramount importance to the success of learning English as a foreign language. The question at issue, in this respect, is how to provide learners with sufficient opportunities of exposure to and practice of the language, while they live in a non-English-speaking environment.

Additionally, it could be affirmed that the extent to which the learner's performance is successful depends considerably on the teaching methodology and the learning strategies, and that the degree to which learning strategies are useful is determined by the extent to which the teaching methodology is effective. This affirmation would lead us to the assumption that one reason behind the serious communication difficulties a great many Tunisian EFL learners face could also be attributed to the inadequacies of certain approaches and techniques used for teaching the language. In this respect, a language-teaching approach that has been in worldwide use in EFL classes for more than a score of years is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Particular parties, namely EFL teachers, course book designers and ELT inspectors were really enthusiastic about the approach holding the conviction that it was the approach that could help EFL learners with communicative competence. The approach, however, incorporates certain drawbacks, and there are particular constraints, which all could be alleged to obstruct its successful implementation in EFL classes.

One of the principles of CLT, which is subject to criticism, is its emphasis on meaning and fluency at the expense of form and accuracy. In fact, applying this principle in the process of language teaching is assumed to hamper the achievement of the expected results, in view of the interdependent role of form and meaning in successful language learning.

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Another CLT principle, which can be reckoned as a drawback, is that oral proficiency is allocated priority over written communication. It is axiomatic, however, that language is used for both oral and written communication. Therefore, placing further emphasis on oral skills can aid students with spoken language, but it may be seriously detrimental to their learning of writing as a language skill, and subsequently to their use of the language for written communication,

Addressing the issue is quite obvious. As language is used for oral and written communication, we ought to put focus on all the language skills during the process of foreign-language teaching.

Apart from the aforementioned drawbacks of the communicative approach, there are certain constraints that are likely to hinder its successful implementation in many EFL classes. Among these is the scarcity of instructional materials, while the approach requires various sufficient teaching aids that are indispensable to carrying out communicative activities. Yet, these aids, in many schools, are very rare or unavailable, on more scores than one. So, how can particular communicative learning activities be performed successfully without the necessary teaching tools?

Large classes always pose a daunting challenge for teachers, and for the part of the Communicative Language Teaching, they usually present an insuperable obstacle to the success of performing communicative activities. In this regard, one major problem caused by large classes is the fact that there is not enough room for the students and the teacher to move about, particularly during group-work activities. Such activities necessitate communication between the different groups, the teacher's help to these groups, and his or her checking of their work. Nevertheless, by reason of the big number of students and the shortage of time, not all the groups can communicate with each other, nor can the teacher offer the required assistance that contributes to the success of the communicative tasks.

Another influence that can interfere with the success of communicative tasks in many EFL classrooms is the low proficiency level of the great majority of students. Such an issue makes it very difficult to achieve the learning objectives of those tasks, which are supposed to be learner-centered.

In a word, the CLT principles representing drawbacks on the part of the approach, and the constraints standing against the successful implementation of its principles in EFL

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classes could be claimed to have made the approach far from achieving the expected objectives, which can affirm the assumption that adopting Communicative Language Teaching in EFL teaching for a long time may be reckoned as one of the factors that have contributed to many Tunisian learners' inability to communicate effectively in English.

Accordingly, the query at issue is: what teaching approach could be a possible perfect alternative taking into account particular considerations, such as the teaching materials available, the overall learners' level of proficiency in the target language, and their current and future needs for using it.

A further point to note in the field of teaching methodology is the use of L1 in the L2 classroom. In the Tunisian context, despite the general contention that using the learners' mother tongue for teaching a foreign language is an aspect of the instructor's poor methodology, Arabic is still used in many EFL classes. One supposition about the reason for adopting such a potential teaching technique is that many learners' low level of proficiency in English has prompted teachers to have recourse to using the students' mother tongue in English courses as a teaching technique which – though undesirable – may be thought to work out a lot of comprehension difficulties experienced by learners. In this respect, a question of interest the research attempts to answer is to what extent this assumption is right, and what effects the use of Arabic has on EFL learning.

Another assumed reason for the communication difficulties among EFL learners relates, on the one hand, to the nature of language skills, and on the other hand, to what may be claimed as the unsatisfactory methods of teaching them.

In this frame of reference, listening as a communicative skill has a vital role in language learning. One fact justifying such an assertion is that the process of acquiring or learning any language starts with mere hearing and attentive listening before the language is produced. It is a personal teaching experience that the majority of learners, however, do not seem to be actually interested in listening as an academic language skill due to their conviction that it is very hard to learn and develop, this is why they usually apprehend being tested on it, and often divert their attention from working on listening comprehension lessons in class. Many EFL teachers, in turn, complain that teaching listening is tiring and sometimes demanding.

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The teachers' attitude towards listening may be due to the unsatisfactory students' performance during regular courses as well as in tests, and may equally be the result of the unavailability of certain teaching equipment.

As for the students' view, equally relying on a personal teaching experience, it stems from a variety of problems and difficulties listening comprehension underlies during the course of the learning process. These spring mostly from:

- the phonological features of the English language. These include mainly stress, intonation, and reduced forms;
- particular specificities of listening passages. Examples of these include, especially the way listening passages are delivered by native speakers (consisting precisely in the speed rate and unfamiliar accents), the abundance of new lexical items, and the length of listening texts;
- the quality of listening equipment and the classroom acoustic environment. As alluded to above, in many schools, the listening equipment is scarce or unsophisticated; whereas the acoustic environment is sometimes inappropriate due to internal and extraneous noise.

Taking into account the learners' attitude towards listening and the aforementioned listening problems and difficulties, the study aims at:

- raising the students' awareness of the importance of listening to language learning, so that they will show keen interest in learning it;
- examining the different listening problems and difficulties and how they present obstacles to the development of the learners' listening ability, as well as how such hindrances could be overcome;
- suggesting possible ways of developing the students' listening skills.

Another major concern of the present study is to demonstrate the significance of theoretical teaching in contributing to the success of the learning process. What is behind this assertion is the undesirable common practice in EFL classes that learners are often engaged in various practical learning activities without any sound theoretical background, which has caused students to experience learning difficulties that have hampered, to a certain extent, the development of particular communicative skills, namely reading and

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writing, mainly because they are not familiar with specific aspects connected to those skills. One may wonder how a student can perform certain learning activities as desired without combining theoretical knowledge and practice. The question that is to be raised, in this respect, is: what reading-related and writing-related aspects may theoretical teaching cover?

Where reading comprehension is concerned, before engaging learners in working on reading materials, it would be recommended to devote enough time to theoretically instructing them in specific aspects with consolidating exercises, so as to familiarize them adequately with those aspects.

In fact, for the sake of a better performance in reading comprehension exercises, and with the eventual aim of developing into effective readers, learners need to be acquainted with the types of text, reading techniques, and kinds of meaning. Indeed, it is imperative that the learner reader know that a text can be descriptive, narrative, argumentative, or expository. A variety of practical exercises on the type of reading materials are an essential requirement for reinforcing the learner's familiarity with the different kinds of prose discourse. Students' attention may also be drawn to the benefit of relying on the title, the author of text, as well as its source, in that they can help them recognize the type of reading material, and can equally assist them in comprehension, at times even before reading a text and engaging on working on it.

As pointed out above, it is equally indispensable to familiarize learners with reading techniques. The major reading techniques secondary school students need to know are skimming, scanning, extensive reading and intensive reading. Reading techniques are among the fundamental tools that do help the learner reader exploit reading materials effectively, most often without any unnecessary physical or intellectual effort. If, for instance, the learner is required to find a specific piece of information in a text, he or she can quickly run his or her eyes through the text and find it in no time relying on scanning. But, a learner who is not familiar with this technique may spend much unnecessary time reading the whole text just to locate a simple particular detail.

Unfamiliar lexis is one of the issues EFL students usually reckon as the most serious hindrance to comprehension. Perhaps what would make one adhere to this conviction is that many words used as one particular part of speech can have more than one meaning,

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and a big number of other vocabulary terms used as different grammatical categories, though spelled the same, can have diverse significations. Therefore, sensitizing learners to these lexical characteristics and acquainting them with the types of meaning, namely denotative, connotative, contextual, and pragmatic are a prerequisite for a better understanding of comprehension materials, in particular if aside from this, they are trained in adopting a context-based strategy for dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary items.

Productive language skills could generally be claimed to present more difficulties for learners than receptive skills do. This can be justifiable for the simple reason that it is usually less hard for learners to comprehend language input than to produce language output. Putting it plainly in other terms, students may be able to perform better in listening and reading activities than in writing and speaking activities. One line of argument for this assertion may be the fact that the language input they are provided with by listening and reading materials can help them with performance.

As was noted earlier, a question of interest within this setting, which is one subject of examination of this academic work, is: what is behind the learners' unsatisfactory speaking and writing ability?

One common cause of the problem among many students is probably poor semantic repertoire, which itself is the result of other factors, mainly the severe lack of exposure to the language – as noted above – and equally the shortcomings of certain teaching techniques.

One possible temporary measure that may be resorted to as a starting point that can pave the way for the development of students' speaking proficiency is instructing them in the use of various communication strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, approximation, and body language; inasmuch as they can help them avoid breaking down communication or falling silent when they are engaged in speaking activities in class or in social interactions elsewhere, which can later assist them in developing some oral fluency.

As to writing as a language skill, it could be maintained that prior to engaging students in practical writing activities, they need to be theoretically familiar with specific written language resources, namely punctuation and cohesive devices in view of their fundamental contribution to communicating written materials to the reader fairly plainly. Theoretical instruction, in this respect, may also include the kinds of topic, purpose, and

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audience. Making the learners aware of what they are going to write on, the reason behind writing, and how to communicate the piece of writing to a particular reader is a basic precondition in the process of learning to compose in any language.

Many students' EFL learning and communication difficulties are compounded by the fact that they are not actually aware of what lies at the root of those difficulties, and seem to have no intention of surmounting them. Without fail, addressing the problem cannot be accomplished only by one party. It is a common responsibility that rests with education authorities, school administrators, the teaching staff, the students' parents, and the students themselves.

As far as the teacher is concerned, the study will look at how he or she can be of real help while undertaking his or her academic and affective roles in working out the students' learning problems, and consequently contribute a great deal to achieving their communicative competence. With respect to his or her affective role, he or she is expected to take a number of measures, some of which – for instance – lie in: (a) drawing the learners' attention that their learning difficulties are a fact of life and helping and encouraging them to find remedies for them, (b) boosting their potential for improvement, and (c) sensitizing students to the fact that English is not simply taught as a scholastic discipline, but as a means that can open to them future professional prospects.

Overall, in the light of what has been considered above, the descriptive outline of the dissertation is as follows:

Chapter One covers the literature review.

Chapter Two accounts for the research methodology used for backing up the study. It details the context of the study, its subjects, the instruments used to collect data, the participants selected as sources of such data, and the rationales for their selection.

Chapters Three and Four center upon the analysis and discussion of the whys and wherefores of the learners' communication difficulties relying on the data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and other sources; and suggests various remedies for the issue. More precisely, Chapter Three deals with (a) the key role of exposing the learners extensively to English input in helping them to learn this language successfully, and considers whether the subjects of the study benefit from this factor; and hence the ensuing effects on the process of learning, (b) the extent to which the principles of the

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communicative approach can be successfully implemented in EFL classes and whether the approach has been at the level of the expected results, and (c) the use of the mother tongue in EFL classes and the extent to which it can contribute to the success of the learning process. Chapter Four examines the diverse problems and difficulties the learners experience with each of the four communicative skills in the course of the teaching-learning process, and proposes solutions to these hindrances.

Chapter Five states the conclusions and recommendations.

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1. Literature Review

Much has been written about the difficulties and problems learners face in the course of their learning of English as a foreign language, as well as about the sources of such constraints and the ensuing detrimental effects on their communicative competence.

According to a website article entitled "Difficulties for learners", the difficulties learners encounter while learning English as a foreign language or using it communicatively result from the extent to which their native language differs from English. This implies that such difficulties may be more serious for certain learners, but may be less so for others. For instance, a Chinese learner may face many more difficulties than a German learner. Broadly speaking, this is due to the fact that Chinese is much more different from English than German in many aspects.

In this Literature Review Chapter, we will consider two broad areas from which stem problems and difficulties for EFL students with learning, and hence with using the language for communication. These are (a) the aspects of the English language including pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar; and (b) the four communicative skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

1.1. Difficulties with the aspects of English

1.1.1. Pronunciation

Certain EFL learners often make pronunciation errors that are usually thought to be due to the influence of their native language. In fact, as stated in the electronic article mentioned above, they pronounce certain sounds incorrectly or with difficulty.

Consonant sounds

Such difficulties lie in the following aspects:

- Particular consonant phonemes exist in English, but not in other languages. Examples of these are */v/* and */p/* which do not exist in Arabic, and /θ/ and /ð/ which do not exist in French. Some learners while speaking English tend to substitute the English consonant sounds that do not exist in their L1 for sounds that are nearest to those English ones. For instance, some Arabic learners of English mispronounce */v/* as */f/* and */p/* as */b/*.

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It is my experience that Emirati students' unfamiliarity with certain English phonemes may be more serious, in the sense that they are taught by non-native teachers coming from different Arab and Asian countries. The problem lies in the fact that being influenced by the phonological features of their mother tongue and regional dialects, many such teachers may still show some unfamiliarity with certain English phonemes, which may cause their students comprehension difficulties when they listen to authentic materials. For example, although the sounds [th] as in *three,* and [th] as in *there* exist in the Arabic language, many Egyptians mispronounce them respectively as [s] and [z]. Many also mispronounce the voiceless [p] as a voiced [b] and the voiced [v] as a voiceless [f]. Due to this fact, the non-native learner is likely to be confused and may fail to understand certain utterances if he or she is taught by a non-native teacher who mispronounces certain sounds, and happens to be later taught by a teacher who pronounces English sounds accurately. Ur (1984: 17–18) points to how different pronunciations of the same terms affect the learner's comprehension stating, "If a word is pronounced differently in informal speech from the way it is said formally, or was said when it was learnt, the listener may simply not recognize it as the same word, or may even miss its existence completely." Imagine, for instance, a learner who has been taught accurately-pronounced English, and hears the following sentence for the first time: "*They think the two papers she delivered were burned there before anyone could see them"* mispronounced as: "*zey sink ze two babers she delifered were burned zere before anyone could see zem."* Due to this mispronunciation, the listener is likely to be confused, and may not comprehend or may misinterpret the meaning of the sentence, because "*think"* may be misunderstood as *"sink", "papers"* which is mispronounced as "*babers"* might be heard and taken for *"babies"* and *"delivered"* belonging to the same semantic field as *"babies"* may be misunderstood in this respect as *"gave birth to."* So, the whole statement may be misunderstood as *"After the two babies were born, they were sunk (into water) and then burned before anyone could see them."*

Relying mainly on Kharma and Hajjaj (1989: 12), we consider below three common aspects of errors with consonant sounds.

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Confusion of some pairs of consonant sounds

Both authors refer to particular consonant sounds in minimal pairs, such as /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ as in *share* and *chair*. They assert that these confusions result from the fact that the Arab learner may not be familiar with the distinction between voiceless sounds and voiced sounds (ibid. :16). Here are examples:

. */f/* and */v/* as in *fast* and *vast.* In Arabic */v/* occurs in certain borrowed words only, such as *veranda* and *vitamin*, but when they speak English, some Arab learners use */f/* for both sounds */v/* and */f/*.

. */p/* and /*b/* as in *pin* and *bin.* /p/ does not exist in Arabic; certain Arabic speakers of English often substitute it for */b/* treating it as an allophone of this sound.

. /ŋ/ and */n/* respectively as in *sang* and *sand*. /ŋ/ is often replaced by /ng/ that sounds as two distinct phonemes, e.g. /*sɪngə*/ instead of /sɪŋə/ *singer*.

. /s/ and /θ/ as in sin and *thin*, and /z/ and /ð/ as in *zoo* and *they*.

. Under the influence of certain Arabic dialects (e.g., Egyptian dialect), /θ/ is mispronounced as /s/ and /ð/ is mispronounced as /z/.

Consonant clusters

Consonant clusters in English and Arabic differ a great deal. Arabic has no sequence of more than two consonants, whereas the English syllabic structure allows for a cluster of four consonants with no vowel between them, e.g. */teksts/ texts*. In connected speech, the consonant sequence may be even longer: a word can end with a consonant sound and the following one can begin with another. So, there can be clusters like */mɔ: drinks kleimd/ more drinks claimed*.

This peculiarity causes pronunciation difficulties to some foreign learners of English, who often tend to force intrusive vowels between consonants. For example, /grænfɑ:ðə/ *grandfather* may be mispronounced as /grændifɑ:ðə/ by certain Arab learners of English, and *desks /desks/* may be mispronounced as */desukusu/* by Japanese learners.

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Another example of breaking consonant clusters with vowels is that of the past tense form of regular verbs ending in a voiceless consonant: *stopped* /stɔpit/ and *asked* /a:skt/ may be mispronounced as /stɔpid/ and */a:skid/*

Consonant doubling

Although English has a lot of orthographic double consonants, these are pronounced as a single consonant sound, e.g. /əlaʊ/ *allow*, /ɪmbærəs/ *embarrass*, etc. Certain EFL learners, however, tend to double the pronunciation of English double consonants, because they are spelt as such, and also due to the fact that doubling is a feature of the pronunciation of their native language.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that doubling is a characteristic of the pronunciation of certain English compound patterns, such as *midday* /*mid-dei*/, *bookcase* /*buk-keis*/, etc.

Vowel sounds

English has a large number of vowel sounds in comparison to some other languages, such as Arabic, French, Japanese, and Spanish. The above-mentioned electronic article spells out that the exact number of distinct vowel sounds depends on the variety of English. For example, Received Pronunciation has twelve monophthongs (single or 'pure' vowels), eight diphthongs (double vowels); whereas General American English has thirteen monophthongs.

Many EFL learners, such as native speakers of the above-cited languages may have problems with hearing and pronouncing these distinctions.

The main aspects of difficulty with vowel sounds on the part of Arab learners as stated by Kharna and Hajjaj (1989: 14) are listed below.

Difficulties in recognizing and producing some vowel sounds

These sounds include:

- /eə/ as in /ðeə/ *there*, /feə/ *fair*, and /weə/ *wear*
- /ʊə/ as in /ʃʊə/ *sure* and /pjʊə/ *pure*
- /ɪə/ as in /bɪə/ *beer* and /ɪəz/ *ears*

These sounds are often replaced by the nearest vowel sound followed by a clear Arabic /r/. Thus:

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. /eə/ becomes /e:/ as in colloquial Arabic /de:r/ (monastery)

. /ʊə/ becomes /u:/ as in Arabic /du:r/ (houses)

. /ɪə/ becomes /i:/ as in Arabic /bi:r/ (a well)

Confusion of some particular vowel sounds

Many learners often confuse the following vowel sounds, because they sound to them somewhat similar in pronunciation.

. /ɔ/ as in *hot*, /əʊ/ as in *go*, and /ɔ:/ as in *four*

. /ʌ/ as in *but*, /æ/ as in *bat*, and /ɑ:/ as in *bar*

. /u:/ as in /fu:l/ *fool* and /ʊ/ as in /fʊt/ *foot*

. /eɪ/ as in /teɪl/ *tale* and /e/ as in /tel/ *tell*

Both authors assert that failure to recognize and produce certain vowel sounds, as well as confusing particular ones can lead to misunderstanding.

Connected speech

When sounds are combined into utterances, certain modifications take place not only at the level of the sounds themselves, but also at the level of the force with which the sounds are uttered. This is why particular sounds are pronounced more strongly than others. Apart from this, the voice melody, that is the rising and falling of the voice also changes. All such changes affect the type of meaning or message speakers intend to convey (Kharma and Hajjaj 1989: 22).

Stress, rhythm, and intonation

Stress refers to the degree of force with which a sound or syllable is uttered. Its occurrence is different in isolated words from those same words in connected speech. More precisely, every word used in isolation has at least one major (or primary) stress, and usually has a fixed stress pattern if it is composed of more than one syllable. This is, however, not the case in connected speech. When we speak, we do not utter all sounds and syllables with equal force. We exert a stronger force on the sounds and syllables we want to emphasize than on those that are less important. In the sentence *I want to go now*, the syllables *I*, *want*, *go*, and *now* can each be uttered more strongly than the syllable *to*. This is what is called sentence stress.

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The stressed syllables in an utterance tend to occur at more or less equal intervals of time regardless of the number of unstressed or weak syllables that may be found between them. This is called rhythm.

Intonation refers to the distinctive use of pitch or melody in an utterance. It is used in English for three main purposes. Firstly, it can be used as a signal of grammatical structure, where it has a role similar to punctuation in writing. Secondly, it can be used to show grammatical contrasts, such as the difference between statements and questions. For instance, the sentence *John came yesterday* uttered with a rising pitch is a question, whereas if it is uttered with a falling pitch, it is a mere statement. Thirdly, it can be used to convey the attitude of the speaker.

The main type of intonation errors Arab learners make lies in tending to adapt Arabic intonation patterns when they speak English. This together with the fact that they are often unaware of the attitudinal role of intonation in speech can make the various messages they intend to convey unclear.

How intonation can be taught

Addressing the teacher, both authors suggest the points listed below for teaching English intonation.

- Since there is a close relation between stress and intonation, the teacher should make sure that the students master the stress patterns of English: stress of individual words, sentence stress, and in particular the use of weak forms;
- Showing learners the relation between grammatical structures and intonation patterns. For example, pointing out that a falling pattern is normally used for affirmative utterances or questions with question words, whereas a rising pattern is used with questions without question words;
- Another way to approach intonation is to emphasize 'simple pitches': fall, rise and sustained before introducing combined forms: high fall, rise fall, etc;
- Introducing attitudinal intonation in context, so that the learners may be able to associate an attitude with the intonation pattern used to realize it;
- Practicing intonation after a native speaker's model and recommending the learners not to see the exercise in its written form, but to expose them to the taped material only.

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Treatment of errors

The sources of difficulty and types of errors with stress and rhythm lie in what follows:

- Misplacing of stress on disyllabic words or polysyllabic words, e.g. *satis'fied*, instead of '*satisfied*;
- Confusion of words having identical forms for both noun and verb, but a different stress pattern, e.g. *import, export, etc*;
- Intrusion of the glottal stop /ʔ/ at word boundaries;
- Failure to adopt the stress-timed rhythm of English and weak forms in connected speech. This often leads to all words in a sentence being stressed irrespective of their context, nature of importance, including the function words, which are invariably unstressed, e.g. /'hi: 'went '**tu:** 'sku:l/ instead of /'hi: 'went **tə** 'sku:l/. This especially is what makes some Arab speakers pronounce English with an Arabic accent.

Another characteristic of Arabic pronunciation is that two words tend to be separated by an intrusive glottal stop when the second one begins with a vowel. This upsets the rhythm of the English sentence, and gives it a very jerky effect. For example: /hiː ʔɪz ʔɔːlweɪz ʔɑːskɪŋ ʔɔːkwærd kwestʃənz/ *He is always asking awkward questions,* instead of: /hiːz ɔːlwɪz ɑːskɪŋ ɔːkwəd kwestʃənz/

Kharma and Hajjaj (1989: 29 – 30) make the following suggestions for teaching stress and rhythm:

- It is imperative that Arab learners of English be taught the stress of every individual word when they first learn it;
- Training the learners to hear the right stress of words as and when they are uttered by the teacher or by native speakers in real communicative situations or when they are listened to from materials recorded by native speakers;
- Getting the learner accustomed to using a reliable pronouncing dictionary (e.g. *The English Pronouncing Dictionary* 1976*)* when he does his home assignment, such as preparing a passage for loud reading or learning material by heart;

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Another point related to the last suggestion above is training the students to use an English dictionary which has a pronunciation guide (e.g. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*), both in the classroom and when they work on their own. The teacher should equally encourage learners to build up their own dictionaries or word lists and insist that all stresses should be correctly placed on words.

The teacher should keep a record of the type of stress errors the students actually make. Immediate correction of such mistakes, and later remedial correction sessions will help eliminate them. These sessions may include exercises as the following:

(i) Stress shift in words having identical forms, but belonging to different parts of speech:

'abstract (noun; adj) - ab'stract (verb)
'present (noun; adj) - pre'sent (verb)
'transfer (noun) - trans'fer (verb)

(ii) Stress shift in words of the same root:

'politics - po'litical - poli'tician
'personal – per'sonify – perso'nality
de'mocracy – 'democrat – demo'cratic

- Teaching learners to make the appropriate reduction of unstressed vowels. In this respect, one suggested technique is practicing repetition of connected speech, such as recorded discourse. For instance, dialogues are an invaluable device. Loud reading of dialogues from a written script or their memorization and repetition by several speakers in a life-like situation is also very useful;
- Teaching songs and rhymes, especially to young learners even before communicative language. These types of material can be used extensively to imprint the stress and rhythm of English on the learners' minds.

1.1.2. Spelling

English spelling is claimed to be a major difficulty for non-native learners and native learners, too in view of the fact that there is a considerable irregularity between the writing system and pronunciation.

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One serious aspect of difficulty, in this framework, is that the learner may know a word orally, but not be able to write it correctly, or he or she may see a word written, but not know how to pronounce it, or may mislearn its pronunciation. Following are simple examples:

- The consonant sound */f/* can be represented by different letters: 'f' as in *father*, 'ff' as in *coffee*, 'gh' as in *laugh*, and 'ph' as in *photo*;
- The vowel sound */ɪ /* can be represented by 'i' as in *sit*, 'e' as in *barbecue*, 'ie' as in *sieve*, 'o' as in *women*, 'u' as in *busy*, 'ui' as in *build*, 'y' as in *system*, 'a' as in *village*, and 'ai' as in *bargain*.

Another difficulty is how to spell certain compound patterns, such as *boyfriend.* The difficulty lies in whether they should be written as one word, two separate words (*boy friend*), or separated by a hyphen (*boy-friend*). The same problem equally involves words like *whenever*, but *for ever*, *altogether*, but *all together*.

One measure that can be taken at the beginning of the English course, and that can help learners master English spelling as recommended by Kharma and Hajjaj (1989: 56) is to list the various orthographic representations of the different English consonant and vowel sounds. Apart from this, both authors make the following suggestions for teaching English spelling:

- Devoting some time at the beginning of every period to dictating a few new words learned during the previous lesson the day before. This is likely to develop in learners the habit of learning the spelling of new lexical items they are taught regularly and on a daily basis;
- Focusing on the past tense and past participle forms of irregular verbs, as well as on the form of irregular plural nouns, and urging the students to learn their correct spelling;
- Introducing certain simple, but productive spelling rules even at an early stage of the English course. Examples of these may include:

  (i) The addition of '*es'* to singular nouns ending in a hissing sound to form their plural, e.g. *class/classes; clash/clashes*;

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(ii) The change of *'y'* into *'i'* after a consonant to form plural nouns, the third person singular present tense, the past tense of regular verbs, and the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives, e.g. *city/cities; carry/carries; marry/married; happy/happier/happiest*;

(iii) The change of *'f'* into *'v'* before '*es'* to form the plural of certain nouns ending in 'f' or 'fe', e.g. *half / halves; wife / wives.*

- Making the learners aware of the existence of many words containing silent letters, compiling a list of such words, and urging the students to learn it. Here are examples of such words: *dumb, lamb, thumb; heir, honor, hour; fight, light, might, night, sight; kneel, knife, knock, know; calm, chalk, could, palm, should, would, etc*;
- Drawing the learners' attention to the existence of many pairs of words that are pronounced in the same way, but have different spelling and meaning (homophones). Examples: *born – borne; right – write; sea – see; weak – week; etc*.

To familiarize the learners with homophones, they can be given exercises on pairs of these phonological features focusing on the meaning and the correct spelling of each word.

On the whole, the teacher should be careful not to let spelling errors go uncorrected, so that they will not become deep-rooted and more difficult to eradicate later on.

1.1.3. Vocabulary

There are many features which are related to the vocabulary of every language, such as all the processes of word formation (e.g. affixation and compounding), collocations, synonymy, antonymy, phrasal verbs, idioms, etc. Here we are going to deal with a few ones which are likely to cause serious difficulties to learners.

It is worth noting that one of the factors representing a major difficulty for EFL learners related to the English vocabulary as stated in the aforementioned electronic article is the size of lexicon. It is affirmed, therein that the English language has one of the largest

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vocabulary of any known language. This undoubtedly requires a very considerable effort on the part of the learner to be able to master the language.

Phrasal verbs

One area of the English language which has made its lexicon very large is phrasal verbs. These are verbs which are used with other particular words, especially prepositions or adverbs. Like idioms, the problem with such verbs is that their meanings cannot be made out from the meanings of their individual constituents. In actual fact, the same verb used with different prepositions or adverbs, or the same phrasal verb used with other specific words has different meanings. Consider the following examples by Kharma and Hajjaj (1989: 70):

He ran out of the house = He left the house running.

He ran out of milk = He had no milk left.

Additionally, there are equally a number of phrasal verbs that differ in meaning in British English and American English, which would make the difficulties for learners, especially non-native ones more serious in figuring out the meanings of such type of verbs.

In order to overcome the difficulty of making out the meanings of phrasal verbs, Kharma and Hajjaj (ibid.: 72) suggest that the teacher must make his or her own list of such verbs that occur in textbooks, oral discussions, dialogues, home-reading materials, and which students have special difficulty with and try to deal with them in different successful ways.

Derivational affixation

This is one of the major processes of word formation in English. A derivational affix produces a new word by often changing the part of speech of a root, e.g. *nation (noun)* + the suffix *'al' = national (adj).*

Most errors made in this area consist in affixing the wrong prefix or suffix to the root to form an antonym or a word of a different part of speech. One obvious reason behind such errors is the fact that the combination of affixes and roots is quite arbitrary. Another source of difficulty is that the same affix can be used to form more than one part of speech.

Here are examples:

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al – arrival (noun); national (adj)

f*ul – handful (noun); careful (adj)*

ly – friendly (adj); quickly (adv)

Consequently, as there are no rules or even generalizations, the student has no alternative to rely on, but a lot of rote learning in order to be familiar with English derivatives.

On pages 41, 42, and 83, Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) make the following suggestions to help learners with word derivation:

- Introducing one or more common derivatives whenever the class comes upon a new stem or vice versa;
- Setting up a systematic plan of vocabulary study, including the study of prefixing and suffixing, and other methods of word-formation;
- Teaching the meaning of the various prefixes, which would be of great help in comprehending the meaning of prefixed words. This can also help the students learn new words from already familiar ones. For example, learning the meaning of *auto (self)* in *automobile* is a means of transferring this knowledge to other words such as *autograph, autobiography, etc.*

Confusibles

These are words which are likely to confuse the learner in terms of meaning and/or spelling, because of particular characteristics:

- Some have some similarity in pronunciation, but have different meaning, and sometimes do not belong to the same part of speech. Examples: *accept – expect – except; adapt – adopt; plan – plane – plain; desert – dessert; etc*;
- Others are related in meaning, but not necessarily synonymous; they may overlap in meaning to a small or to a large extent, e.g. *carry – hold*; *arrest – catch – seize*; *etc;*
- Others are synonymous in many contexts, but are used differently, *e.g. capable – able; arrive – reach; careful – cautious*;
- Others are confused because of language interference. For instance, Arab learners of English may say **sweet water* instead of *fresh/potable water*.

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Kharma and Hajjaj (ibid.: 83) do not suggest any practical teaching ways to overcome the difficulties those words may cause the learners, but simply propose having recourse to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* or *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English* that, they assert, can help the learners sort out such confusibles.

1.1.4. Grammar

According to the aforementioned website article, some of the grammar areas with which many EFL learners experience serious difficulties are considered below.

Tense, aspect, and mood

The author of the article claims that English has a relatively large number of tense-aspect-mood forms with some quite subtle differences between specific ones, such as the difference between the simple past (*I ate)* and the present perfect *(I have eaten).* Progressive and perfect progressive tenses add more complexity.

Functions of auxiliaries

Many learners of English often find it hard to manipulate the various ways English uses the first auxiliary verb of a tense. These include negation (e.g., *He hasn't been sleeping*), inversion with the subject to form a question (e.g. *Has he been sleeping?),* short answers (e.g., *Yes, he has*.), and tag questions (e.g., *has/hasn't he?)*

A further complication is that the dummy auxiliary *do/did* is used to fulfil these functions in the simple present and simple past, but not auxiliary *be*, or *have.*

Modal auxiliaries

English has a significant number of modal auxiliaries, each of which has a number of diverse uses. For example, the opposite of *You must be here at eight* is usually *You don't have to be here at eight,* while *must* in *You must not park your car here* has a different meaning from *must* in *You must not be a native speaker*. This complexity requires considerable work on the part of learners, particularly non-native ones, so that they can master these grammatical patterns.

1.1.5. Other factors

Rababah (2003) treats a number of reasons behind communication problems among Arab learners of English with some more focus on Jordanian EFL school learners and university students majoring in English. The main ones of these are summed up below.

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Lack of exposure to authentic English

One of the reasons behind the communication difficulties among many Arab EFL learners is lack of exposure to English as spoken by its native speakers. In this frame of reference, Rababah (ibid.) affirms that in order for language learners to use the language more effectively, they should be involved in practicing it in real-life situations. Without such practice, he assumes that "English or any other language cannot be acquired."

The author expresses dissatisfaction with the fact that in Jordan (and one would also say in the majority of Arab countries, especially those in which English is used as the second foreign language, such as Tunisia) English is used only as an academic subject. More precisely, the sole way to learn English is through formal instruction; that is inside the classroom where the language schoolteachers are native speakers of Arabic. Due to this actuality, therefore, there is little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language. He maintains that this is only possible when students encounter native speakers of English who visit the country as tourists, but this rarely happens.

The same factor is equally behind the weakness in communication (to quote Rababah's words) of Jordanian English majors. He asserts that in order to address the problem, the English Language Department at Yarmouk University used to bring over Americans in the summer to teach English pronunciation, stress, and intonation. During those courses, most of the students' speaking time was in English as they were exposed to the target language as spoken by its native speakers. The author says that the experience was very helpful to English majors, but the English Department is no longer interested in continuing the program.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the teaching staff in the department are native speakers of Arabic, which means that the students might not have enough exposure to English as presented by its native speakers, especially with respect to stress and intonation.

Motivation

Rababah (2003) states that certain attitudinal studies conducted on EFL Arab secondary school and university students have shown that they are instrumentally motivated to learn English, and that they are really aware of the usefulness of mastering

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the language. The writer explains that the main stimulus for learning English is instrumental, that is to achieve a professional goal.

In this regard, referring to Jordanian English majors, Rababah says he does not think that many of them desire to be part of an English-speaking community. He maintains that it might be true that a few of them have such a desire, but the majority join the English-language department, because it might be easier for them to get a job with a BA in English than in any other specialization.

Teaching methodology

Another serious cause of many Arab learners' communication difficulties relates to teaching methodology. Rababah stresses the fact that one aspect of deficiency in teaching English is the use of the learners' mother tongue. Indeed, he asserts that teachers in Jordan use Arabic to explain English literature and to teach difficult lexical items. He makes it clear that vocabulary items are taught in isolation, though the Communicative Language Teaching approach insists on the importance of teaching vocabulary in context.

In the same context, Rababah asserts that about one-third of the courses of the English Bachelor's degree are taught in Arabic, especially at the Faculty of Arts and Education. These courses include Islamic studies, Arabic, social studies, history, computer science, and education. He says he assumes that the remainder of the courses, which are taught in English, may not be enough to help the graduates communicate effectively in the target language. Therefore, he suggests that it would be better and helpful if such courses were taught in English rather than in Arabic. In this respect, he quotes Halliday et. al (1984: 18) discussing ways of learning a foreign language:

> In Nigeria, English is used in almost all the teaching in high schools. This has two important results. In the first place, the quantity of classroom experience that each pupil receives is much greater outside the English lesson than within it. Some people have said that if the English language lessons were removed entirely from the schools in Nigeria, little or no effect would be noticed on the ability of the pupils in English when they came to leave schools. But in the second place, the children are influenced by class teachers other than those who are trained in English. If those teachers' English is not very good, the pupils will suffer. Teaching in a language is an excellent way of teaching a language, but all those who teach subjects in a foreign language need to be able to perform well in it themselves.

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Accordingly, Rababah holds the opinion that if this is the case in Nigerian high schools, all university courses except Arabic courses should be taught in English, which would improve the learners' linguistic ability, and thus can improve their communicative competence.

Additionally, Rababah states that authentic listening materials are not made use of by the majority of schoolteachers, most probably because of the limited number of cassette recorders and the large number of teachers at the same school. Therefore, teachers find themselves obliged to read out dialogues to their students, which does not provide them with the necessary native-speaker model. The author explains that dialogues are designed to be role-played by at least two partners, not by the teacher alone, who would enact all the partners' roles with the same voice and intonation, which may demotivate the learners and make them bored. He thinks that this may be due to the effect of the audio-lingual method, which had been in use in the country until the early eighties, and through which teachers were taught.

Rababah concludes that the teacher-training programmes have not been successful in changing the teachers' methodology. In fact, the adopted teaching methodology is claimed to be eclectic and focus on communicative approaches to language teaching, but because of the teachers' practices in the classroom, it is more likely a grammar-translation method.

1.2. Difficulties with communicative skills

Rababah (2003) quotes Suleiman (1983: 129) as arguing that the most remarkable problems which impede the progress of Arab university students may be attributed to the "inadequate mastery of the four language skills; namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing." This issue is our concern in the following section of this literature review. Focus will be laid on what has been written about the problems and difficulties that hinder EFL/ESL learners' proficiency in the four communicative skills, the various sources of those problems and difficulties, the measures that can be taken to overcome them, and the suggestions that can be made to help them use the language communicatively.

1.2.1. Listening comprehension

Relying on Penny Ur (1984), Shelagh Rixon (1986), Mary Underwood (1989), Michael Rost (1991), and H. Douglas Brown (1994), listening difficulties fall into two

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categories. The first category includes listening problems resulting from the characteristics of the English language and the native speakers' culture. These are the following:

- Interference (including L2 phonemes not available in the L1);
- Effect of suprasegmental elements on the perception of sounds;
- Redundancy;
- Inappropriate listening style;
- Lack of background knowledge or unfamiliarity with the L2 culture.

The second category of listening problems involves features of listening situations causing difficulties for listeners. These are outlined below:

- Kind of delivery including speed rate and the speaker's accent, (especially native speakers' accents);
- Number of speakers;
- No chance of repetition;
- Inability to concentrate;
- Boring topics.

Since these diverse difficulties represent obstacles to the development of non-native learners' listening skills, the second part of this literature review section will be devoted to considering some ways of developing the students' listening ability inside and outside the classroom. Instances of these ways may be the following:

- Suggestion for the stages of a successful listening lesson;
- Value of face-to-face interaction;
- Focusing on meaning;
- Value of attention to accuracy and analysis of form.

1.2.1.1. Problems due to the peculiarities of English

Ur (1984: 11) considers some listening difficulties the non-native learner comes upon during his or her learning a foreign language. In discussing them, she reports she relied heavily on Gillian Brown's *Listening to Spoken English* (1977).

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One of these obstacles is mishearing certain sounds accurately. The author states that one reason behind such a hindrance is the fact that these sounds do not exist in the foreign language learner's own mother tongue. As referred to earlier, she states that "the sound /θ/ as in *think*, for example, does not exist in French. A native French speaker may very often, therefore, not notice at first that it occurs in English; he may simply assimilate it to the nearest sound familiar to him and both hear and say */s/* or */f/*."

Ur (1984: 12) goes further elucidating another reason why certain sounds may be misheard asserting, "The student is not used to the stress and intonation patterns of English and the way these influence both the realization of certain phonemes and the meaning of the utterance." To overcome such a difficulty, Ur (ibid.) strongly recommends that the foreign-language learner be made familiar with the common phonemes of the target language in order to be an efficient listener.

Additionally, it could equally be asserted that by relying on situational contexts, foreign-language learners can guess the meaning of many misheard or even mispronounced words, as well as the meaning of many homophones or minimal pairs. In this respect, Ur (1984: 15) argues that the learner, banking on contexts can understand what will come next even without hearing it. Ur believes so much in this fact that she calls what will be said next redundant. Therefore, she claims, "The foreign-language learner who listens carefully for the exact sense of redundant phrases and attaches importance to it is actually hampering himself".

In point of fact, it is conspicuous that Ur disagrees with any learner who wants to know every word of what he listens to, in the sense that this may very often lead him away from comprehension. However, she assumes, "The ability to make do with only a part of what is heard and understand the main message is a vitally important one for effective listening in a communicative situation" (1984: 15).

This is definitely true, because apart from the reason Ur mentions above, making do with only a section of what is delivered represents some advantages, one of which is the fact that concentrating on the global message of any listening material spares the listener

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time and physical and intellectual efforts, even in situations where outside interferences like noise – as Ur (1984: 13) argues – make listening difficult.

Mary Underwood (1989: 17) shares the same opinion with Ur contending that focusing on the language word by word does not work with listening. It is often a case of "He who hesitates is lost!" However, she argues that

> to listen to what is coming, and letting things that have passed go rather than dwelling upon them, often gives surprisingly good results. Speakers often say things more than once, or rephrase them, or another speaker echoes what has been said. The listener who has not 'stopped' on a half missed point gets a second, or even a third chance to fill the gap in the message he/she is receiving.

Referring back to the solution consisting in relying on contexts to understand utterances, it is without doubt that this solution is not always guaranteed, because the listener may not be knowledgeable about all situational contexts. For instance, the context can be a target language cultural aspect that is unfamiliar to the non-native learner. In this respect, and worth mentioning as a serious problem causing comprehension difficulties for the non-native learner is unfamiliarity with the L2 culture or insufficient background knowledge.

Mary Underwood (1989: 2–3) seems to limit the scope of relying on situational contexts arguing that it requires the listener's knowledge of the culture and the background of the speaker, as well as the way utterances are said and the topic dealt with. She claims that comprehension in such circumstances is easy, especially for native listeners. As for non-native ones she (ibid.: 4) asserts:

> If the language is a foreign one, the listener's problems are even more acute. He/She may not be able to provide a suitable context (because of lack of knowledge of the speaker or the speaker's intentions) and may then resort to trying to derive meaning from the individual syntactic and semantic components of utterance and the manners in which it is spoken, without having anything to relate it to.

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Mary Underwood does not offer any effective solution to the problem of non- native listeners' miscomprehension or incomprehension due to lack of background knowledge. She simply claims seemingly doubtfully that listeners may rely on individual syntactic and semantic components to extract the meaning of utterances. It, therefore, could be held that resorting to such a solution is beyond a learner whose command of a foreign language is limited, and even when he or she has recourse to the mentioned solution, matters are very likely to become more complicated for him or her, because working on syntactic and semantic components is manageable only for someone whose command of a foreign language is actually perfect.

There is no doubt that background knowledge is really indispensable to the comprehension of any listening material. Therefore, teachers are called upon to provide non-native listeners with background knowledge in advance before tackling a listening lesson in the classroom; whereas outside school, these learners can be helped by foreign-language assistants – in case they are available – so that the former will not encounter comprehension difficulties.

H. Douglas Brown (1994: 239) equally examines several factors which are very likely to make listening texts hard to fathom, particularly for non-native learners. He cites eight characteristics of spoken language which he adapts from miscellaneous sources, such as Dunkel (1991); Richards (1983); and Ur (1984). Of these characteristics, we mention reduced forms. These are of various types:

a. Phonological reductions, such as *"Djeetyet?"* for *"did you eat yet?"*

b. Morphological contractions, as *"I'll", "he'll", etc.*

c. Syntactic (elliptical forms like *"When will you be back?"* ~ *"Tomorrow, maybe."*

d. Pragmatic *(phone rings in a house, child answers, cups the telephone and yells to another room in the house. ("Mum! Phone.")*

He claims, "These reductions pose significant difficulties, especially to classroom learners who may have initially been exposed to full forms of the English language." Brown (1994: 240) also refers to colloquialism, idioms and slang asserting, "Learners who

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have been exposed to standard written and/or textbook language sometimes find it surprising and difficult to deal with such spoken language aspects."

It is interesting to note, therefore, that learners should not always be exposed solely to the full forms of English or to the standard language of textbooks. With the help of teachers and foreign-language assistants, they ought to be exposed to and practice all forms of English inside and outside the classroom, preferably not at the beginning of the learning process, so that matters will not be complicated for them, but – as mentioned so far – after their listening ability starts developing, so that they will not be bogged down with comprehension difficulties when they happen upon any sort of listening material delivered in any way.

1.2.1.2. Situations causing difficulties for listeners

Shelagh Rixon (1986) considers several listening problems and difficulties that are likely to cause comprehension difficulties for listeners, and would consequently obstruct the progress of their listening ability. One of these problems is what she terms *type of delivery* (ibid.: 58).

The way a listening material is delivered comprises two factors: the speed of the speaker and his or her accent. Referring to the difficulty fast delivery brings about in listening passages, Rixon (ibid.) argues that it "places more strain on the learner even when he has no difficulty in understanding." This is certainly true, especially of non-native learners who do not have a good mastery of the target language, because fast delivery may make the listener lose concentration due to the tension imposed on him or her, and he or she may consequently not understand or may misunderstand the listening passage.

Incomprehension or misunderstanding is more likely to occur when fast speech is delivered in an unfamiliar accent. This is true on more scores than one, primarily the fact that there may be many words that are misheard, and others may be pronounced unclearly or seemingly strangely. Hence, listening comprehension teachers may begin by exposing learners to listening materials delivered at normal speed and in a familiar accent, and when they notice that their listening ability is evolving to the better, they can start training them gradually to get used to various rates of speed delivery as well as – as Rixon (1986: 59)

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states – making them accustomed to "the range of accents that they are likely to come into contact with in real life".

Equally important to cite in the matter of Rixon's treatment of the issues standing as obstacles to the development of listening skills is the number of speakers in listening texts. She advocates, "Listening passages in which there is more than one speaker often cause more difficulty than monologues. The listeners have to relate each speaker's new contribution to what the other speakers have said, as well as to the development of the argument as a whole" (1986: 61 – 62).

It could be argued that there is unquestionably some exaggeration and generalization regarding Rixon's opinion of listening passages where there is more than one speaker. This is, especially clear in her use of *often* in the last quotation. She should have been precise taking into consideration that the criteria for the difficulty of listening passages are not an irrefutable scientific truth. This difficulty depends on specific factors, such as the kind of text, the topic it deals with, and the learners' level of proficiency in the target language. It is true, therefore, that what is said to be difficult for one type of listeners may be considered easy for another type of learners. For instance, a listening passage in which there is only one speaker may be reckoned monotonous, boring and difficult to concentrate on, even when its subject is interesting, because there is no variety of voices which would make it lively, and thus induce the audience into listening to it attentively as is the case for listening texts in which there is more than one speaker. Listening materials in which there are a number of interlocutors are usually motivating and easy to comprehend, more precisely in situations where speakers talk over a favorite topic or exchange different opinions about an important common issue. This would make the listener attend to each speaker's argument carefully, and even may predict what the next speaker will say relying on what the previous one has said.

In the context of the value of interesting common themes for the comprehension of listening materials, Rixon (1986: 62) refers to this question under the heading *familiarity of subject matter*. Her argument, in this respect, is incontrovertible. She asserts:

> Even someone with a minimal grasp of a foreign language will often be able to follow a conversation or a talk on a subject that he knows something about already. He will have at the forefront of his mind a

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> whole series of familiar concepts and ideas and will be able to use these to fill in any gaps in comprehension that might arise because of his low command of the language. Conversely, someone with even a good command of a language may experience difficulty if he has to listen to something about a subject that is new or strange to him.

Mary Underwood (1989), in turn, examines a number of listening problems some of which are dealt with above by Rixon. So, let us see how the former treats some of the same problems considered so far by the latter.

With regard to the problem springing from the kind of delivery, Underwood (1989: 16) refers to it as lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak. She states that unlike reading comprehension where the learner can glance back at the words and re-examine them thoroughly in a written text, the listener in listening comprehension cannot keep pace with the speaker. He feels that most utterances disappear before he can sort them out, or becomes so busy working out the meaning of one part of what he hears that he misses what comes next.

Mary Underwood examines this problem without suggesting any solution to it either explicitly or implicitly. However, one can approve of the solution she proposes to the second problem which is so much in the same context as the first one that she seems to repeat herself. This problem – as she terms it - is the inability to get things repeated. Undoubtedly, this problem does not apply to all types of listening situations. There are instances – as Underwood (1989: 17) roughly states – where listeners can resort to recording what they listen to and, of course, can play it over and over again. Yet, there are situations where the listener cannot record listening materials. In such a case, the learners, especially non-native ones, have to be taught — as noted so far — not to concentrate on the meaning of individual words, but try to work out the global meaning of utterances relying on situational contexts on condition that they should be acquainted with such contexts.

Another listening problem examined by Mary Underwood (1989: 19) is the inability to concentrate. She maintains that this problem can be caused by a number of factors, such as poor recording, bad quality record-players and acoustically unsuitable environment.

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Aside from these factors, it is worthy of note that the inability to concentrate may often result from boring uninteresting topics sometimes, even when these topics are quite familiar to the learner. This would cause comprehension problems and may lead to the failure of the listening lesson, simply because the students are likely to be reluctant to attend to a listening material the theme of which does not arouse their interest. Here, the solution is quite evident. Learners ought to be taught in an acoustically appropriate atmosphere and should be provided with well-recorded and clearly acoustic listening materials dealing with subjects that are at the level of their affective interests and their current or future professional needs.

In this context, Underwood (ibid.) refers to the advantage of selecting listening materials dealing with interesting topics, so as to assure the listeners' concentration asserting, "If students find the topic interesting, they will find concentration easier." If, however, the teacher is not always able to provide his or her students with the desired listening passages for one reason or another, one may suggest that he or she should resort to various kinds of motivating activities in order to arouse their interest in the lesson.

1.2.1.3. Developing the learners' listening ability

Mary Underwood (1989) dedicates the fourth chapter of her *Teaching Listening* (pp. 21–29) to elucidating what the teacher can do and what he or she ought to take into consideration, so as to be qualified as a successful listening teacher, and thus can carry out the success of a listening lesson. For instance, with respect to a really successful listening session, the author (ibid.: 28) maintains that the teacher ought to ensure that his or her lesson should include:

- the pre-listening stage, when the context of the listening text is established, the tasks explained and assistance offered as necessary;
- the while-listening stage, when the students listen to the passage (in some instances one section at a time) and attempt to the while-listening activities;
- a period when students discuss their responses in pairs/groups, and help each other with the task;

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- if necessary, a repeat listening for students to continue/complete the activity or to check/clarify information they may have missed or think they may have got wrong;
- perhaps some further discussion between students, or some assistance from the teacher leading if necessary to listening again to all or part(s) of the text;
- post-listening production of the "acceptable" answers, either by the teacher or the class in general;
- consideration of the areas where students failed to understand or missed something and discussion of why this happened, playing through the text again in whole or in part, if necessary;
- perhaps a post-listening extension activity.

Underwood's points can be said to represent no defect, but they ought not to be considered as the only recourse during any listening course. In other terms, the teacher should always select various suitable activities according to the requirements of the three phases of the lesson and to the level of his or her students' command of the target language. This would undoubtedly avoid monotony and assure success.

In the terms of Professor N. Candlin, the General Editor of Rost's *Listening in Action* (1991), this book "highlights the skills and strategies involved in listening in a second or foreign language. It illustrates activities which teachers can use as models to refine the students' listening ability and to develop their learning capacity" (1991: Preface).

Rost (1991: 7) suggests general guidelines for the development of the learners' listening skills. For instance, he asserts that listening ability develops through face-to-face interaction. He maintains, "By interacting in English, learners have the chance for new language input and the chance to check their own listening ability. Face-to-face interaction provides stimulation for development of listening for meaning".

Further, it could be assumed that through face-to-face interaction, the listener is prompted to play an active role sometimes even against his or her own will; and this is what efficient listening necessitates. It requires an active listener who listens attentively and tries to respond appropriately. If not, he or she is a mere passive hearer. It accordingly, can be affirmed that by means of face-to-face interaction, effective linguistic

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communication can be guaranteed. It, however, cannot take place unless the speaker and the listener exchange each other's role in turn.

Another basis through which listening skills can develop to Rost's mind is focusing on meaning and trying to learn new and important content in the target language. By so doing frequently while attending to any listening material, the learner's lexical repertoire can be enriched, which would better his or her comprehension capacity, and thus paves the way for the development of his or her listening ability.

A further possible ground for the development of listening ability in Rost's opinion is attention to accuracy and analysis of form.

It is, without fail, perfect for learners to be accurate in using a language, but while being in the process of developing our students' listening skills in order to achieve the objective of linguistic communication, one could affirm that training the learners to focus on accuracy and form is very likely to be disadvantageously at the expense of fluency and content.

In addition to the above-examined general guidelines that Rost (1991) proposes for the development of the learners' listening ability, he also addresses the classroom teacher suggesting several other recommendations that the latter should implement, so as to accomplish the same objective. Following are instances of these recommendations:

> . Addressing all the students in English, not only the brilliant ones and getting to know them through talking about topics of mutual interest;
> . Making English the language of the classroom and pointing out to students how they are becoming confident and effective users of English;
> . Exposing the learners to various English listening situations, personally and through use of video and audio tapes;
> . Setting classroom listening activities that personally engage the students, and setting challenging, yet realistic goals for each activity. The students should be given clear feedback on how well they do. Systematic review of tapes and activities should be provided to help consolidate their learning and memory (ibid.: 7 – 8).

"Success breeds success," Underwood (1989: 22) states while addressing the teacher "[to build] up the students' confidence in their own listening ability." In this respect, it

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could be claimed that if we succeed in developing the learners' listening skills, we can consequently manage to pave the way for them to engage in successful autonomous learning outside school, even without the help of the teacher or the foreign-language assistant.

1.2.2. Speaking

Speaking is a priority for most learners of English (Miller 2001: 25). It has, however, been noticed in many EFL settings that developing oral communication skills in a great number of learners is an objective that has not yet been achieved. In the present section of this Literature Review Chapter, we will look mainly at the various reasons behind the issue, what learners are expected to know to be communicatively proficient, and we will eventually examine the favorable factors, as well as the possible effective instructional procedures that could aid the development of the students' speaking skills.

1.2.2.1. Causes of difficulties

Emotional influences

Shumin (2002: 206) notes, "The affective factors related to L2 or foreign language learning are emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, and motivation." Oxford (1990: 140) puts it concisely and clearly stating, "The affective side of the learner is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure."

Emotional influences involve mainly apprehension of errors and lack of motivation. Both issues are examined below.

Apprehension of erring

Shumin (ibid.) argues that speaking a foreign language in public, especially in the presence of native speakers often provokes anxiety. Excessive anxiety sometimes occurs when EFL learners are lost for words or become tongue-tied in an unexpected situation, which usually causes discouragement and a general sense of failure. Unlike children, adult learners are concerned with the way other people judge them. Therefore, they are very careful about not making errors in their speech, in that erring would be a public manifestation of ignorance. This would present a situation in which a speaker "loses face"

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in certain cultures. In a word, learners' sensitivity to making mistakes or "loosing face" has obviously been one reason for their inability to speak English fluently. Jianing (2007) accounts for the same issue stating that in order for students to spare themselves being ridiculed, they tend to be reluctant to speak English in class. Therefore, the author explains, "There is the vicious circle: the less they speak, the less they improve their speaking skills, and the more they are afraid of speaking."

Lack of motivation

In a similar frame of reference, Smyrniou (2003) cites three motivation-related reasons why Puerto Rican College students may be unwilling to take part in classroom discussions in English. These reasons can apply to many other EFL learners including a greater number of Tunisian secondary school students, according to a personal observation.

The first reason is that students are afraid that classmates or the instructor may judge their English, which puts them in an embarrassing situation. They, therefore, prefer to be passive and silent, even if the teacher makes it clear that participating in oral activities is graded.

The second reason is that English classes – though obligatory – do not appeal to the great majority of the student population. Consequently, students are not very motivated to perform well in English, and especially to participate in class debates which involve critical thinking.

The third reason, which is somewhat similar to the second one – one could claim –, is that since students are not interested in the same subjects as North American undergraduates, they are not motivated to take part in class discussions, and are thus apathetic to search for information to prepare themselves for doing so.

Cognitive factors

Shumin (2002: 205) maintains that age is one of the most determinant factors of success or failure in learning a foreign or a second language. He reports Krashen, Long, and Scarcella (1982) as arguing that second language learners who start the process of learning in early childhood via natural exposure achieve a higher degree of proficiency

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than those starting as adults. Shumin points out that ageing may also affect adult learners' pronunciation of the target language detrimentally, especially certain phonological features, such as intonation and stress, which may cause misunderstanding or communication breakdown. In a word, the author holds, "Adult learners do not seem to have the same innate language-specific endowment or propensity as children for acquiring fluency and naturalness in spoken language".

Sociocultural factors

Apart from the cognitive factors, there are also sociocultural factors at play. In point of fact, Shumin adheres to the claim that many cultural peculiarities of a language influence second or foreign language learning. On this note, by reason of the impact or interference of their own cultural norms, it is difficult for non-native speakers to select the forms appropriate to certain situations. By way of illustration, in China, paying a compliment to someone obliges them to give a negative response (such as "No. It is not so good.") in order to show "modesty", whereas in North America, such a reply might be both inappropriate and embarrassing.

Further, oral communication involves a very influential nonverbal communication system, which at times may contradict the messages conveyed verbally. From this perspective, due to lack of familiarity with the nonverbal communication system of the target language, EFL learners often do not know how to pick up nonverbal cues. Consequently, ignorance of nonverbal messages often results in misunderstanding. The author (2002: 206) gives the following example as a case in point, which shows that sociocultural factors are among the circumstances that affect oral communication deeply.

> One day, when a Chinese student heard "Let's get together for lunch sometime," he immediately responded by proposing to fix a specific date without noticing the native speaker's indifferent facial expression. Undoubtedly, he was puzzled when his interlocutor left without giving him an expected answer. It is evident that the student had not understood the nonverbal message.

Another reason why learners may have difficulty acquiring conversational skills in a second language, as argued by Scarcella (1990: 344), is that the target culture may discourage non-native speakers from having too perfect command of the language. The

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author exemplifies this assumption through quoting Gannon (1980) as reporting that a francophone informed an Englishman who spoke French fluently that his French was too good to be acceptable.

Scarcella (1990: 344) assumes that a further explanation for adult learners' inability to acquire conversational competence is prejudice. This issue, one could argue, relates solely to second-language learners living in native-speaking communities. The author asserts that the learners feel that prejudice rather than linguistic differences possibly hinders their gaining socioeconomic power in the target culture. As a result, they may "simply give up trying to learn a language which enables them to fit into a culture in which the cards are stacked against them" (ibid.: 345).

Other causes

Lack of exposure to the target language

No wonder, exposing foreign learners to a language sufficiently in a variety of ways is much help in achieving successful learning. Dealing with the causes of communication difficulties in second-language oral production, Scarcella (1990: 344) spells out that adult learners may not always receive enough exposure to the target language to develop their conversational competence. He adds that it is equally possible that adult learners do not have adequate direct experience interacting with native speakers to acquire conversational skills. Consequently, certain conversational features may be acquired late in the language acquisition process, for they are neither perceptually salient nor easily understood.

Nevertheless, in a second-language situation, it could be argued that it is possible for learners to have the chance of practicing the language regularly and everywhere. Conversely, EFL students' learning and use of the language is often confined to a formal classroom setting with rare or no opportunities for practice elsewhere, which has a detrimental effect on their speaking ability.

The influence of the first language

Another potential reason lurking behind the difficulties foreign language learners encounter during the process of developing their oral skills is that they are not motivated to acquire the conversational features of the target language. This is due to the risk of

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falling back on their knowledge of their mother tongue conversational rules when communicating in the target language, and they are not usually aware of the communication difficulties that consequently arise out of this strategy (Scarcella 1990: 344).

A further detrimental effect of the mother tongue on oral English, as noted by Na'Allah and Sanusi, in a website article entitled "Teaching speaking skills among second language learners", is the way ESL and EFL learners pronounce sounds, words and sentences. In the Nigerian context, the authors assert that most of the phonological features of Nigerians' English are affected by interfering features from their first language. This phenomenon is so noticeable that many people claim to be able to tell which part of the country a Nigerian belongs to from the way he or she speaks English. It is, therefore, recommended to devote a considerable part of oral English lessons to teaching the correct pronunciation of the language.

Lack of practice due to large classes

According to Jianing (2007), large classes present another hindrance to the learners' oral proficiency. In the context of China, where there are usually over fifty students in each class, students have little opportunity for practicing speaking in the classroom. This causes the speaking skills of most students to be comparatively lower than the other skills. Green, Christopher, and Lam (1997: 135), in turn, attribute the difficulties with oral communi- cation to some factors, among which are large classes: "Discussion skills are often undeveloped in the EFL/ESL classroom. A combination of potent inhibitors are responsible for this situation: large class size, students' level of proficiency, and time constraints. As a result, many teachers never attempt discussions or, as a result of negative experiences, simply stop holding them."

It is a personal experience that the same problem applies to Tunisian secondary students. As there are roughly twenty-seven students on average in one class, not every learner can have a share in speaking activities due to shortage of time, especially as speaking in its own right whether done individually, in pairs, or in groups is not usually allotted a whole one-hour class period, but no more than one quarter of an hour at best.

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The classroom atmosphere

Jianing (ibid.) contends that the impact of the classroom atmosphere on language learning, and particularly on speaking courses is manifest and prompt. A free and jovial atmosphere boosts communications, while an apprehensive and tense atmosphere resulting from a number of circumstances gives rise to invisible barriers to communication.

Speaking topics

It is generally recommended that speaking topics be familiar to students in terms of their connection to real life, and at the level of the language required to talk on them, with the aim of raising the students' interests and making it easy for all of them to take part in speaking activities. Conversely, Jianing (2007) reports that Chinese students often object to being frequently asked to talk about their families, schools, hobbies, or majors; and converse on topics, such as job interviews, meeting visitors, or shopping. These topics and situations provide students with little chance to be creative, in the sense that they are difficult to develop in depth. In consequence, students seem to lose interest in these situational themes, because they have felt that they are not much help to them in achieving the expected progress.

1.2.2.2. How learners deal with difficulties

When speakers do not know a word or fail to remember it, they may employ some or all of the following strategies to resolve the difficulty they encounter in expressing themselves properly (Harmer 2001: 249).

- *Improvising*: Speakers sometimes come up with words or phrases hoping they can help them express themselves, but these sometimes work, and some other times may obscure meanings.
- *Discarding*: When speakers cannot find the words to convey the intended meanings, they simply abandon the thoughts they cannot put into words.
- *Paraphrasing*: This lies in using terms that are familiar to the speaker to express a certain meaning. For instance, a learner may say *something for cleaning the teeth* if he or

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she does not know the word *toothbrush*. Such lexical substitution, however, may cause communication to be longer or more complicated than necessary.

- *Foreignising*: Foreign-language learner speakers choose words in a language they know well, such as their native language, and 'foreignise' them in the hope that they will express the meaning they intend to convey in the foreign language. An example of 'foreignising' words as cited by Thornbury (2005: 29) is turning the Spanish *una carpeta*, which means a file for papers, into the English-sounding *a carpet.*

As it is clear from this example, 'foreignising' words does not always convey the meanings the learner has in mind, but it rather at times leads to misunderstanding or incomprehension.

Other examples of communication strategies as mentioned by Thornbury (2005: 30) include:

- *Approximation*: This refers to using alternative related words, such as *work table* for *workbench*.
- *All-purpose words*: Examples of such words include *stuff, thing, make, do, etc.*

Harmer (2001: 249) holds that some of these "difficulty strategies" are more appropriate than others, and recommends teachers to encourage the learners' use of those strategies that help with oral fluency, such as paraphrasing and improvising.

1.2.2.3. What learners need to know

Shumin (2002: 206–208) quotes Canale and Swain (1980) as maintaining that communicative competence includes grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. These are considered below as abilities underlying speaking proficiency.

Grammatical competence

Scarcella and Oxford (1992: 141) cited in Shumin (ibid.) state, "Grammatical competence is an umbrella concept that includes expertise in grammar (morphology, syntax), vocabulary, and mechanics. With regards to speaking, the term mechanics

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refers to basic sounds of letters and syllables, pronunciation of words, intonation, and stress."

Shumin (2002: 207) points out that in order for EFL students to convey meaning, they must acquire the knowledge of words and sentences. In other terms, they must be familiar with how words are segmented with various sounds, and how sentences are stressed in particular ways. Hence, grammatical competence enables speakers to understand English language structures and use them accurately and smoothly, which contributes to their fluency.

Discourse competence

Shumin (ibid.) affirms that in addition to grammatical competence, it is imperative that EFL learners develop discourse competence, which is concerned with intersentential relationships. In both formal and informal discourse, the rules of coherence apply. These help hold communication together in a meaningful way. In communication, producing and comprehending a language require the ability to perceive and process stretches of discourse, and to formulate representations of meaning from referents in both previous and following sentences. Therefore – as Scarcella and Oxford (1992) cited in Shumin (2002) put it – it is necessary for effective speakers to acquire a large repertoire of structures and discourse markers to express ideas and show various types of relationship. With these, learners can manage turn taking in oral interactions.

Sociolinguistic competence

Knowledge of language only cannot prepare learners sufficiently for effective and appropriate use of the target language. Learners must be knowledgeable about what is expected socially and culturally by the target language users; that is they must acquire the rules and norms that govern the appropriate timing and realization of speech acts. Understanding the sociolinguistic aspect of language assists learners in knowing what comments are appropriate, how to ask questions in the course of interactions, and how to reply nonverbally according to the purpose of the talk.

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Strategic competence

As defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002: 515), strategic competence is "an aspect of COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE which describes the ability of speakers to use verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication." Shumin states that it may be the most important of all the communication competence components, and points out that where speaking is concerned, strategic competence is the ability to know when and how to start talking, how to keep a conversation going, how to end a conversation, and how to deal with communication breakdown and solve comprehension problems.

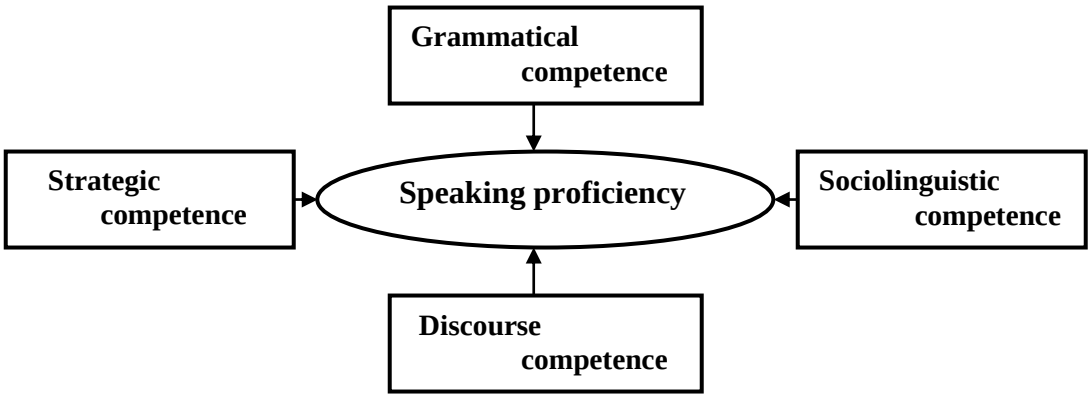

Figure 1: What speaking proficiency requires (Shumin 2002: 207)

1.2.2.4. Developing speaking skills

Factors promoting oral fluency

While in the process of developing oral fluency, learners ought to be provided with the favorable circumstances that can help them be proficient users of oral language. Thornbury (2005: 25) argues that the conditions in which speaking takes place play a key role in determining the extent to which fluency is achievable. He reports that researchers have identified a number of factors, of which the following ones seem to be the most important. These fall into three categories: cognitive factors, affective factors, and performance factors, each of which includes particular points.

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Cognitive factors

- *Familiarity with the topic*: The more students are familiar with the topic of the speaking task, the easier for them it is to talk about it. That is why it is generally easier to talk about familiar topics, such as one's job or family than to talk about a theme that has no or little relevance to their day-to-day life.
- *Familiarity with the genre:* Just as familiarity with the topic makes it easier for learners to perform a speaking task, so too does familiarity with the genre.
- *Familiarity with the interlocutors*: Broadly speaking, the better the speaker knows the people he or she interacts with, and the more shared knowledge they can assume, the more effective oral communication can be carried out.
- *Processing demands*: In order for interlocutors to handle language for communication successfully, it would be better not to engage them in speech events requiring complex mental processing, as that involved in describing a complicated procedure without recourse to illustrations.

Affective factors

- *Feelings towards the topic and/or the participants*: In general, if one is well disposed to the topic of the speech and/or to the other participants, performance will be easy for them.
- *Self-consciousness*: Thornbury (2005: 25) holds that putting a participant on the spot can make them anxious, which will have an adverse effect on performance. Similarly, the participant's knowing or believing that he or she is being evaluated can be prejudicial.

By implication, therefore, one could put it plainly in other terms that in a foreign-language learning context, learners ought not to be often asked questions that are difficult or embarrassing to answer, and should also be made secure of not being frequently assessed when engaged in student-student or teacher-student interactions, so that they can perform speaking tasks successfully.

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Performance factors

- *Mode*: Face-to-face oral interactions, where the interlocutors' responses are closely monitored and where gesture and eye contact can be used, are usually easier than speaking, say, on the phone.
- *Degree of collaboration*: Giving presentations on one's own is generally more difficult than doing it with peers.

In other words, we can say that in group or pair presentations, participants represent a psychological and linguistic support for one another. Working together is very likely to make all the participants feel self-confident, and on the other hand, they can help one another with linguistic input in case anyone of them fails to produce appropriate language. However, students need to be gradually trained and assisted in giving presentations on their own, because there will be situations in real life where they find themselves under the obligation of individual performances.

- *Discourse control:* Following from what is considered in the previous point, it is often more comfortable if one can control the direction of events, rather than being under the control of someone else.
- *Planning and rehearsal time:* Normally, the more time taken to prepare a task, the easier doing it will be. For instance, telling a joke is usually easier the second time round.
- *Time pressure:* Unlike what is implicitly recommended in the previous point, doing an oral task under time pressure is likely to increase difficulty for the speaker.

Nevertheless, in a similar setting of what is suggested above, one may hold that students need to be coached in doing speaking activities under time pressure, so that they will not experience serious difficulties in future real-life situations.

- *Environmental conditions:* Speaking against a background of loud noise, or in poor acoustic conditions is difficult. Therefore, speaking activities should always be performed in a suitably-acoustic environment.

Thornbury (2005: 26) makes it clear that the above-considered factors do not necessarily make it difficult or easy for participants to perform speaking activities, since

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they are also in connection with personality factors, such as introversion and extroversion. For instance, being put on the spot or being under time pressure does not always have negative effects: some speakers can perform successfully in such and similar conditions. In like manner, physiological factors, such as tiredness can impact on performance detrimentally. Above all, those factors can be useful tools for predicting the degree of fluency speakers can achieve.

The importance of affect

Hue (2010) advocates the promotion of positive attitudes among students as a workable measure that can help them use the target language communicatively. One key affective course of action, in this respect, is boosting self-confidence. The author advances the claim that students can easily carry out a sense of success and high self-perceived communication competence if easy tasks with clear and simple goals are used in the first place. The level of difficulty can, however, be increased over time as the learners' proficiency develops. General goals should be broken down into small short-term ones, so that even when students cannot achieve the final goals, they still feel a sense of success in fulfilling some of the sub-goals. Learners should also be rewarded in case they manage one or more goals, so that they feel more self-confident.

Another important matter in the sphere of promoting positive affect among students is lowering their anxiety in the classroom. Hue reports Oxford (1999) as underlining that the classroom ought not to be a location where students are anxious about making mistakes and being ambiguous in communicating. Young (1991) quoted in Hue (ibid.) suggests that teachers can start with finding out the causes of students' anxiety. Hence, teachers can help them get rid of or ease some of their irrational fears through various ways. They can, for instance, teach them strategies, such as self-talks or doing relaxation exercises to deal with the problem.

As concerns communicative mistakes, Hue recommends changing students' negative attitudes towards them. He proposes the frequent engagement of students in oral activities that focus on meaning with clearly-stated goals, and also rewarding learners for conveying meanings effectively. The author spells out that when students are rewarded for

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communicating messages successfully, they will gradually change their view positively about mistakes and language use. On the other hand, the teacher's tolerance of mistakes needs to be made clear, for there is no point in trying to change the students' attitudes while the teacher still keeps his or her own.

Moreover, situations that cause students to be restless, such as calling on them without allowing them to prepare for answers and calling on individual students simply because they are quiet or not concentrating should be avoided. Otherwise, what the teacher receives from students is not usually the desired language use, but tense faces, which will have negative effects on the learners' feelings and attitudes later on.

A further affective consideration of crucial importance in influencing the classroom atmosphere, and hence of profound impact on learning, particularly on speech production is the nature of relationship between the teacher and the taught, and among the taught, too. From this perspective, there should be a friendly relationship between the teacher and students, and as Ebata (2008) puts forward, the teacher ought to "teach all the students the importance of having respect for one another in a classroom, so that each of the students can actively participate in lesson."

Creating a supportive learning environment

Hue (2010) asserts that once students feel a sense of support from the teacher and from one another, they will likely to be more inclined to speak in the target language. Following are some procedures the teacher can have recourse to in order to create a supportive learning atmosphere for students.

Encouraging peer support in the classroom

Cooperative learning is frequently used in Communicative Language Teaching (Richards and Schmidt 2002: 124). For the part of speaking, Hue proposes that students can be allowed to discuss their performance with their peers before talking to the whole class, so that they will feel more confident in using the target language.

Cooperative work, one could maintain, may also be stressed outside the classroom. This provides pairs or small groups of students with enough time to prepare and rehearse oral activities for a better performance in class.

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However, as Jacobs and Hall (2002: 55) hypothesize, what can be done if some students are not willing to work with peers? Both authors argue that discussing with students the benefits they can derive from collaborative learning may help overcome reluctance to peer work. These potential benefits include learning more, enjoying more fun, and preparing for tasks outside school in which cooperation is necessary.

Another likely benefit according to Jacobs and Hall is that studying in groups is just one of a number of effective learning strategies. Students should be sensitized to this benefit, and informed that such a strategy will be adopted in class when need arises. Additionally, since many games are fun, and can teach academic and social skills, group games can encourage students to look forward to other group-learning activities.

The authors recommend providing learners with helpful lexical items and syntactic structures while they are working in groups, so as to guarantee the success of activities, which will build confidence in their ability to work in groups, and thus arouse their interest in cooperative learning.

However, the authors (ibid.: 56) suggest allowing students who do not want to study with peers to work alone. They contend that some time later, such students will be willing to participate in group interaction, and will ask to join a group. This is very likely, especially after those students have noticed the agreeable atmosphere of collaborative learning, as well as the expected good results of group-work activities.

Allowing students to choose their group-work partners

Hue counsels teachers to be sensitive when assigning students into groups. He points out that since many students usually tend to talk more with their close friends, the teacher may allow students to choose who they want to work with in group and pair-learning activities.

Tolerating L1 use when appropriate

Hue suggests teachers should be tolerant of some L1 use when certain students cannot communicate all their thoughts in English. The teacher's attitude to the use of the mother tongue ought to be positive, so that learners do not feel humiliated when they use their first language to assist the development of the target language. However, when there

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is no need for the L1 use, the teacher should tactically lead students back to using English, say, by commenting on an idea or asking a question in English instead of voicing a strong objection.

The importance of regular practice

Hue advocates the creation of opportunities for students to speak English inside and outside the classroom, such as through setting up English clubs. In order to persuade them to join the clubs, the benefits of and the tactics for participation should be made clear for them. Classroom activities may also be connected with these club activities. For instance, students can be asked in class to report on their participation in the clubs or share their experiences with classmates. Other situations for speaking English outside school can also be made available. For example, students can be asked to carry out and record interviews with native English-speaking foreigners who are visiting or living around.

Yet, as Shumin (2002: 209) observes, due to lack or absence of opportunities in many foreign-language settings to interact with native speakers, the need for exposure to a variety of scenes, situations, accents, and voices is particularly crucial. This need can be met by resorting to audiovisual materials in English clubs, such as appropriate films, videotapes, and soap operas.

It could be recommended that these visuals of necessity include aspects of the target language culture as one way of familiarizing students with it.

Activities promoting oral communication skills

Defining teaching speaking

Teaching speaking to foreign learners of English aims at making them able to: (a) produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns, and use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns, and the rhythm of the language, (b) select appropriate utterances according to the proper social setting, audience, and subject matter, (c) organize their ideas in a meaningful and logical sequence, (d) use language as a means of expressing values and judgments, and (e) use it quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses to achieve fluency (Nunan 2003, cited in Kayi 2006).

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How to teach speaking?

As Kayi (2006) assumes, students learn to speak in the target language through interaction. The author affirms that such a method of learning is compatible with Communicative Language Teaching and collaborative learning. In order to develop oral competence via the use of both approaches, teachers should create a classroom setting where learners are often engaged in groups in authentic and meaningful activities based on real-life or lifelike situations. Examined below are examples of such activities.

Games

Recently, using games has become a well-known technique used by many teachers in the classroom, and advocated by methodologists (Uberman 1998: 27). Such a technique, as I-Jung Chen (2005) claims, generally has a number of benefits that can be summed up in the following points: games (a) are learner-centered, (b) promote communicative competence, (c) create a meaningful context for communicative use, (d) increase learning motivation, (e) integrate various linguistic skills, (f) encourage creative and spontaneous use of language, (g) construct a cooperative learning environment, and (h) reduce learning anxiety, in the sense that while playing games, the learners' attention is on the message rather than on language accuracy since most participants usually do their utmost to win.

However, not all games share all these characteristics (Larcabal 1992: 28). From this standpoint, one can stress the necessity that games should be selected in accordance with particular factors, among which are the communicative skills generally intended to be developed and the specific learning objectives planned to be achieved. Other factors include the students' level of proficiency, age, or the time required for the completion of the game (Uberman 1998: 21).

Following are examples of games meant to encourage students to use oral language, and hence to develop their oral fluency.

One game proposed by Dobson (1974: 112) is entitled *definitions*. This can be a speaking activity used in a pre-listening or pre-reading phase with the aim of recycling some already-seen lexical terms, which may be considered as key words in the listening or

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reading passage. The game can be played by a group of students. One student, who acts as a leader, announces he or she is thinking of a vocabulary item that rhymes with a certain word. The other students try to guess it through asking different questions. Below is an example by the author (ibid.: 113).

Leader: I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with *shoe*.
Student A: Is it the opposite of *old?*
Leader: No, it's not *new*.
Student B: Is it the color of the sky?
Leader: No, it's not *blue*.
Student C: Does it mean *also*?
Leader: No, it's not *too*.
Student D: Is it a place where wild animals are kept?
Leader: Yes, it is *zoo*.

Since student D guessed the word right, he or she now becomes leader, and has another group of students guess the word he or she has chosen.

Playing cards

Playing cards is a popular recreation among teenagers and older people. In a classroom setting, the game can be played in a specific way to practice language, as suggested and described by Kayi (2006).

Students form foursomes, and each suit of cards will represent a topic. For instance:

- Diamonds: Earning money
- Hearts: Love and relationships
- Spades: An unforgettable memory
- Clubs: Best teacher

Each student in a group chooses a card, and writes 4-5 questions about the topic to ask the other members of the group. For example, if the topic "Diamond: Earning money" is selected, here are some possible questions:

- *Is money important in your life? Why?*

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. *What is the easiest way of earning money?*

. *What do you think of lottery? Etc.*

The author draws the teacher's attention that he or she should state at the very beginning of the activity that students should prepare open-ended questions, because by simply answering yes or no, learners get little practice in spoken language production. They should rather ask open-ended questions to each other, so that they reply in full sentences.

Computer games

Using the computer for classroom activities is motivating, and using it specifically for educational games is very likely to make students more motivated and interested. Reinders (2009: 57) notes that there are some educational games, which are designed specially for use in class, but students do not usually find them as amusing as non-educational games. Nonetheless, some non-educational games can be appropriate to language learning. One interesting example is *Ace Attorney, which* is about a young lawyer who investigates crimes and prosecutes wrongdoers. Students can play this game and write out their choices, their arguments and finally the whole case, and can afterwards deliver a speech about all these.

Furthermore, the author speaks well for encouraging and helping students to engage in communication through online role-playing games. He explains that MNORPG stands for "massively multiplayer online role-playing games". Such games are played by a huge number of people online. Success in playing a game offers a perfect opportunity for practicing language via written and spoken chat.

The author also suggests the creation of games with or for students, especially as there is free software that can help with doing so, such as *(http://scratch.mit.edu/).* This can assist students in creating environments, characters, and animations using a simplified programming language. "The main aims," Reinders (ibid.) explains, "are to help students develop thinking skills and the ability to use technology productively." Creating games in class can equally provide ample opportunities for spoken interaction of quite a complex nature. Moreover, created games can offer skills-integration activities. In fact, students can

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be asked to write summaries of their games, advertisements for them, or produce a manual with instructions on how to play. As regards oral activities, one can propose asking students to sum up their games and explain to the whole class the way they are played orally.

In the same framework of creating games, Reinders (ibid.: 58) equally proposes *Machinima*, a form of storytelling (see *www.machinima.org*) as an exercise for practicing oral language. The term *Machinima* is the contraction of machine and cinema, and it is the telling of a story based on games graphics. Putting it plainly, if a learner likes a certain game, he or she can make use of the characters and scenes from that game, and modify them using software in order to tell their own story.

It is interesting to note that the author voices a word of warning drawing the teacher's attention to set some clear boundaries, in that the graphics students derive from particular games can be unsuitable for use in the classroom.

Using screenshots for class discussions

Reinders (2009: 57) defines a screenshot simply as a picture of whatever is displayed on a computer screen. He puts forward using screenshots as a starting point for discussions in class, and believes that an ambiguous image can be best exploited for such classroom activities. This is justifiable, one could claim, inasmuch as the image opens the door to various interpretations on the part of students, which may make the discussions lively and longer.

Picture exploitation

Picture describing, *picture narrating*, and *find the difference* are picture-based speaking activities suggested by Kayi (2006). Each is described below in turn.

Picture describing

This activity consists in giving the students one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity, students can form groups, each of which is given a different picture. The members of each group discuss the picture, then a spokesperson for each group talks about the picture to the whole class. The author argues that such an

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activity furthers the learners' creativity and imagination, and helps their public speaking skills develop.

Picture narrating

The students are given a number of pictures illustrating a story. They are asked to tell the story taking place in the sequential pictures. Their narration may take into account criteria provided by the teacher as a rubric that can include the vocabulary and/or structures they need to use while telling the story.

To make the activity more challenging, one could suggest giving the students the pictures out of order. First, they have to discuss the correct order of pictures, and then narrate the story.

Find the difference

For this activity, students can work in pairs, each of whom is given two different pictures, for example a picture of boys and another one of girls playing two different sports. The pairs discuss the similarities and/or the differences in the pictures.

Storytelling

According to Jianing (2007), there are three reasons why storytelling should be included in EFL/ESL classes. The primary reason is that stories are motivating and very interesting. They can thus attract the listeners' attention best and promote communication. Secondly, stories represent a massive language treasure. The author points out that many old stories are considered as the models of language and treasures of culture, from which learners at different proficiency levels and age groups can find convenient narratives to read and tell. It would, therefore, be a waste and pity if they were excluded from EFL/ESL courses. Thirdly, the lively and real-life environment created by stories prompts the students to talk and discuss with one another. In addition, storytelling plays an effective role. When telling and listening to a story, the students will easily be plunged into the plot and scenes, and "forget about themselves", which will – to a great degree – relieve their anxiety.

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The author gave examples of how stories can be exploited in the EFL classroom. From this perspective, we would like to note that in order to use a story in speaking courses effectively and fruitfully, the teacher ought to take into account certain considerations, particularly the suitability of the story in terms of the age and overall proficiency level of students, the necessity of arousing the learners' interest and making them motivated, as well as the variety of activities springing from it, so that they can practice the four communicative skills.

Songs and music

Like games and storytelling, songs have two principal roles: an affective role and an instructional role. Manifestly, their affective role lies in the fact that they are entertaining and motivating. Their instructional role consists in making use of them for a variety of learning activities that provide practice of the four macroskills, as well as certain microskills.

Orlova (2003) and Scrivener (1994: 176) assert that the use of songs and music in EFL classes still seem to be overlooked; and affirm, on the other hand, that they can be of a useful use in the EFL classroom. Orlova suggests that songs can be used for the following instructional purposes:

- Practicing particular phonological features of the English language, such as rhythm, stress and intonation patterns;
- Teaching vocabulary, especially in the reinforcement stage;
- Teaching grammar, especially while investigating the use of tenses;
- Teaching listening comprehension;
- Teaching speaking: For this purpose, songs and their lyrics can be employed as a stimulus for class discussion;
- Developing writing skills: For this purpose, a song can be used in a variety of ways, say, writing on what could happen to the characters later; writing a letter to the main character; etc.

Apart from what is suggested above, Orlova (ibid.) maintains that songs, as a cultural phenomenon, can acquaint students with the musical and cultural patterns typical for the target language community.

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Scrivener (ibid.), in turn, proposes a number of learning activities for which songs can be exploited adopting, in particular learning situations, an integration-of-skills approach. Examples of these follow:

. **Listening:** Using the song as a normal listening text by recording it and having students listen to it.

. **Reading:** The lyrics of the song can be printed out and given to students for exploitation as a normal reading selection.

. **Listening and speaking:** Getting the students to listen to the whole song once or twice, or to a shorter section, and having them discuss what happened, and what may happen later, and also express reactions, interpretations, predictions, etc.

. **Listening and writing:** Learners can be presented with the lyrics with certain words blanked out. They listen carefully, and fill in with the missing words. The gaps could also be used as a pre-listening activity with students guessing what the missing words are. Another activity connecting listening with writing is that the teacher can play the tune, and students write the lyrics.

. **Reading, speaking, writing, and listening:** The lyrics can be cut into separate jumbled lines. In small groups, students read the lines, discuss their correct order, and then write the original text. After that, they listen to the original text, and check and correct their work.

. **Singing along with the tape:** Students can be asked to sing along with the tape with the aim of learning the tune. This can be more challenging, and requires careful preparation work on practicing stress and rhythm, perhaps with spoken rather than sung sentences.

Class discussions

Scrivener (1994: 59) points out that running a class discussion is not so easy a task as people outside the world of English-language teaching may think. Success in running a class discussion depends on a number of factors. These include mainly the necessity that the topic is relevant and interesting, the students already have some background knowledge about it or are provided with information on it before engaging in the discussion, and are motivated and feel they really want to communicate their ideas or express their opinions.

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The author explains that there may be several aims for a discussion, but often the main aim is to provide students with an opportunity to practice speaking, with more concentration on improving fluency than on producing accurate sentences. Following are some suggestions by the author (ibd.: 60) for getting discussion activities to work:

- Framing the activity well: The teacher should not just jump in the deep end by simply assigning the students a topic and asking them to talk about it. It is usually helpful to find ways to lead in at the beginning and ways to close at the end. A lead-in may, for instance, be no more than a brief focus on a picture or a text the students had read before, or read just before they start the discussion.
- Allowing students some quiet time before engaging them in the speaking activity; they may look up some lexical items in their dictionaries, think through their ideas, make some notes, etc.
- Instead of giving students a general topic for discussion, it is better to assign them a specific problem-related one. The author says, "This is more challenging, more interesting, and more realistic."
- 'Pyramid-discussion' is a simple organizational technique that works well, especially with simple problem-based topics *(e.g., what are the four most useful things to have with you if you are shipwrecked on a desert island?)* Such type of discussion gives students time to rehearse their thoughts in smaller groups before facing the whole class. The activity can be started with individual reflections followed by discussion in pairs. Once the pairs have come to some sort of agreement, they can combine to make fours. These, too need to reach some sort of agreement, and then join all the other students. The author comes to the view that the smaller groups are seedbeds for a range of ideas and opinions. Hence, even the weaker speakers tend to feel confident or more so, as the activity proceeds, and they are able to repeat arguments they have already tested on other classmates.

Information gap

This activity is usually performed by pairs of students. Each of them has pieces of information, which the other one does not have. Both students need to exchange

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information, so that they can work out a problem-solving task or gather the necessary details or ideas on a certain issue. Kayi (2006) contends that information-gap activities are effective, because they enable every participant to have the chance to talk extensively in the target language.

Conclusion

In sum, this section of literature review has laid focus specifically on the barriers to the EFL learners' oral proficiency and the various procedures that could address the issue.

The barriers include a number of different circumstances, in particular affective, cognitive, and sociocultural factors; as well as lack of exposure to and insufficient practice of oral language inside and outside the classroom. Given that speaking is one of the key channels of communication, it – in an EFL setting – requires special attention and instruction (Shumin 2002: 210). As has been examined above, in order to achieve the aim of the learners' ability to speak English fluently and appropriately, they should be provided with the diverse possible requisites underlying oral proficiency, among which are frequent speech-developing activities in class and elsewhere.

1.2.3. Reading comprehension

Various are the difficulties learners encounter during the process of learning to read in a foreign language, and diverse are the ways ELT authors have tackled these hindrances in terms of their sources, as well as the procedures through which they could be addressed.

1.2.3.1. Code, lexical repertoire, and field of knowledge

Under the heading *What makes a text difficult?* Christine Nuttall (1996) considers the following four short texts (pp. 5 – 6) in order to shed some light on the question.

a. Istuin eraana tammlkuun loppupaivana Tiitin kanssa kokkolasta jyvaskylaan kulkevassa linja-autossa. Oli kirpea pakkasilma, taivas oli kirkas, ja aurinko heitti lumihangille ja tien poikki puiden pitkea sinisia varjoja.

From kokko, Y. 1954 Ne Tulevat Takaisin (Werner Soderstiom OY)

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b. In the first example, a carbon anion is formed that is stabilized by resonance (electrons delocalized over the carbonyl group and the & carbon atom). In the second case, a carbon anion is formed that is stabilized by the electron withdrawing inductive effect of the three chlorines.

From University of Malaya Language Centre 1979 Reading Projects: Science (University of Malaya Press/Nelson)

c. Ideas imprinted on the senses are real things, or do really exist, this we do not deny, but we deny that they can subsist without the minds which perceive them, or that they are resemblances of any archetypes existing without the mind: since the very being of a sensation or idea consists in being perceived, and an idea can be like nothing but an idea.

From Berkeley, G. 1949 *Principles of Human Knowledge* (Nelson)

d. Cavorting in the vicinity of the residential area populated by those of piscatorial avocation, the miniscule crustacean was enmeshed in a reticulated object with interstices between the intersections.

The first of these texts is written in Finnish, the second is a scientific text from a chemistry course, the third is a philosophical excerpt by Bishop Berkeley (1949), and the last one is a twenty-eight-word selection containing about ten low-frequency vocabulary items.

The author explains that the source of difficulty the reader may encounter in the first text is unfamiliarity with the code (the language in which the text is written). One could affirm that it is self-evident that if the reader is not really familiar with the language in which a reading passage is composed, he or she can undoubtedly not understand it. Therefore, Nuttall (ibid., p. 6) maintains, "A prerequisite for a satisfactory communication is that the writer and reader should share the same code."

Where the above-referred to scientific text is concerned, Nuttall affirms that difficulty depends on the amount of previous knowledge the reader brings to the text. She makes it clear that it would not help even if the reader looked up the words in a dictionary, because he or she cannot understand even the definitions. What only would help is a chemistry course, she adds.

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As for the third text, the author claims that its vocabulary is not particularly difficult, but many people find its message eluding, and even if the reader has a superficial idea about what it deals with, he or she cannot explain it clearly unless he or she has read a good deal more by its writer Bishop Berkeley, and thought carefully about his arguments. The source of its difficulty does not lie in the language, and not in the knowledge the reader needs, but in the complexity of the concepts as communicated by the author.

Vocabulary, however, is the only origin of difficulty in the last text, and one can extremely simplify it, so as to make its messages intellectually unchallenging. Yet, she claims that for readers whose vocabulary is limited, the problem is more serious with the first text than it is with the second or the third one: "The writer's code," she says "is only partly the same as the reader's" (p. 6).

Under the heading *Shared assumptions* (p. 6), the author concludes that from the above-mentioned examples of textual difficulty, it is considerably important for both the reader and writer to share certain features in order for communication to take place. To put it plainly, as mentioned earlier, the minimum requirement is that they have a common code: they write and understand the same language.

1.2.3.2. Difficulties with particular types of authentic materials

There is a wide range of particular kinds of authentic materials the learner reader may come across during reading classes or during extensive readings on his or her own. The problems and difficulties the reader may encounter with such materials consist in what to read depending on his or her interests, how to read depending on his or her purposes and whether the code the writer uses is within his or her comprehension reach.

One common kind of authentic material are newspapers, journals and magazines. Foreign language teachers sometimes bring issues or articles from these to class for particular learning requirements, and often lend some to their students or encourage them at times to buy particular weeklies or dailies and read them, in the sense that this is one way that can help them improve their reading proficiency in a foreign language. However, it is my experience both as an EFL learner and teacher that many non-native students of English feel apprehensive of authentic materials even by reading only the title of a text or

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the name of a newspaper or magazine from which the selection is taken believing it is too difficult for them to fathom.

Wainwright (2001: 80) states that one problem with newspapers, journals, and magazines is the bulk and frequency of publication. He suggests using skimming to select what one will read and how to read it. The author refers to skimming as a reading technique that "involves allowing the eyes to break away from line-by-line movements and move more freely across and down the page". He makes it clear that there are at least three ways of achieving this process. The first way is sampling. This refers to reading parts of the material at speed, so as to have an impression of the whole. The act of reading focuses only on the first sentence of each paragraph, as this is where the key information is most likely to exist. The second way is locating. This is vertical reading, but it does not look really so, as the eyes are continually drawn over to the right, because the material is printed horizontally from left to right. The eyes then have to correct for this by moving diagonally to the left.

The writer affirms that this type of skimming will only work really well if the reader has already identified key words and phrases, and is actively looking for them. If they are there or if there is anything else relevant or interesting, the eyes will be drawn to that information. Wainwright explains that this takes place, because aside from the area of close focus vision called eye span, there is what is termed peripheral vision. This is used every time one, while reading, gets to the end of a line of print and makes the return sweep to the beginning of the next line. The reader may be looking at the right-hand side of the page, and cannot see clearly what is on the left, but the brain sees it sufficiently clearly and directs the eyes correctly to the beginning of the following line. In case this did not happen, the reader would spend much time skipping lines or re-reading lines already read. However, bold-typed or italicized words, as well as capitalized ones all can help to attract the attention of the brain, and therefore the eyes. The third way through which skimming can be carried out is previewing. This is a combination of the first two techniques; it makes use of both first sentences of paragraphs and peripheral vision to identify the noticeable, relevant points. Previewing enables the reader to get an overview of the material before reading or rejecting it, and can save considerable time. Therefore, as listed by Wainwright (ibid.: 81), skimming has many uses and purposes. It can be used:

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- to gain an overview and see the pattern of organization of material (previewing);
- to find specific information (locating);
- as substitute for reading when time is short (sampling);
- as a means of defining purposes in reading (previewing);
- to assess the level of difficulty of material (sampling);
- to supplement other techniques (previewing);
- to help in the selection of material (sampling);
- in making use of dictionaries and handbooks (locating);
- in reading classified advertisements in newspapers (locating);
- in assessing the relevance of material to one's immediate needs (previewing).

1.2.3.3. Conventional and technical-language materials

In certain reading materials, writers tend to use very conventional, even old-fashioned expressions. One instance of such materials is formal correspondence (Wainwright 2001: 97). Examples of conventional phrases cited by the writer (ibid.: 97 – 98) that can be used therein follow:

- *We are in receipt of your communication dated…* instead of *Thank you for your letter of…*
- *Awaiting your detailed instructions as to how you wish the goods to be supplied* instead of *How would you like us to send you the goods?*
- *Enclosed/Attached, please find* instead of *I enclose/I am sending with this letter…*
- *Awaiting the favor of your reply* instead of *I should be glad to hear from you.*

Although formal correspondence is characterized by conciseness, Wainwright (ibid.: 97) claims that in conventional-language letters, "there is frequently a lack of essential or relevant information, and there is a good deal of insincerity and over-politeness. Consequently, many are much longer than they need be." Wainwright suggests that the solution would be skimming for the central points. He adds that with most letters, this technique will tell the reader where the letter has to go, or what kind of answer or action is necessary recommending to read the letter in full only where that seems to be necessary.

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Another instance of materials in which conventional language is utilized is legislative texts. Wainwright (ibid.: 100) affirms that legislative texts present special problems on the grounds that "the language is often archaic and difficult to understand. The documents are frequently lengthy. The structure is different from most of the other documents [the reader is] likely to encounter in normal reading." The writer adds that part of the problem is certainly the fact that most people do not read a lot of legislation; people read it only when they have to. The best solution he proposes is to read more of it, because with practice comes familiarity, and with familiarity comes greater skill in dealing with the material.

Another type of reading materials that may cause comprehension difficulties to learners are technical-language passages. General examples of these are scientific and financial texts. One source of scientific texts is scientific papers. Wainwright (2001: 100 – 101) refers generally to these papers making a negative value judgment about them: "Unless you are an expert in the field, and sometimes even if you are, you will find that scientific papers are poorly constructed, badly written and fail to differentiate fact from opinion." Wainwright's conviction could be said to be unjustifiable, and even if it incorporates some truth, it does not apply to all scientific texts.

Wainwright makes no reference to how scientific texts present particular difficulties for readers. One could, therefore, affirm that such texts may not always be designed for all types of readers, but normally only for those specialized in the field, and this is where their difficulty normally lies if they are assigned to students who do not major in a particular scientific area. For instance, a biology text may present no comprehension difficulties for biology students in terms of what it mainly deals with, as well as at the level of the meaning of its individual words, whereas it may be somewhat double Dutch for arts learners. This is why, in certain textbooks, we sometimes find some reading selections labelled 'for sciences students'; others are marked 'for arts students'.

Doubtless, like scientific passages, the same applies to financial reading materials in the sense that dealing with this type of materials usually depends on one's expertise in the domain of finance. Wainwright (ibid.), however, writes: "For many people, difficulties [relating to financial texts] arise, because by definition, much of the information is given in numbers rather in words. Numbers are a different language."

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Casting a critical glance at Wainwright's above argument, one may wonder how the fact that much of the information in financial materials when communicated in figures is unfathomable. Does this follow that if the messages are expressed in letters, they pose no comprehension complications for the reader? The actuality that numbers are a different language as he points out, does not represent any obstacles to understanding or correct interpretation. Furthermore, no one can deny that using numbers in financial texts is merely imposed by the nature of the reading material. Utilizing figures rather than substituting them for terms would certainly make texts more concise and easier for the reader to locate particular numerical details, even without having to read all that is written in full, as they are usually easily seen amongst words.

Robinson (1991: 28) cited in Urquhart and Weir (1998: 145) recommends the avoidance of technical terms in tests for heterogeneous populations. It could, therefore, be deduced that the reason behind the recommendation is the serious difficulty such terms may cause to particular learners.

All that has been examined so far can lead us to state that, as Aslanian (1985: 20) puts it, the extent to which one understands a reading passage depends very much on specific text variables, such as vocabulary intensity, sentence structure, and the text subject matter, as well as on variables related to the reader, such as motivation and background knowledge. These are considered below.

1.2.3.4. Text variables

Vocabulary

A great many foreign-language learners, particularly those lacking efficient reading strategies lay the blame of the comprehension difficulties they encounter with reading materials on unfamiliar vocabulary. It is a common conviction among such learners that an easy recourse to solve the problem is the teacher explanation in the classroom, or often a bilingual dictionary, or at times a monolingual dictionary.

In this context, Wainwright (2001: 103) maintains that unfamiliar vocabulary is rather a common problem. To deal with it, he suggests that the reader ought to get himself or herself a vocabulary notebook, and divide it out in three columns, the last one being a broad one. In the first one, is to be written the new word; in the second one, the dictionary

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definition; and in the third one, are to be written two or three sentences illustrating the word.

A dictionary certainly is a reliable learning aid, but using it in the way proposed by Wainwright whenever one comes across a new lexical item can be said to be an ineffective strategy, for it requires too much work of the reader, who may – in the course of time – refrain from doing it, in that it is likely to become tiring and boring.

Additionally, as many words have more than one meaning according to the context in which they are used, when looking up a term in a dictionary be it monolingual or bilingual, the learner may not know which meaning of the word the writer intends to convey. Learners, therefore, need to be trained in how to use a dictionary and advised on when it is necessary to have recourse to it. Ramsay (1986: 61) suggests that "the best way to choose the correct definition of a word is to look at the word in a sentence. Then try the different definitions of the word in the sentence. This will help you to choose the best definition." But, if a word has one identical form for more than one part of speech, we must look at the sentence in which the word is used as a verb, noun, adjective, or adverb (ibid.: 123).

How can we then develop successful strategies for dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary in our students?

Learner readers need to be sensitized to the fact that they do not have to expect the teacher to explain all the new vocabulary items during the pre-reading phase, and do not have to stop at every unfamiliar term trying to make out its signification while they engage into reading in class or elsewhere on their own. The point for this assertion is that apart from what is critically raised above against Wainwright's suggestion, the presentation of all or even many of the new lexical terms during the pre-reading stage does really take much time at the expense of the remaining activities of the reading session. Field (1998: 12) advocates that during the pre-listening phase (and one could maintain that it is also applicable to the pre-reading phase), the teacher should present not more than three words – key words without the explanation of which understanding would be impossible.

It should be noted that instances of difficult lexis that need to be explained by the teacher, provided that they are necessary for comprehending the reading selection, are

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particular idioms and phrasal verbs in the sense that they have special meanings that cannot be derived from the signification of the individual words composing them. Nuttall (1996: 66) points out that the problematic idioms are the ones consisting of simple words, each of which the student understands. She draws the teacher's attention that without his or her help, the learner may not realize that he or she does not understand the whole sentence. So, the author suggests that the teacher can ask a question that cannot be answered if the idiom is not understood, and adds, "Once students are aware of the deceptively simple ones, [they] can keep them on the lookout for idioms and deal with them individually as they occur."

It could be held that where the learner is concerned, pausing at every unknown word and reflecting upon its meaning or having recourse to a dictionary is – as has been argued above – a characteristic of an ineffective reader. This would imply that there are difficult terms which can be overlooked by the learner reader. But, this may not always be a simple task to be performed by students inasmuch as the problem lies in when to take no notice of unknown words and which ones are to be treated as such. By the same token, Nuttall (ibid.: 64) holds that one hallmark of an effective reader is the ability to decide upon the difficult words that may be safely ignored, but this is something many learners have never contemplated, because it may seem wrong as it is not done in class. For this reason, she recommends that "it needs to be done in class to make it respectable," and underlines the necessity of practicing it under the teacher's guidance on the grounds that it "may [….] seem dangerous, and it is."

In order to help learners be able to ignore particular difficult lexical terms, the author proposes that the teacher ought to ask them to bear in mind the following questions:

Before reading: Why am I going to read this? What do I want to get from it?

While reading: Do I need to stop and look up the meaning of this word, or can I set the gist without it?

After reading: Have I got what I wanted? If not, where in the text is it hidden? Can I get it by looking up any words? If so, which?

In the same context, Ramsay (1986: 182) states, "Good readers use context clues to find the meanings of new words as they read. Sometimes, the author gives definitions of

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new words in the context, and sometimes the reader must look for clues in the context in order to guess the meanings of the words."

In addition to what is mentioned in the above quote, there are other context clues the learner can rely on to figure out the signification of new lexis. Instances of these are restatements and examples. Ramsay (ibid.: 52) writes:

> Sometimes, a writer gives the meaning of a new word by explaining the meaning in another sentence.
> Example: *Professor Tracy belongs to several professional organizations. He is a member of the Teachers' Union, the Science Foundation, and the Association of Teachers of Science.*
> The writer tells us that the meaning of *belongs to* in the first sentence is *to be a member of*.
> Sometimes, the writer gives the meaning of a new word by giving examples in other sentences.
> Example: *There are activities for foreign students every weekend. For example, the International Sports Club organizes soccer games every Saturday afternoon, the Foreign Student Association sponsors Saturday night dances every month, and the YMCA offers an international dinner every other Sunday night".*

Ramsay explains that the writer gives examples of *activities*: *soccer games, Saturday night dances,* and *international dinners.* So, we can guess that *activities* are *things to do*.

Other context clues include contextual synonyms and antonyms. Ramsay deals with such clues through pages 117 – 123 with illustrating examples and consolidating exercises.

To make use of contextual clues successfully, learners ought to be made familiar with them through identifying their nature as well as by means of practical exercises. This would imply that both students and teacher ought to be aware of the fact that – as argued by Ooi and Lee Kim-Seoh (1996: 58) – the purpose of vocabulary instruction should be to make the learner distinguish between word meaning and word use. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to adopt an integrated approach that combines lexis, grammar, and discourse. Both authors hold that this can be fulfilled by teaching vocabulary through reading and thinking in terms of 'activities' with varying focus rather than clearly

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demarcated ‘lessons’. They claim that this approach has certain advantages, particularly the fact that the students can take part in the process of deciding what should be taught and when, which would enhance motivation and engagement.

Syntactic structures

Complex syntactic structures that are unfamiliar to the learners are very likely to cause comprehension difficulties. Structural complexity is manifest in two different aspects:

a. long sentences composed of several subordinate clauses and phrases, and also – as Nuttall (1996: 81) states several ‘nested’ constructions, that is modifiers that are themselves modified.

b. complex constructions of sentences, even if the sentences are short.

Here is an example of our own: *Hard as he tried, he could not make out anything of the instructions.*

Relying on the word *hard* and the phrase *could not make out*, the learner can notice that there is a relationship of contrast between the subordinate clause and the main clause, and may then understand the meaning of the whole sentence. But, a learner whose level of proficiency in the target language is average or low, and who knows that a concessive clause can only be introduced by *although*, *in spite of* or *despite*, is not likely to understand the meaning of this sentence. In this context, Nuttall (ibid.: 78) asserts, “Long sentences and difficult syntax can block comprehension even when vocabulary is familiar.”

Simplification can then be the optimal solution to unfamiliar lexis, complex syntax, and long sentences. It could be affirmed, however, that this process is not so easy a task for the teacher or the textbook designer. When simplifying a text, either of both parties ought to take into consideration the following:

a. The authenticity of material: The text should not be simplified in a way that may result in making it lose its authenticity utterly. Furthermore, care should be taken – as Nuttall (ibid.: 177) recommends – so as not to remove the basic qualities of a text as discourse. In the same framework, Widdowson (1978: 88) warns that one needs to be careful to avoid the problem of distorting use when simplifying usage.

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b. The learners' level of proficiency: Taking into account the learners' general proficiency level in the target language before simplifying any reading selection concerns the teacher more than the textbook author, in that it is the former who knows much more about his or her students' level in the L2 than anyone else. Therefore, an authentic text that is already simplified by a textbook designer can be made more or less so by the teacher to make it compatible with the general level of proficiency of learners.

c. Learning activities: Another criterion according to which reading materials can be simplified is the learning activities intended to be done in class. If, for instance, the material is to be exploited as extensive reading, only light or little simplification might be done at the level of syntax and lexis. Should there be any particular grammatical structures to be tackled in class, simplification may focus more on these linguistic elements somewhere in the text where they are located than, say, on vocabulary or other structures located elsewhere.

Topic and genre

Harmer (2001: 205) asserts that students perform many receptive skill activities less successfully than expected because of the inappropriacy of topic, or by reason of their unfamiliarity with the text genre they are dealing with. He explains that the learners may be unwilling to engage fully in an activity unless they are interested in a topic, or if they are unfamiliar with the text genre they are asked to work on. Their lack of engagement or schematic knowledge may, therefore, be a serious obstacle to successful reading or listening. Considered below are suggestions by the author (p. 206) meant to address the issue.

. **Choosing the right topics:** Harmer recommends the choice of topics in which learners are interested. He states that this can be found out through questionnaires, interviews, or by means of the students' reactions to various activities and topics that have been used in both current and previous classes. Not all students, however, have the same interests. Therefore, it is necessary to include a variety of topics across a series of lessons, so that all the learners' interests will be catered for.

It is worthy of note that in addition to the fact that the learners do not have similar interests, there are certain topics in textbooks which may not be interesting to any learner,

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and must be tackled by the teacher as recommended by the official programs. In this case, how can the teacher deal with such a dilemma?

- **Creating interest:** If the teacher can get the students engaged in a task, there is a much better chance that they will read or listen with commitment and concentration whether or not they were interested in the topic.

There are many ways through which students can be engaged in a task. Instances of these may be showing them a picture for prediction, asking them to guess what they are going to see or hear on the basis of a few words or phrases from the text, or having them look at the headlines or captions, and try to predict what the text is about before reading it.

- **Activate schemata:** Harmer (ibid.) states that in the same way the teacher creates interest by presenting the students with predictive tasks and interesting activities, he or she should activate their background knowledge before they read or listen to a text, so that they can bring their schemata to it.

We will consider in the following section a number of strategies for activating background knowledge.

- **Varying topics and genres:** The author proposes that students ought to be exposed to a variety of different text types taken from various sources as a way of countering their unfamiliarity with certain text genres. He observes that a number of different genres of texts are represented in both reading and listening activities in good general English course books. But, if the teacher is not following a course book, it is a good idea to make a list of text genres which are relevant to the learners' needs and interests, so as to be sure that they will experience an appropriate range of texts.

1.2.3.5. Learner variables

Motivation

As defined by Harmer (2001: 51), motivation – at its basic level – "is some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do something in order to achieve something." He distinguishes between two types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The first type results from any number of outside factors, such as the need to pass an exam, the hope of financial reward, or the possibility of future travel. The second type, however,

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comes from within the individual. Thus, a person might be motivated by the enjoyment of the learning process or by a desire to make themselves feel better.

What is noted above refers to motivation in general, but what can motivate learners to read in a foreign language and contribute to developing their reading skills?

No doubt, motivation is a key factor in assisting students in the process of their learning to read. This very view is expressed by Alderson (2000: 275): "The importance of motivation, of pupils being encouraged to read texts they will relate to, that will encourage learning to read, as well as reading to learn, is clearly paramount, especially in the early stages." In this frame of reference, what can contribute to arousing the students' interest in reading could be said to revolve around certain characteristics of the reading material as well as the topic. Indeed, learners are usually inclined to read texts that are easy to understand and are not so long, so that they will not take much time to read, and may not, thus, be reckoned as boring. So, it would be motivating for students and helpful in terms of the desired performance to be presented with easy and short texts, especially at the beginning of the reading course. Later, however, when their reading ability starts developing, they can be assigned to work on gradually challenging texts in class or for their extensive reading on their own.

Challenge can be of various aspects. As put by Alderson, for instance, it "is defined in terms of subject matter (which 'extends thinking'), narrative structure, and figurative language."

Authentic reading texts can be considered challenging, but motivating. Although such reading materials are usually reckoned as very difficult to understand and are, therefore, at times simplified, many EFL learners, especially those whose level of proficiency in the foreign language is outstanding, are motivated to read texts taken from well-known English or American newspapers or magazines. They find these positively challenging to read, and believe that these represent one reliable way of improving their English. For some others, authentic materials act out as a psychological stimulus for building or boosting confidence in their abilities. Peacock (1997: 144) voices a similar act of faith stating, "Many writers claim that authentic materials motivate learners, because they are intrinsically interesting or stimulating than artificial or non-authentic materials." Among these, Peacock says, are Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1989: 26) who claim,

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“Authentic texts bring learners closer to the target language culture, making learning more enjoyable and, therefore, more motivating”.

Background knowledge

Background knowledge refers to what a learner already knows about a topic. This definition is the same as that of Stevens (1980) quoted in a website article entitled “background knowledge” by Strangman and Hall, who state that he defines background knowledge quite simply as “…..what one already knows about a subject.” Cited in the same source are Biemans and Simons (1996) who are said to provide a slightly more complex definition of the term: “….all knowledge learners have when entering a learning environment that is potentially relevant for acquiring new knowledge.”

Strangman and Hall point out that background knowledge stands for prior knowledge, and both terms can thus be generally used interchangeably. They maintain that specialized forms of prior/background knowledge include subject matter knowledge, strategy knowledge, personal knowledge, and self-knowledge.

Both authors examine background knowledge in the scope of reading comprehension. They argue that reading to learn effectively requires students to integrate new material into their existing knowledge base, construct new understanding, and adapt existing conceptions and beliefs as necessary. However, learners lacking enough background knowledge or are unable to activate such knowledge may find it hard to access, participate, and progress throughout the general curriculum, where reading to learn is a prerequisite for success.

The query at issue in this setting is what efficient strategies can be adopted to assist learners in activating and building background knowledge, so that they can become effective readers?

Strangman and Hall distinguish two categories of strategies for activating prior knowledge: direct instruction on background knowledge and indirect instruction on background knowledge. They spell out that direct instruction on background knowledge can be imbedded into an approach, such as previewing, where students are provided with introductory material before being engaged into reading particular texts. The introductory material may contain important background information, such as definitions of new lexis, translations of foreign phrases, and explanations of unfamiliar concepts. The authors refer

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to a study by Graves et al. (1983), in which learners were presented with previews of narrative texts including a plot synopsis, descriptive list of characters, and definitions of difficult lexical terms in the story. They explain that the learners were, therefore, given both a framework for understanding the stories and important background information, which resulted not only in their appreciation of the previews, but in helping them make significant improvements in both story comprehension and recall.

The writers make the point that as an alternative to a direct instruction approach, teachers might consider an indirect-instruction approach, such as engaging learners in field experiences through which they can assimilate background knowledge more independently. They consider six strategies for helping learners activate prior knowledge through indirect instruction:

Reflection and recording

One of the simplest ways of assisting learners in activating prior knowledge is to have them state orally or in writing what they already know about a particular topic. The reported effectiveness of this simple strategy is said to be quite remarkable with several studies. For instance, they quote Spires and Donley (1998) who, they state, noted that activating background knowledge through reflection and oral elaboration during text reading was a more effective strategy than taking notes on main ideas and their supporting details.

It could, however, be affirmed that this strategy should not be adopted if the teacher previously knows for sure that the topic is utterly unfamiliar to the students. In this case, direct instruction on prior knowledge presented in printed material or orally by the teacher may be resorted to as the sole effective strategy.

Interactive discussion

This strategy represents a supplement to the first one. This is so, in the sense that once having been recorded by individual students, pairs, or groups, prior knowledge on a particular topic can be extended with a whole class interactive discussion. Demonstrating the extent of effectiveness of the interactive approach, Strangman and Hall refer to Dole et al., (1991) who designed an intervention where learners reflected upon and noted down their background knowledge on a topic, and then engaged in a group discussion of the topic during which the teacher prompted them to contribute knowledge to complete a

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semantic map. It was proven that the approach was more effective at promoting reading comprehension than no pre-reading instruction. Yet, it was less effective than direct instruction on the information needed to comprehend the text, and it was, therefore, not clear that an interactive approach would have any advantage over the direct-instruction approach.

Answering questions

Research by Rowe and Rayford (1987), cited in Stragman and Hall suggests that teachers can make it easy for learners to activate prior knowledge through having them answer questions before and/or while they read new texts.

Strangman and Hall state that certain studies have examined whether activating background knowledge by means of question-answering boosts reading comprehension. Instances of such studies cited by both writers are those of King (1994) and Pressley et al. (1992) that confirm the hypothesis that generating answers to questions facilitates deep processing and high-level knowledge building, which in turn helps to ease the learning process. Also referred to in this context is an experimental finding by King (ibid.) which supports the theory. It revealed that a guided reciprocal peer-questioning-and-answering approach, where learners were trained to exploit new reading passages by asking and answering one another's self-generated questions, promoted significantly better comprehension lesson than untrained questioning.

As noted earlier, granted that the students may fail to generate questions and answers on the topic for the simple reason that it is unfamiliar to them, it could be suggested that the teacher can initiate a pre-reading activity by directly instructing them about the subject matter, and then have them proceed with it through generating questions and answers from one another prompted by his or her help whenever necessary.

The K-W-L strategy

Strangman and Hall state that this strategy, which stands for 'accessing what I Know, determining what I Want to find out, recalling what I did Learn', was developed by Ogle (1986) to help students access important background information before reading non-fiction. The authors explain that the strategy incorporates several features of the approaches examined above. Concerning the first two steps of K-W-L, students and teacher take part in an oral discussion. They start by reflecting on their knowledge about

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the topic, brainstorming ideas about it, and pinpointing categories of information. The teacher then helps report lacunae and inconsistencies in students' knowledge, and individual students bring about lists of things they want to learn about the topic or ask questions about it, and want to get answers. Finally, the students engage in reading new material and share what they have learned.

The writers report a line of argument for the K-W-L strategy by Ogle (1986) who states, "Informal evaluations indicate that [it] increases the retention of read material and improves student ability to make connections among different categories of information, as well as their enthusiasm for reading nonfiction." They add that the approach has been recommended by a number of teaching professionals, but it has not been rigorously tested.

CONTACT-2, computer-assisted strategy

Strangman and Hall point out that as opposed to the above-considered approaches that involve traditional materials, such as paper and pencil, as well as face-to-face interaction, Biemans and Simons (1996) examined a computer-assisted approach for activating conceptions during reading, called CONTACT-2. This helps learners to search for preconceptions, compare and contrast these preconceptions with new information, and formulate, apply, and evaluate new conceptions.

The authors assert that findings of Biemans, Deel, and Simons (2001) support the idea that combining new information with prior knowledge is a worthwhile learning strategy and advocate that a computer-assisted approach can be as successful as a teacher-directed one.

Interpretation of topic-related pictures

The authors put out that Croll, Idol-Maestas, Heal and Pearson (1986) give an account of an approach that joins building and activating prior knowledge. The approach requires training students to interpret pictures relating to a certain topic.

It is reported that two learners trained in the strategy improved reading comprehension a great deal for both pictures and text. It is, accordingly, suggested that the approach is effective. However, the restricted sample of two students and insufficiency of a control group make such any claims tentative and preliminary at best. Furthermore, there has been no ensuing research to help validate these findings.

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Nevertheless, as reported by Strangman and Hall, there are particular factors that can impact in certain ways on the effectiveness of the above-examined strategies for activating prior knowledge. The most significant, one could claim, is associated with the learners. This is the extent to which they are familiar with the text topic. Students may, in fact, have no prior knowledge about the topic, or they may have accurate, but inadequate, or inaccurate conceptions about it. In either case, the teacher can refine the learners' inadequate or inaccurate conceptions by adopting particular indirect and direct-instruction strategies on background knowledge or a combination of both. On the other hand, as suggested earlier, should the subject matter of the text be utterly unfamiliar to the students, the teacher ought to resort to implementing suitable direct-instruction strategies for building and activating prior knowledge depending on the students' grade level, their general proficiency level in the target language, as well as the type of reading material and/or its genre.

1.2.3.6. Developing the learners' reading ability

Extensive reading

It is argued that the first step towards helping learners be effective readers is to develop in them a good habit of reading and create in them a keen desire to so do. This objective can be best attained through an extensive-reading approach.

Ono, Day, and Harsch (2004: 13) state that there are several reasons why it is beneficial to encourage language learners to read extensively. They put it plainly that when students read extensively, they not only better their reading ability, but they also acquire new lexical knowledge and expand their understanding of the words they are already familiar with. Such type of reading can equally help the learners with other language skills, and probably the best result is that they develop positive attitudes towards reading in English and an increased motivation to learn it.

The authors point to the important role teachers play in assisting their students in getting the most out of extensive reading. Quoting Day and Bamford (2002), they recommend that it is necessary for teachers to introduce their students to extensive reading and supply them with essential guidance.

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Ono et al. suggest ten tips that teachers can offer the learners when they engage in extensive reading. They recommend teachers to present them to their students before beginning to read and revisit them occasionally during a semester or the whole school year. Summed up below are the ten tips proposed by the authors with comments of our own where necessary.

Tip One: Read, read, and read some more.

Ono et al. make the point that this may be the most significant piece of advice. Addressing the teacher, they say he or she might want to introduce this tip by emphasizing to the students that one learns to read by reading. Therefore, extensive reading can

. help learners read faster and understand more;

. assist them in reading meaningfully rather than word-by-word;

. boost their confidence in reading;

. consolidate their lexical and grammatical knowledge;

. help improve their writing proficiency and oral fluency.

Tip Two: Read easy books.

The authors argue that books including many difficult words and complex grammatical structures can be frustrating if not discouraging. So, it is important for learners to choose books that they can read quickly and easily, as this will increase their confidence and help them become more comfortable with the process of reading in the foreign language.

Nevertheless, one could claim that it may not be easy for learners to select the reading materials that suit their reading ability. The teacher should then help them so do as recommended by the authors, depending on their proficiency and the reading resources available.

Tip Three: Read interesting books.

Ono et al. assert that since students need to read many books, it is important that they be interested in and enjoy what they read. The authors address the teacher advocating that if his or her students do not find their reading materials interesting or exciting, he or she should advise them to stop reading them and try to find other ones they may enjoy more. As Williams (1986: 42) points out, interest is vital for it increases motivation, which in turn is a significant factor in the development of reading speed and fluency. He adds

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wondering how the teacher knows what his or her learners are interested in reading in English. He recommends the teacher to ask them what they like reading in their own language, and help them find texts in English of an appropriate level on similar topics. In order for the teacher to check the interest level of texts currently being used in his or her EFL course, he or she can ask the learners to assess them as 'interesting', 'all right', or 'boring'.

Tip Four: Reread books you found particularly interesting.

The authors claim that reading books more than once is beneficial for several reasons. One of these is that having already read a book once, the learner will be able to read it more fluently the second or the third time. This helps build vocabulary knowledge and can improve reading speed. Additionally, there is also a psychological benefit in reading, in that it is fun to reread a favorite book.

Tip Five: Read for general understanding.

Given that this tip represents the most significant characteristic of extensive reading, one could argue that it ought to be dealt with as number one, in the sense that before engaging in reading extensively, the learners should be sensitized to its nature. They need to be aware of the fact that – as the authors assert – such reading does not necessarily mean reading for one hundred per cent comprehension. On the contrary, since the aim is to read a great many books, it is in the learners' interest to read for general, overall understanding rather than struggling over every detail and worry about the exact meaning of every word or phrase.

To reinforce this principle, the authors suggest asking students to think about reading in their native language or watching certain T.V. broadcasts, such as movies. Most likely, they do not fret over every detail when so doing. Similarly, they should not expect to understand every item when they read extensively in English. They could equally be reminded that reading extensively implies reading for pleasure and for certain aims, such as increasing fluency and vocabulary knowledge, and that they will not be penalized for not comprehending every detail, and will not be tested on what they have read.

Tip Six: Ignore unknown or difficult words. Skip them and continue reading.

It could equally be contended that it might be unnecessary to deal with this tip separately, as the essence of its content has been examined in Tip Five. Ono et al. (2004:

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14) make the point that despite unfamiliar words, students can still maintain an overall comprehension of the passage. Sometimes, they can also guess the signification of new words from contexts. On the other hand, they can be helped to get used to living with a bit of ambiguity while reading. The authors observe that one way to do this is that the teacher can have the learners skim one page or two of their books circling any difficult words, then have them reread those pages encouraging them to focus on the general meaning and ignore any circled words. After they have finished, the teacher finds out how successful they were by asking them general questions on what they read. Very probably, the students can grasp the overall meaning despite encountering difficult words. If a student is unsuccessful, the book is likely to be too difficult, and he or she should stop reading it, and look for an easy reading material as mentioned in Tip Two.

Tip Seven: Avoid using dictionaries.

Where this tip is concerned, it could also be suggested that it might be needless to consider it independently, as it is related to unfamiliar words whose way of dealing with them has been examined in the two previous tips. Yet, it could be deduced that the authors offer this tip concerning the use of dictionaries, because they may know that foreign-language learners cannot refrain utterly from resorting often to dictionaries however much they are advised against their use. So, the writers might like to demonstrate the disadvantages of the frequent use of dictionaries: "Stopping two or three times per page to look up words in the dictionary is laborious and time-consuming, and it can distract students from reading for general understanding." However, they hold that having recourse to a dictionary becomes a necessity only when not knowing the meaning of a word which prevents overall understanding, or when "the unknown word reoccurs frequently in the text" (2004: 15). One could, therefore, argue that it might be more appropriate to entitle Tip Seven *Avoid overusing dictionaries* instead of *Avoid using dictionaries*.

Tip Eight: Expand your reading comfort zone.

Ono et al. (ibid.) assert that as students read more and more, their reading fluency will develop, and their reading comfort zones will expand. Consequently, as learners increase the size of their reading comfort zones, they will be able to read books that were previously too hard. To help learners enlarge their reading comfort zones, the authors

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advocate that the teacher needs to be familiar with the level of texts they are reading and the extent to which they can achieve overall comprehension. He or she can monitor his or her students' general understanding through incorporating classroom extensive reading activities. One instance of such activities quoted by the authors from Iwano (2004) is that the teacher briefly interviews individual learners while the others are reading.

Furthermore, the writers recommend that the teacher be au fait with the range of extensive reading materials available to the students. Being so with extensive reading materials and being aware of each learner's proficiency and reading interests will permit the teacher to better help students while they extend their reading comfort zones; he or she can offer useful recommendations when learners choose new books.

Tip Nine: Set reading goals and keep a reading log.

The writers (ibid) claim that setting personal goals can often be a strong motivational factor, which is especially true for reading. The teacher is invited to advise his or her students to set aside times for reading extensively, and encourage them to determine a reasonable target number of books, chapters, or pages to read within a particular period of time according to their abilities and to what their timetables allow.

The authors observe that "one way to set and monitor reading goals is to encourage or require […] students to keep a log of their extensive reading. This will allow them [and the teacher] to see their progress."

Tip Ten: Enjoy! Enjoy! Enjoy!

Referring to the motto of extensive reading, *reading gain without reading pain*, Ono et al. hold that the more the students enjoy what they are reading, the more they will read, but if they do not enjoy reading, their desire to stick with it is likely to decrease, and they may give up reading.

In this respect, the writers (ibid.: 16) maintain that the teacher's goal is to spark the learners' interest in reading and find encouraging ways to make sure they carry on reading. Should the teacher notice that some of the students begin to show disinterest in reading, the authors suggest that it might help to read aloud to them from a book that is easy, but captivating. They explain that the teacher's enthusiasm to so do can assist them in getting back into the frame of mind where they want to pick up a reading material whenever it is possible.

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One key conviction with which Ono et al. conclude the aforementioned article is that teachers can develop their students' proficiency in English and help them become fluent readers by engaging them in extensive reading. They add that the increased fluency, confidence, and motivation that result so often from reading extensively will assist the learners in their academic endeavors, such as bettering exam performances. In this frame of reference, the authors quote Colin Davis (1995: 335) as arguing, "Any ESL, EFL, or L1 classroom will be poorer for the lack of an extensive reading program of some kind, and will be unable to promote its pupils' language development in all aspects as effectively as if such a program were present."

Top-down and bottom-up approaches

These are distinguished as a couple of complementary approaches to processing comprehension materials. Nuttall (1996: 16) gives a detailed account of the nature of these approaches in the framework of reading texts.

The author states that sometimes either of these predominates the other whenever we read a particular text, and although they are normally unconscious processes, both can be adopted as conscious strategies by a reader interpreting a difficult text. She maintains that in top-down processing, we draw on our own intelligence and experience to understand a text. She explains that this type of processing is used when we interpret assumptions and draw inferences, and that we use it consciously when we try to see the overall purpose of the text, or get a rough idea of the pattern of the writer's argument, in order to make a reasoned guess at the next step on the grounds that having an idea of what something might mean can be a great help in interpreting it.

The author compares the top-down approach to an eagle viewing a landscape from a great height. It can see a wide area spread out below and understand the nature of the whole area, its general pattern and the relationship between its various parts far better than an observer on the ground.

Nuttall (ibid.: 17) asserts that the reader adopts an eagle's view of the text when he considers it as a whole, and relates it to his own knowledge and experience. This enables him to predict the writer's purpose, the possible trend of the argument and so on, and then use this framework to interpret difficult parts of the text. "The top-down approach gives a sense of perspective and makes use of all that the reader brings to the text: prior

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knowledge, common sense, etc., which have sometimes been undervalued in the reading class."

Bottom-up processing, however, builds up meaning through recognizing letters and words, working out sentence structure. It can be consciously used when an initial reading is confusing. Perhaps we cannot believe that the apparent message was really what the writer intended. This can happen if our knowledge of the world is inadequate, or if the writer's point of view is very different from our own. In that case, we must scrutinize the vocabulary and syntax to make sure we have grasped the plain sense correctly.

Bottom-up processing might be compared to a scientist with a magnifying glass examining the ecology of a transect – a tiny part of the landscape viewed by the eagle. The scientist develops a detailed understanding of that one little area (which might represent a sentence in the text), but full understanding comes only if this is combined with knowledge of adjacent areas and the wider terrain, so that their effects on one another can be recognized. In other words, bottom-up and top-down approaches are used to complement each other as important strategies for readers.

The 'standard exercise'

It is argued that the comprehension exercise types used to exploit any text usually depend on its kind, genre, and the learning objectives intended to be attained. It is generally reckoned that it may be demanding for the course book designer or the reading teacher to always devise a number of particular comprehension exercises that suit the text to be exploited. Scott, Carioni, Zanatta, Bayer, and Quintanilha (1984) could be claimed to spare both the teacher and the textbook designer this matter by adopting what they term the 'standard exercise' which, they argue, can be applied to almost any text, and which allows for much greater freedom in selecting reading materials.

The authors state that they experimented the 'standard exercise' through a semester with Brazilian first year university non-native learners of English. As will be noticed later, one could affirm that it can equally be used with secondary school EFL learners, for it suits their level and does not normally include tasks that are unfamiliar to them. Roughly the same viewpoint is voiced by Walker (1987: 47). She proposes an adaptation and extension of the 'standard exercise' stating, "It is, of course, possible to omit questions: the format is flexible enough to be adapted to most levels and circumstances. There are, no

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doubt, other questions which could be added, provided they are consistent with the general approach taken"

The 'standard exercise' consists of thirteen questions followed by explanations of the purpose of each one. These are listed below followed by some comments of our own where necessary to refine them in an attempt to make them more reliable, and therefore more beneficial.

1. Read only the title of your text. Predict and write down at least five vocabulary Items – key words – which you expect to see in the text. Use a dictionary if necessary. The key words can be noted down in English or in Portuguese.
2. Skim the text quickly (maximum one minute), looking for key words in the text. Use all the typographical indications, your previous knowledge, cognates, and repeated words. Now write down in no more than 15 words, the main theme of the text.
   Re-read the text as often as necessary to answer the following questions:
3. What seems to be the author's main intention: to persuade you or just to inform you?
4. Write down any words which look important in the text (key words) which you did not know before reading it. Beside each one, write down your idea of what it probably means.
5. Write down the main idea of each paragraph using only one sentence for each main idea. If the text consists of more than seven paragraphs, write down the main idea of each main section. Avoid translating, and try not to mention insignificant details.
6. Divide the text into sections. Is there an introduction? If so, where does it end? Is there a conclusion? If so, where does it start? Explain your answer.
7. Write one sentence reporting something which you learned from the text.
8. Critical reaction: whose interests does this text reflect? Which country, which social class, or which institution? Who would find the publication of this text desirable? Is the information in this text applicable to your own situation?
9. Indicate your interest in this text, using a scale from 1 to 5 (5 = very interesting; 1 = very boring).
10. How many times did you need to use a dictionary to answer the questions so far?
11. Write down the number of each paragraph which you feel you couldn't understand properly or aren't sure you understood.
12. Try to work out why you found the paragraphs you listed in the last question so difficult. What was the main reason?

a. lack of previous knowledge of the topic
b. a grammatical problem (which one?)
c. Inefficient reading strategies
d. difficulty in separating main points from details

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e. difficulty in identifying the introduction or conclusion

13. Now estimate your comprehension of the text (e.g. 50 per cent; 80 per cent).

'*Standard exercise*' (translated from Portuguese) (Scott et al. 1984: 116)

As stated by the authors, the questions in the 'standard exercise' involve some development from very superficial skimming to achieve general comprehension, as in Question Two, to deeper and more detailed and critical levels of comprehension. More precisely, there are three principal levels of comprehension: overall comprehension, main points comprehension – focusing on each paragraph – and detailed comprehension.

Scott et al. (1984: 115) explain that Question One aims to have the students "predict intelligently, anticipating problems before they arise." As noted above, Question Two, they state, initiates the comprehension process at the level of general understanding through the skimming technique. They assert that they try to start from what the student already knows, not – as is commonly the case – from what he or she does not know.

Commenting on what is recommended in Question One, one could assert that the comprehension process starts from this question, and not from Question Two, as the authors state, because the act of prediction relying on the title relates to comprehension. More precisely, by reading the title, the learners can make guesses about what the text is about. Certainly, by key words mentioned in Question One, the authors aim at paving the way for the students to identify the topic of the text. It could, however, be more helpful for the students to ask them straightforwardly – relying on the title – to guess what the text will be about. One reason behind this conviction is that – according to what the authors recommend – the students might write down words related only to the title, but probably having no relationship with the theme of the text.

Additionally, one could equally wonder for what reason the students can use a dictionary, especially as the key words can be noted down in Portuguese should they not know such words in English.

Question Three pertains to the function of the text. Yet, since the 'standard exercise' is intended to be used with virtually any text, the question should be more general. So, as different texts have different functions, the second part of this question, 'to persuade you or just to inform you?' should not be mentioned. The authors (ibid.: 116) justify the reason

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why the question is posed as such, i.e. in somewhat a specific way stating, ["It] originally required a much more complete analysis of the rhetorical functions in the text, but we simplified this to deal with functions and their markers in separate exercises according to need. This question, therefore, simply attempts to identify the differences between persuasion/ argument and more factual exposition".

Question Four requires the students to identify key words. It aims at developing particular skills. These are: (a) awareness of the relative importance of different vocabulary items; (b) not bothering about the insignificant items; and (c) trying to work out the meaning of unknown words from context before using a dictionary (ibid.: 117).

Nevertheless, it could be argued that asking the students to write down any unfamiliar key words may prompt them to note down as many new words as they can find in the text whether these are essential to comprehension or not. It would, therefore, be better to limit the number of the key words to be picked out from the text. For instance, Walker (1987: 49) recommends selecting ten words. But, the number of words to be selected may, on the one hand, be reckoned to be high, and on the other hand, some texts may not include ten new words. It would, therefore, be logical to restrict the key items to be identified and focused on to at most several or a few only; and these must actually be indispensable to comprehension, as alluded to earlier.

Another line of argument, in this respect, is that the authors should have included complex syntactic structures in Question Four or dedicated to these linguistic elements a separate question, because these – as referred to earlier – can equally represent a serious hindrance to comprehension. The question may be worded as follows: *Pick out a few complex structures and rephrase them in your own words to show you understand them.*

Question Five, the authors explain, aims at 'main points' comprehension. But, they did not put a question on supporting details. They should have so done, so that the students can learn to differentiate between the main ideas and the supporting ones. It could be deduced that it was very likely by reason of not having asked such a question that many learners with whom the 'standard exercise' was experimented, the authors themselves said, "had trouble in distinguishing the main from the marginal points." Walker (ibid.) makes a similar recommendation regarding the very question. Indeed, one of the modifications she has introduced into the 'standard exercise' is a question on specific

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details. After having put a question on the general idea in each paragraph, which consists in underlining the sentence containing such an idea, she recommends to look at the remaining sentences in each paragraph and decide whether they are related to the ones that have been underlined, and provide an explanation.

Scott et al. (ibid.) state, "The point of Question 6 is to go back to the development of the main ideas presented." They add, "It has been interesting for all of us to see how quite often texts, particularly articles from journals, have both an introduction and a conclusion in the first paragraph."

It could be argued that this question is not clearly stated, as it requires the learners to divide the text into sections, while with reference to Question Five, it is already divided into separate paragraphs. So, one may wonder how else the students are to divide the text, and whether the word 'section' in the context the writers used it has another signification different from that of the term 'paragraph'. The aim of the question, as stated by the authors themselves, is equally not explicit.

Taking into account the fact that in certain articles taken from journals, there are an introduction and a conclusion in the first paragraph, it could be suggested that the question may be stated as follows: *Look at the first paragraph, and decide whether it contains only an introduction or an introduction and a conclusion. In case there is a conclusion, decide whether it is restated in the final paragraph.*

With regard to the remaining questions (i.e. from 7 to 13), Scott et al. (ibid) explain that most of these aim to elicit personal reactions. They assert that this reflects their belief that reading without some sort of personal involvement is likely to be virtually useless.

Putting it plainly, with reference to those questions, the personal involvement stressed by the authors includes the reader's assessment of his or her comprehension of the text, his or her awareness of the reasons behind the difficulties in comprehending particular parts of the text, as well as the degree of his or her interest in the reading material.

The authors of the 'standard exercise' reported that they had conducted a questionnaire on it after having piloted it for a semester. They affirmed that they had found that beginner university students' ability to read authentic texts in English had improved greatly (ibid., p. 118). It should, however, be noted that in order for the

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‘standard exercise’ to be really reliable and beneficial, and used successfully with most academic levels, students need to get used to using it through adequate practice on various types of texts under the teacher’s guidance. In addition, particular modifications ought to be introduced into it depending on specific factors and circumstances. For instance, included in the ‘standard exercise’ may be questions linking reading to the other communicative skills, thus manifesting the adoption of an integrated approach.

An integrated approach is actually beneficial to teaching reading comprehension and to foreign-language learning as a whole, in that it works not only on the improvement of reading ability, but equally on furthering the learners’ communicative competence in the written and oral media.

Instances of tasks according with the mentioned approach, and that can be included in the ‘standard exercise’ may be:

a. Write a summary for the text;

b. Without looking at your written summary, present an oral summary of the text.

In case the text is a narrative, the teacher may ask the students to imagine a different ending for it, write it down, and have individual learners to communicate it orally to the class. Should the text be without an ending – as is deliberately the case for certain reading materials in many textbooks – the same writing and speaking tasks can be assigned to students.

Walker adheres to the same point of view regarding the necessity of introducing particular modifications to the ‘standard exercise’. Indeed, as suggested above, she recommends writing a summary of the passage in about 200 words (p. 49). But, the objection that can be raised to her recommendation is the length of the summary (200 words). As noted earlier, since the ‘standard exercise’ is intended to be used with virtually any text, the writer should not have determined the length of the summary, because depending on their length or on the number of the main ideas they include, certain texts can be summed up in much less than two hundred words; other reading materials can be summarized in more than that.

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Conclusion

There are diverse difficulties and problems learners encounter during the process of learning to read in a foreign language. General examples of these, as has been considered in this section of literature review, are related to code, lexical repertoire, and field of knowledge. In this sense, in order for communication to take place, the writer of a text and the audience to whom the text is addressed must share common features. Taking into account the three features mentioned above, (code, lexical repertoire, and field of knowledge), the reader cannot really grasp the writer's intended messages unless he or she is familiar with the type of language in which the text is written, his or her semantic repertoire is as satisfactory as the writer's, or he or she is specialized in the same field of knowledge as the writer is.

Specific instances of potential hindrances to the learner's comprehension of reading materials include text variables, such as vocabulary, syntactic structures, and topic, as well as learner variables, such as motivation and background knowledge.

One of the sound strategies for dealing with unfamiliar lexis is to make the learner differentiate between word meaning and word use by teaching vocabulary through reading, which requires the integration of lexis, grammar, and discourse. Another strategy for addressing the problem of difficult vocabulary and complex syntactic structures is simplification. However, care ought to be taken when simplifying a text taking into account particular factors: the learners' level of proficiency, the learning activities intended to be done in class, and perhaps most important is the necessity of keeping a certain amount of authenticity of the simplified material.

The topic of reading materials is an important factor that actually affects the learner's reading ability. Text topics ought to be interesting and motivating with a view to stimulating the desire of students to read, and consequently contribute to their becoming effective readers.

Apart from motivation as a learner variable, which is of significant influence on the student's learning performance, background knowledge as another learner variable ought to be activated, in the sense that it is a key factor that can help the student a great deal with comprehension. There are two types of strategies for activating background knowledge: direct-instruction strategy through which the teacher can provide the students with

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necessary information about the topic, either orally or in printed material, and indirect-instruction strategy which consists in engaging the students in learner-centered activities, such as stating orally or in writing what they already know about a particular topic, generating questions and answers about it, and interpreting topic-related pictures.

In the second part of this literature review section, we have examined a few approaches that can contribute to effective teaching of reading and successful learning to read. Bottom-up and top-down are prominent approaches that have an interdependent role in interpreting comprehension passages. The extensive-reading approach implies reading for global understanding, usually for pleasure. Adopting this approach can improve the students' reading ability satisfactorily, as well as the other communicative skills provided that reading extensively is practiced amply with the help of the teacher and under his or her guidance where necessary.

The 'standard exercise', according to its designers, consists of a certain number of comprehension questions that can be applied virtually to any text. However, particular modifications ought to be introduced into it depending on specific factors, so that it can actually suit any reading material. Accordingly, the exercise can be turned into some sort of an integration-of-skills approach if the modifications include tasks related to the other language skills.

1.2.4. Writing

Writing is "frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired" (Nunan 1991: 91). This is factual because of the nature of the skill, in the sense that one can speak and read before they can write. It is also generally contended that writing even in the mother tongue is more difficult than the other language skills. One major reason for the contention is that formal instruction and ample practice are required before one can produce an acceptable composition.

This section of literature review offers for consideration mainly the most common difficulties EFL learner writers experience, as well as ways that can help them overcome these difficulties and assist them in developing their writing proficiency.

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1.2.4.1. Areas and causes of difficulty with writing

As noted by Hadfield and Hadfield (1990) cited in an electronic article entitled "A process approach to writing" by Adam Simpson, there are three areas of difficulty with writing that can be categorized into three main areas, namely psychological, linguistic, and cognitive difficulties. Relying on a number of ELT authors, each will be discussed below in turn.

Psychological difficulties

One psychological hindrance to writing fluently and effectively is absence or lack of confidence in one's capabilities on the part of many foreign-language learners. In this frame of reference, Daniel J. Jarvis (2002) asserts, "[…] students who do not feel good about their writing will not write or want to share their writing." This would create a negative attitude towards the skill, "because they feel that they cannot do it correctly the first time, then they will never get it." The teacher, therefore, ought to get round the issue by – as Jarvis (ibid.) suggests – helping them feel good about their abilities, and hence feel successful about the progress they are making in writing.

Another psychological difficulty dealt with by Adam Simpson quoting Hadfield and Hadfield (ibid.) is that the writer's audience is not immediately present as is the case with speaking. The psychological difficulty consists in deciding what information the reader needs and the best way to express this. He goes on to point out that "this difficulty manifests itself in the prewriting stage, when some learners may be unwilling or unable to produce ideas that will work towards the construction of a piece of writing." In order to negotiate such a difficulty, the teacher is invited to devise certain strategies to elicit the necessary input.

Linguistic difficulties

Although it is taken for granted that errors and mistakes are one inevitable aspect of the learning process, a number of ELT authors relate some aspects of the difficulty learners experience with writing as a language skill to the various errors they make in their pieces of writing.

For starters, a distinction between an error and mistake ought to be made, especially as both terms sometimes are used interchangeably. Both terms denote the wrong use of a

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linguistic item, but the difference lies in the fact that an error, as Richards and Schmidt (2002: 184) state, "Results from incomplete knowledge"; whereas a mistake is caused by particular factors, such as "lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other factors of performance." Accordingly, it could be affirmed that while speaking, a learner may be able to correct his or her mistakes immediately if he or she notices them, and can also correct the mistakes he or she makes in compositions whilst writing, or when revising what he or she has written. The case, however, is not the same for errors. These can be avoided only after successful learning.

Undoubtedly, all foreign-language learners make mistakes and errors in their pieces of writing. In the following section, the learners' types of inaccuracy manifesting their linguistic difficulties with writing will be referred to as mistakes or errors, as used by the authors of the articles relied on.

Grammar mistakes

In a previous section, difficulties with grammar have been looked at as being an obstacle to the development of the whole ESL/EFL learning process. In the present section, such difficulties will be dealt with as being a hindrance to effective writing in a foreign or second language.

A website article entitled "Writing is the most difficult skill" reports that learners of English as a foreign language affirm that writing is more difficult than the other language skills.

Among the reasons which, according to the article, can answer the question why writing is the most difficult communicative skill is that it necessitates good grammar. This requires the non-native learners to learn a large number of structural rules, which may be different from those of their mother tongue. This presents a very big problem if they learn the grammar with an English native teacher, in the sense that the teacher cannot help to distinguish the differences between both languages. For this reason, the learners must work out the differences themselves, and even outline some rules to convert from their native language to the target language.

In another online article entitled "Materials for writing tutors: addressing specific problems: grammar", it is asserted that there is no workable solution to the problem of grammatical errors. What can be offered as a solution is a way of looking at grammar that

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will help the teacher to make it more relevant to the writing and thinking process. The author points out that it is easier to see why grammar is important when one understands that, in writing, form and content are not two separate entities. When one changes the form of expression, they change (sometimes subtly, sometimes drastically) its content. Similarly, an error in form might reveal that there is something wrong with the content. The author then affirms:

> By understanding that problems with grammar may reveal problems with thinking and content, the tutor can approach grammar in a way that is more meaningful to the writer, and to that particular paper. In other words, you can discuss antecedent references with writers until their eyes glaze over, and their stomachs rumble, and still have very little success. However, if you can tie a grammar error to a more general tendency in the student's writing or thinking habits, then he will be more apt to understand the error, and to avoid it next time he writes.

Spelling mistakes

Barbara Fine Clouse (2005) and Paul Shoebottom, in a website article entitled "Understanding writing mistakes", have examined spelling mistakes as being among the difficulties ESL learner writers experience. One main reason for this type of mistakes is – as generally contended – the discrepancy between the way words are pronounced and the way they are written. Both authors assert that even proficient adult native speakers have spelling difficulties, which can lead the reader to have a negative impression of the writer's composing ability. More to the point, one could argue, is that it might be assumed that such an impression is likely to cause the writer to have undesirable results in situations, such as exam taking or applying for particular positions, among the requirements of which is accuracy in writing.

Perhaps most serious is that – as Shoebottom points out – spelling mistakes prevent the reader from understanding the messages the writer intends to communicate. This claim can be true as concerns only particular utterances, which implies that spelling mistakes do not frequently impede communication. Harmer (2001: 256) confirms this assertion holding that incorrect spelling does not often hinder the understanding of a written message, but it can detrimentally affect the reader's judgment. He puts it clearly, "All too

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often bad spelling is perceived as a lack of education or care." Let us consider below a sentence of our own.

**The booc I borowed from my frend kontains alot of intresting texts ilustreited with naice picturs.* (= The book I borrowed from my friend contains a lot of interesting texts illustrated with nice pictures.)

Although there are many spelling mistakes in this sentence, the message is fairly comprehensible. So, spelling mistakes do not always cause comprehension difficulties.

In any case, taking into account the above arguments, as well as the fact that writing is marked by linguistic accuracy, the issue of spelling mistakes in EFL writing classes ought to be addressed. Shoebottom and Harmer (ibid.) suggests extensive reading in English as a very good way in the long term to learn English spelling patterns, so that mistakes are less likely.

Porte (1995), in turn, proposes copying written selections as a way to improve spelling. He advocates that underachieving learners need to be sensitized to their spelling mistakes and/or errors and the reasons for committing them. Copying written materials under the pressure of time can serve this purpose. Noticing and thinking over the mistakes they have made in copying exercises may be an effective strategy that can raise awareness of their recurring misspellings, and can hence help them avoid them in their future writing compositions.

Clouse (2005: 163 – 171) offers a number of procedures that can be of more help to the learning of correct spelling. The most important are listed below.

a. Using spelling dictionaries that can be used at home and elsewhere.
b. Breaking words into syllables. This procedure can help to spell words, especially multisyllabic ones, more easily:
   - *under-stand-able*
   - *room-mate*
   - *or-ga-ni-za-tion*
c. Learning homophones: Homophones are words that are pronounced similarly, but are spelled and used differently. Focus should be on the ones that can cause trouble. Here are examples: *it's / its; their / there; principal / principle; etc.*
d. Underlining words to check later

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e. Using a computer: If one writes at a computer, they can use the AutoCorrect Feature that can allow them to correct the misspelled words automatically.

Punctuation mistakes

Shoebottom assumes that punctuation mistakes are among the main types of mistakes learners make in their pieces of writing. He stresses that the most serious punctuation mistakes are made not only by ESL students, but by native speakers, as well.

Accounting for the source of such mistakes, the author reports that "[they] are due to the lack of a clear understanding of what a sentence is, and they result in fragments (incomplete sentences) or run-ons ('sentences that do not end when they should')."

Another reason why foreign learners of English, namely Arab students make punctuation mistakes – as Kharma and Hajjaj (1989: 107) observe – is that Arabic does not use punctuation marks as extensively as English does, and there is no capitalization in Arabic, either.

Both authors echo Shoebottom's above argument regarding the lack of a straightforward comprehension of the nature of sentence as one source of punctuation mistakes when they go on pointing out that the problem is made more serious by the fact that a great deal of classroom teaching and learning takes place at the level of the single (mostly simple) sentence, frequently as a question-answer dialogue between the teacher and the students. "The result is that in extended writing practice (i.e. beyond the sentence) what an English language teacher often finds is a seemingly endless sentence written by the students" (p.108).

Examining punctuation mistakes among the main types of mistakes made in writing shows the importance of punctuation in written communication. Its importance consists in helping to clarify the meaning of the messages of a text. Therefore, absence or misuse of punctuation marks can make it difficult for the reader to quickly understand or cause him or her to misunderstand what the writer intends to express. Let us consider the following example by Sanford (1979: 354): *Sue Sidney and Emmett got into the car*. The author explains that this sentence means that two people got into the car; one is Sue Sidney, and the other is Emmett. However, the meaning of the sentence can be changed without

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changing any words, but by adding two commas, and two people become three people: *Sue, Sidney, and Emmett got into the car.*

As a way that can help learners master the correct use of punctuation, Shoebottom suggests reading the composition aloud. He explains, "If a natural pause in the reading does not correspond with, say, a comma or a full-stop in the written text, then it is likely that the punctuation is faulty." The author also proposes resorting to extensive reading, especially of non-fiction both in English and the mother tongue in the belief that it will help students understand the notion of the sentence as the basis of good writing.

Usage mistakes

Shoebottom asserts that usage mistakes are often seen in ESL students' writing, and spells out that it is this type of mistakes rather than grammar mistakes in extended pieces of writing that promptly identifies even the most proficient ESL learners as non-native speakers. He adds making it clear that a usage mistake does not break a grammatical "rule", but it is a word or a group of words that a native speaker would never use to express a given meaning that the ESL student is attempting to convey.

The author maintains that usage mistakes can often be more problematic to the reader than grammar mistakes. He exemplifies the assertion stating:

> The ESL student who writes *My mother don't speak English* or *Then I putted beaker on tripod* will be understood. On the other hand, the student who writes in a journal *My mother has an arrangement with her operator today* will not be understood to mean that his mother has an appointment with her surgeon.

To address usage problems, Shoebottom proposes a short-term solution and a long-term solution. The first one consits in asking a native speaker to check the written work, whereas the second one – the same remedy he suggests for spelling and punctuation mistakes – is to do a lot of reading in English.

The author notes that the type of writing mistakes discussed above are not the only problems to be concerned about. In point of fact, there are particular aspects of writing that are much more important than worrying about mistakes of spelling, grammar, and usage. Referring to these aspects, the author asks a set of questions addressing the learner writer that in order to get a good grade for a piece of written work, he or she must answer the

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questions with yes. Those aspects referred to in the questions, and which can present difficulties to learners are: relevance to the topic, strong introduction and conclusion, a topic sentence in each paragraph, clarity and organization of ideas, and cohesion and coherence.

Cognitive difficulties

A cognitive difficulty examined by Adam Simpson in the website article referred to above relates to the necessity of organizing thoughts on paper. Learners may find this difficult in such circumstances as an essay assigned as homework for which the purpose is not immediately apparent, and the piece of writing is not being done for any personal reasons.

In an online article entitled "Difficulties with writing: What can inhibit writing development", Dr. Mel Levine is reported as stating that children having difficulty with higher-order cognition are often incapable of using writing to present a sound argument or convey sophisticated or abstract ideas. This is manifested in (a) trouble generating ideas or elaborating on them, (b) difficulty in developing and organizing ideas, (c) lack of opinion or sense of audience, and (d) difficulty with writing tasks that require creativity and/or critical thinking.

Neither author offers an answer to help overcome such cognitive difficulties. One may put forward that adopting a free-writing approach and a process approach to teaching and learning writing, familiarizing learners with their nature and offering them opportunities to use them extensively inside and outside class can address such difficulties at least in part.

Other sources of difficulties

Another reason for the difficulty in writing is lack of practice. The author of the online article "Writing is the most difficult skill" referred to above asserts that people often spend less time to write than to listen, speak, or even to read. Those learning in their country usually read more than practicing the other skills, while those learning abroad must listen to the language most frequently. Whatever the case, EFL learners devote little of their time to writing.

No wonder, as the proverb goes, practice makes perfect. Trupe (2001), Jarvis (2002), and Stanley (2003) note the key role of ample practice and enough time in the

development of writing skills. Jarvis maintains, “Learning to write, like learning to do many things, requires practice and time”, and comes to the view that “all students are capable of becoming excellent writers given enough time and practice.”

In the same article, the teacher’s inability to evaluate all students’ written work is also considered to be among the reasons for the difficulty in writing. The author affirms that the teacher does not have enough time to correct all the learners’ pieces of writing if the class is made up of more than ten students, and “when [he or she] corrects the writing for just some of them, the other students cannot recognize their own mistakes. Without correction, the mistakes may be repeated many times and become bad habits which are hard to adjust.”

Equally as regards this problem, there is no suggestion of any way out to work it out although the solution might be commonplace. This lies in self-editing, peer-editing, and alternate teacher assessment of a particular number of students’ writing activities at a time.

1.2.4.2. Developing writing proficiency

In addition to addressing the problems and difficulties related to writing, one needs to know why this communicative skill should be taught. This may make instructors more enthusiastic to do their utmost to teach it successfully, and can rid learners of a possible negative attitude towards writing due to the difficulties they face with the skill. In all likelihood, making students aware of the necessity of learning writing will motivate them.

According to Harmer (1998: 79), the reasons for teaching writing include reinforcement, language development, learning style, and most important writing as a communicative skill in its own right.

Referring to reinforcement as one reason for teaching the skill, the author argues that most of the people gain great benefit from seeing the language presented in written form. He explains that the visual demonstration of language construction is very useful for understanding how it all fits together, as well as an aid to committing the new language to memory.

For the part of language development, Harmer (ibid.) observes that we cannot be sure, but the actual process of writing assists us in learning as we go along. In this respect,

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he states, “The mental activity we have to go through in order to construct proper written texts is all part of the ongoing learning experience.”

The third reason why writing ought to be taught is that it is one among the language-learning styles. In this context, the author notes that writing is appropriate for many learners for whom the time to reflect upon things, to produce language in a slower way, is invaluable.

The fourth reason, which Harmer reckons the most important, is that writing is a basic language skill, just as essential as listening, speaking, and reading. The importance of the skill lies in the students’ need for knowing how to communicate in writing in a variety of situations, such as writing letters, putting written reports together, and replying to advertisements, as well as how to increasingly write using electronic media. The author adds that students need to know some of the writing’s special conventions (punctuation, paragraph construction, etc.) just as they need how to pronounce spoken English appropriately, and that part of the teacher’s job is to give them that skill.

Relying on the experiences of three foreign learners of English, Tribble (1996: 3–5) finds out the following reasons for teaching writing: (a) helping to meet particular professional needs, (b) consolidating language learning, (c) being necessary for language exam taking, and (d) aiding access to specific professional opportunities.

Byrne (1988: 129 – 130), in turn, examines a number of reasons for teaching writing, some of which are peculiar to children. We consider in what follows those applying to all ages followed by comments of our own.

- Writing offers learners a break from oral work. Students enjoy talking, but they can get tired even if the teacher keeps changing the oral activities. “Writing activities provide a very important quiet (or relatively quiet!) period for them in the lesson, after which they usually return to oral work refreshed and less restless;”
- Writing is an opportunity that allows learners to work at their own pace, which is very relaxing for them;
- Written work sometimes clears up difficulties students experience during oral activities. Students sometimes cannot tell the teacher about those difficulties, because they themselves are not even aware of them;
- Written language serves as a record – which learners like and need – of many of the oral materials they do in the classroom, such as

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> dialogues they have practiced and songs they have sung. "Again this is important, because although they learn quickly, they forget quickly, too. [The teacher] should not forget that they lead very busy lives – in and out of school!"

On the basis of the reasons for teaching writing cited above by Byrne, it could be argued that the skill can act as a facilitating factor for learning and teaching. In fact, writing has a substantial effect on the learners' physical and psychological readiness for learning, in the sense that the serene atmosphere during which students work on writing activities offers them some rest from the bodily lassitude and mental strain caused by oral and aural exercises. Further, writing has an instructional function: it helps with learning oral language through copying specific aural content, which aids memorization. For the teacher's part, the learners' written work can assist him or her in finding out certain learning difficulties, which he or she has not discovered via any other ways.

Raimes (1983: 12) adheres to the same claim above as regards the instructional role of writing, and goes even further arguing that the skill helps even with the whole L2 learning. She states:

> While writing and the process of struggling to get ideas on paper is a valuable aid to the whole learning process; it should not be singled out as though it exists in a vacuum. There is rarely a situation in real life in which we do not talk to someone or read something at some point in our writing process, before we write, while we are writing, or after we have written.

The example of successful writers

Assisting learners in overcoming learning difficulties ought to be initiated with certain emotional factors before engaging them into practical activities. In this context, Clouse (2005: X – XI) suggests a number of recommendations – which she refers to as *Habits of highly successful writers* – that can help learner writers with writing fluently. The recommendations concern anyone in the process of developing their writing ability be they a learner writer in an educational setting or anybody else in a non-academic environment. These are summed up below.

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Be patient.

Improving writing takes time, and hence expecting too much too soon ends up with the learner's becoming frustrated. The learner should then expect to make slow, steady progress rather than dramatic, overnight improvement.

Expect to get stuck.

Here, the writer refers to getting lost for words, and maintains that everyone does, even experienced professional writers; and that "writer's block and dead ends are all part of writing." She suggests talking to experienced writers when one gets stuck, and tucking the solution away for future reference when one manages to solve the problem, so that the same problem does not plague the learner over and over again.

In order to work out the same problem, JoEllen Simpson (2000: 34) can be said to propose a potentially better solution that can guarantee the flow of the learner writer's ideas when composing in English as a foreign or second language. She counsels the learner not to stop writing if he or she does not know what to write. Rather, he or she can write the sentence 'I do not know what to write' until he or she thinks of something. By the same token, the author suggests the student writes a word in his or her native language, and continues in English in case he or she does not know or remember the word in English.

Remember that writing is really rewriting.

The author states that experienced writers work and rework drafts several times, and thus draws the learner's attention to know that he or she is acting like an experienced writer with each revision.

Talk to other writers.

Clouse (2005: xi) recommends the learner writer to find out what other writers do when they write, and try some of their procedures.

It is worth noting, however, that in case it is not possible for a foreign learner writer to talk to experienced writers face-to-face or through another medium, he or she can resort to reading their writings, and do what is recommended in the last point above.

Study the responses to your writing.

The author advocates sharing one's pieces of writing – either in draft or in finished form – with people with good judgment, and asking them what they think and why. She

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adds making it clear, "Reader response is valuable to a writer. By paying attention to this response and working to improve areas where readers see weaknesses, you can improve more quickly."

By *the responses to your writing*, Clouse refers to feedback. Doubtless, feedback is more beneficial when it is immediate. Under the heading *Immediacy* as one tip for teaching writing, Yates (2007) underlines the importance of rapid feedback as one key to improving the learner's writing fluency. She contends that turning back students' papers with positive and negative feedback on them the next class period with two class periods a week, works well. Praise is necessary, because people need to feel appreciated, and on the other hand, negative comments should be constructive.

Read, read, read.

Another way of improving writing skills is – as the author suggests – through reading a variety of interesting materials. In this setting, she counsels the writer to notice how other writers do things, to pay attention to how they deal with beginnings, endings, proof of their ideas, sentence structures, punctuation, and transitions; and to try to include some of their techniques in his or her own writing. On the basis of these recommendations, the author argues that "the more you read, the more you learn about the nature of language and the faster your writing will improve."

Do not fear mistakes.

No wonder, apprehension of errors is a serious hindrance to learning. Learners need to be made aware – as Clouse holds – that mistakes are a natural part of learning. From this perspective, she advises writers to take risks, try things out, and embrace mistakes as opportunities to learn pointing out that if one is afraid of making a mistake, they will never try; and if they never try, they will never grow.

Essentials

According to Tribble (1996: 67– 68), the learner writer needs to acquire the following types of knowledge, so that he or she can write effectively.

. *Content knowledge*: This refers to the knowledge of the concepts involved in the subject area. One could make it clear that this type of knowledge denotes the learner's familiarity with the topic of the writing exercise.

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- *Context knowledge:* This is knowledge of the social setting in which the written text will be read, including the reader's expectations, as well as knowledge of the co-texts alongside which the new text will be read.
- *Language system knowledge:* This involves those aspects of the language system (e.g. lexis, syntax) that are necessary for the completion of the writing task.
- *Writing process knowledge:* This refers to the most appropriate way of preparing for a writing task.

Tribble (ibid.: 68) puts it plainly elucidating that if learner writers know what to write in a specific context, what the reader expects the written text to look like in a given setting, and which aspects of the language system are relevant to the particular task in hand, and have a command of the writing skills appropriate to this task, then they have a good chance of producing a piece of writing that will be effective.

The following diagram by Raimes (1983) summarizes and may better demonstrate what a learner must know, so that he or she can produce a fluent effective piece of writing.

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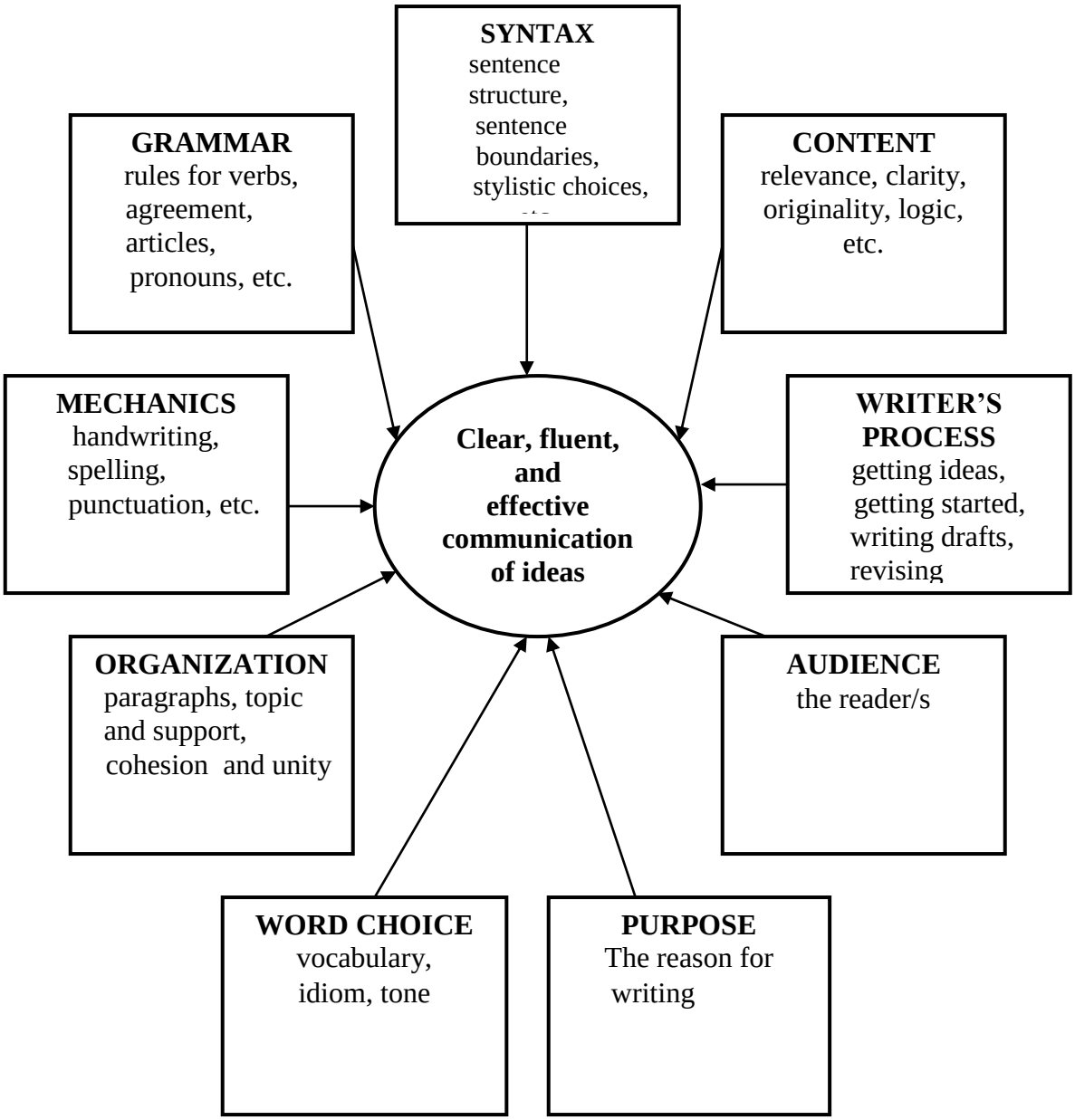

Figure 2: What learner writers need to know (Raimes 1983: 6)

The Humanistic Approach

In the field of language teaching, Richards and Schmidt (2002: 242) define the Humanistic Approach as a term that is sometimes used for what underlies METHODS that are said to be student-centered, in which the following principles are considered

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important: (a) the development of human values, (b) growth in self-awareness and in the understanding of others, (c) sensitivity to human feelings and emotions, and (d) active student involvement in learning and in the way learning takes place.

For the part of teaching writing, the humanistic approaches underlie particular approaches, perhaps the most prominent of which is the Free-Writing Approach that manifests itself in writing activities in which learners are encouraged to write as much as they can on any topic they like, rather than on a specific topic assigned by the teacher without paying greater attention to linguistic accuracy, so that the students will not experience any apprehension of errors, which may hinder the flow of their ideas.

Free-writing activities: Writing letters to the teacher

Among the writing activities compatible with the adoption of the Humanistic Approach to teaching writing is writing letters to the teacher. This is an idea suggested by Gary P. Burkhuisen (1995), which his students practiced with him as a real audience. In this way, as the author puts it, writing letters to the teacher is a real communicative activity, in the sense that the students write to a real person – not to an imaginary person – about real-life matters or real personal concerns.

A humanistic aspect of the activity is that – as the author points out – it opens a communication channel between the students and the teacher. "Often students, particularly children find it hard to talk to their teachers about events in their lives, pleasant or sad. […] some students need to share their thoughts or feelings with someone else, and they take the opportunity to do so in their letters." He adds, "Language teaching and learning is always easier when the relationship between the teacher and students is a close one, […]" (ibid.: 45).

A major benefit of writing letters to the teacher is that it is fun. The author states that providing fun for both the teacher and students is one of the aims of letter writing. In fact, he reports that he certainly enjoys receiving and reading the students' letters, and many of them, in turn, have told him that they like writing to him.

In this sense, it could be deduced that the students' writing letters to the teacher plays the role of an affective factor that builds a friendly student-teacher relationship or strengthens it, and thus enhances learning.

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Another affective function of the activity can be inferred from the author's statement that many learners find this sort of writing a real relief from the more structured and usually graded writing activities that form part of their writing program. This includes process writing that is characterized by more time–consuming systematic stages, namely brainstorming, revising, conferring, and editing. Writing letters to the teacher, the author argues, "Is spontaneous writing which takes place in a non-threatening, non-structured manner" (ibid.: 45).

Furthermore, it is not only the learners who derive benefit from the activity; the teacher also does. Writing to the teacher does not only aim at contributing to the development of the students' writing skills, but it can also serve as an evaluation of the whole teaching program. Barkhuisen reports that he has discovered that once students get to know him, they are willing to tell him what they find exciting or boring in his classes, and sometimes make constructive and helpful suggestions as to how he should do things differently. He adds, "They often comment on the ESL program: what they like or do not like about it, if there is too much or too little work, what skills are being neglected, what activities or content should be excluded, and so on" (ibid.: 45).

The author notes that the students should not be asked to write to the teacher too frequently, so that they will not be bored, and the teacher will not be able to read all the letters. Therefore, writing to the teacher once a month, as a compulsory exercise, is enough to maintain their interest in the activity, and for them to gather newsworthy content.

Free-writing activities: Interclass letter writing

Another writing activity lending itself to the principles of the Humanistic Approach is interclass correspondence (Dhaim 1992). This activity consists in students in a particular class writing letters to students of the same grade level in another class.

Procedure

As described by Dhaim (p. 51), the letter writing activity is preceded by a talk given by a student or a pair of students on a topic they choose themselves. The rest of the class sit in a circle and take notes while listening attentively. Thereupon, there is a class discussion. Once this is finished, the teacher asks every student to write a letter to a student in the other class about the talk, summarizing the main ideas, stating their

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viewpoint, and asking them to give theirs in a written answer. After the students finish writing the letters, the teacher collects them.

When the teacher meets with the other class, he or she distributes the letters to them, engages them in reading them, and has them answer the letters back in writing. The following week, it is the turn of Class 2 to write first, and Class 1 to answer. The same procedure goes on as long as the teacher notices no reluctance from the students towards the activity.

The author asserts that the activity is flexible. The pre-writing exercise does not necessarily have to be a talk; it can be either a song, a joke, or any text studied that is worth writing about. Further, it does not work only with motivated students; it can work with any two classes of the same level. If the teacher does not have such classes, he or she can coordinate with a colleague in the same school, and arrange interclass correspondence.

Advantages of interclass correspondence

On top of motivating students to write and subsequently helping them to improve their writing fluency, this activity – as the author (1992: 52) points out – has many positive points that are essential to better language learning in general: (a) it is a good way of integrating the four skills: listening and speaking are dealt with during the discussion period, and reading and writing during the reading and writing of the letters, (b) it makes the students build up a feeling of achievement when their ideas expressed in a foreign language are understood by a reader other than the teacher, (c) it enables them to gain more knowledge by reading about what other classes have learnt, (d) it gives a chance to inhibited students who cannot express themselves verbally to do it in writing, and (e) the assimilation and use of some expressions heard during a discussion can be reinforced when used in writing afterwards.

The Holistic Approach

In the field of language teaching, a holistic approach underlines the teaching of language as an integrated whole, rather than focusing on teaching only particular components. Hamayan (1989) reports Heald-Taylor (1989) stating that the holistic natural approaches are based on the premise that youngsters acquire language as naturally as they learn to walk and talk when engaged in self-motivating activities that are stimulating, interesting, social, meaning-based, purposeful, interactive, and most of all enjoyable.

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Implications for the teaching of writing

Hamayan (ibid.) holds that the premise has significant implications for the teaching of writing. These are examined below with comments of our own when need arises.

. *Writing for meaning rather than form:* Writing activities must focus on the communication of meaning rather than on the form of language.

This implication relates to a principal principle of the communicative approach. Indeed, what counts most is conveying the meaning in such a way as to make it comprehensible for the reader without paying much attention to linguistic accuracy.

. *Writing as part of whole language:* Writing activities must be part of the entire language experience in which learners are engaged. In this sense, it is more meaningful, and thus easier for students to write about what they have listened to, spoken, read about, or experienced.

Putting it plainly, on the basis of the Holistic Approach, writing is to be taught in connection with the other communicative skills.

. *Writing as part of content-area acquisition:* Crandall, et al. (1987) cited in Hamayan (ibid.) state that integrating writing with content area instruction apart from integration with other dimensions of language is another feature of holistic natural approaches. Together with writing about personal experiences, students can write about content area topics, such as keeping a journal about an ongoing science experiment, or writing about a historical character they read about. The authors note that by using academic content areas as a basis for writing activities, higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing, synthesizing, and predicting can be developed. On the other hand, they suggest providing the students with the appropriate language to facilitate class work in those content areas.

. *Writing as a self-generated and self-actualizing activity:* If someone relies on their creative power, writing can be a joyful, lively, and satisfying activity (Ueland, 1987 quoted in Hamayan, ibid.). Hamayan advances the claim that when students are given the opportunity to do so, they begin to write more; and the more they write, the more likely they are to improve.

Example writing activities

Described below are examples of writing activities manifesting the holistic natural approaches to teaching writing skills, as suggested by Hamayan (ibid.).

. Writing that emerges from group activities: Language experience stories

The approach adopted in such activities is the Language-Experience Approach (LEA). This is claimed to be an excellent way to develop speaking and reading proficiency (Nessel and Jones, 1981 cited in Hamayan, ibid.). With LEA, learners participate in an activity, such as a given process, or watch a particular incident, then compose a written account of the activity in a whole group class, in pairs, or individually after generating enough oral language and talking about it.

. Writing that emerges from reading: extensions of storybooks

Storybooks are an excellent source of writing activities. Described below are three examples of writing activities that can be done in conjunction with storybook reading.

Cloze passages: The teacher can make cloze passages out of sections of a book the students have read, and have them fill in these passages. In order to make the task easy for students, the teacher can provide them with a list of possible words to help them fill in the passage correctly.

Rewriting the ending of a book: This activity can integrate the four language skills: the teacher has groups of students write a new ending for a storybook they have read. Students' written work can be read out, compared, and discussed.

Writing a new version of a story: Hamayan (ibid.) argues that students enjoy adapting plots of stories they have read. The adaptation can be done by renaming characters, putting themselves in the middle of the story, changing a peripheral character into a central one, or changing a central event in the story.

. Student-generated writing: Journals

The author explains, "Journals are a personal account of daily activities, thoughts, and interpretations of classroom events written on an ongoing basis, which students submit for periodic review." She observes that the principal peculiarity of journals is that there is no teacher feedback given about the form of language unless the student requests it directly.

The author reports on two types of journals. These are dialogue journals and diaries.

Dialogue journals: With dialogue journals, students are encouraged to write regularly to the teacher in a notebook on interesting topics of their own choice, and the teacher writes back, responding to the topic or issue written about.

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Such type of writing is student-generated and functional, and the context for the interaction between the learner and the teacher is non-threatening. Students are invited to write at their proficiency level (even if it is low), and the teacher responds to each student's entry in a way that accommodates to the learner's language level of proficiency. However, where the teacher does not comment on the student's language since the focus is on communication rather than on form, the teacher's language input should be accurate and slightly above the learner's linguistic ability, which provides an opportunity for the learner to read at a higher level, and thus helps him or her to use language accurately.

Referring to the benefit of dialogue journals, Hamayan holds that they enable learners to develop reading and writing skills together in a single functional experience that lies in communicating thoughts and feelings to another individual.

The author notes that since daily exchange of dialogue journals is not possible for more than four or five students at a time, the teacher can stagger the journals, so that one fifth of the class submits their compositions on each day of the week.

Diaries: Another way suggested by Hamayan to encourage students to write on a daily basis is through diaries. These may be of two types: personal and content area.

Roughly like journals, in a personal diary students can write about any topic or issue that is interesting in their lives. In a content area, the focus is on a specific academic topic. For instance, students may keep track of progress in a scientific experiment, or may write their personal opinions of events studied in a history lesson.

With a diary, the teacher does not play the role of an active participant in a conversation as he or she does with a dialogue journal. However, if the student wishes, the teacher may read the diary entries and respond to them as he or she does with dialogue journal entries. Besides, students who want to share the diary with others can choose their favorite entry to read to the rest of the class or have it "published" in a collection of diary compositions.

The author voices the opinion that although students have less opportunity for modeling in diaries than they do with dialogue journals, writing about what can be highly personal and meaningful, even with only occasional feedback, is still effective for improving written language proficiency.

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. Student-generated Writing: Creative Writing

Hamayan simply and briefly defines creative writing as the expression of ideas, thoughts, feelings, and stories. Perhaps an elaborate definition of creative writing as given by Richards and Schmidt (2002: 131) is: "Types of writing such as fiction, drama and poetry that reflect the writer's originality, imagination, feelings and which do not describe factual events."

As is the case for dialogue journals, students – in creative writing – are encouraged to write in any genre (drama, fiction, poetry, etc.) about whatever topic that is of interest to them. However – as Jarvis (ibid.) notes – in the beginning, many learners cannot decide upon a topic to write about. The teacher may then provide them with topics related to learning experiences they have had in the classroom, home experiences, or other ones they have had in the world.

Addressing the teacher, the author provides a three-step outline for the process of creative writing:

- Model the process of creative writing for your students. Tell them a story that you like to write about. Then, sit down and write it.
- Encourage students to tell their stories to each other, then set aside a portion of each class period for writing.
- Give immediate feedback on writing, as it is more effective than when it is given at a later time; thus, while students are writing, circulate and confer with them on their writing focusing only on the content of their composition. Through teacher feedback, students learn to organize their ideas better, to write more, and to improve their writing proficiency. At the beginning, they may find it difficult to follow the conventional rules of writing, but gradually they learn to do so.

Using the Internet: Blogs

Equally as a way manifesting the implementation of the holistic natural approaches for the purpose of teaching the four communicative skills is the use of the Internet. For the part of writing skills, and in the same context of encouraging students to be creative learner writers, making use of blogs can serve this purpose.

According to Hockly (2009: 60), a blog is "short for web log, and is an online journal of sorts, usually kept by individuals, and regularly updated with 'posts' which

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appear on webpage in reverse chronological order (so with the latest post at the top of the page)." *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2006) gives a definition of the term that may be reckoned clearer: "A personal record that somebody puts on their website giving an account of their activities and their opinions, and discussing places on the Internet they have visited." Perhaps briefly and most clearly, a blog is an electronic diary.

Hockly affirms, "Blogs certainly lend themselves well to short pieces of writing […]." One instance of writing activities students can practice via blogs as suggested by the author is that the teacher can have a class blog in which students report in writing on books they are reading out of class or contributing short pieces of writing on a certain topic.

Perhaps more beneficial, one could argue, is that the author suggests each learner has his or her own blog – a student blog. She contends that "one of the nice features of blogs, which helps make them more interactive, is the 'comment' function by which learners can leave [space for] comments on each other's blog posts."

In this setting, it could be held that one advantage of such an activity is that it offers a good opportunity for cooperative learning. Through reading and commenting on one another's blogs, students of various levels of proficiency, and belonging to different social backgrounds can acquire from one another a respectable amount of diverse types of knowledge, which would encourage them to blog frequently and thereby improve their ability to communicate in writing.

A further advantage of the activity is that frequent comments on each other's blogs can develop in students critical thinking, which – at the same time – enhances learning, and is a good indicator of a remarkable progress in learning. Moreover, what can make a blog really fun and more interesting is that one can illustrate their pieces of writing with pictures and videos since as Hockly (ibid.) notes, these visuals can be added and embedded respectively into blog posts.

Considerations for implementing holistic approaches

Hamayan recommends considering the following issues, so that a holistic approach to teaching writing can be implemented successfully: (a) the scheduling of writing, (b) coordination between L2 teachers and content area teachers, (c) meeting the curriculum requirements, and (d) monitoring of student progress.

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The author contends that intensity and constancy are two important features of a successful writing program. Teachers need to make sure that all students have time devoted to writing every day, preferably about the same time, either in the L2 class or in the mainstream classroom, which requires coordination between L2 teachers and content teachers. If there are not enough classroom periods dedicated to writing, it must be integrated into other subjects. Hamayan offers a couple of suggestions that might help teachers who find it difficult to use a holistic approach within the confines of a non-holistic curriculum and its approaches into the teacher's holistic framework. One consists in the teacher's seeing if he or she can convert the curriculum, so that it fits into a holistic environment. "This may be a long and involved process, but it can be accomplished simply by reordering elements of the curriculum and showing that the same objectives are met, it is definitely worth the time and effort."

As concerns monitoring students' progress, the author spells out that it is important for two reasons: it allows teachers to assess the learners' writing on an on-going basis to decide on how and what to teach, and it enables administrators to measure the effectiveness of a holistic natural approach to teaching writing.

The Process Approach

This approach is often referred to as process writing, in that it is destined solely for the teaching of writing skills. As Richards and Schmidt (2002: 422) define it, it denotes "An approach which puts up the composing process writers make use of in writing (such as planning, drafting, and revising), and which seeks to improve students' writing proficiency through developing their use of effective COMPOSING PROCESSES."

Plainly in other words, the approach requires the student writer to go through a number of specific stages before he or she finalizes a piece of writing, and hands it in for evaluation by the teacher.

Stages of the writing process

According to some ELT authors, like Clouse (2005: xII) and Tribble (1996: 38), there are four main stages in the writing process that are most commonly followed. Each of these will be described below.

. *Prewriting:* Coming up with ideas by planning and outlining, making notes, collecting data, etc.

Coming up with ideas in the prewriting stage is often referred to as brainstorming. Raimes (1983: 10) defines the term as "Producing words, phrases, ideas as rapidly as possible, just as they occur to us without concern for appropriateness, order, or accuracy." Richards and Schmidt (ibid:. 58) give further details about brainstorming stating that among the activities it includes are:

Clustering: Writing a topic or concept in the middle of a page, circling it as Clouse (ibid.: 5) suggests and gathering ideas into clusters around it.

Word bank: Listing words coming to mind about a topic, then arranging them into categories.

Mapping: Preparing a graphic representation of key words to be used in a piece of writing.

. ***Drafting:*** Writing down the gathered ideas in a preliminary form called the rough draft.

. ***Revising:*** Improving the content of the rough draft, in such a way as to express the ideas in the best way possible.

. ***Editing:*** Finding and correcting the various types of mistakes.

It is worthy of note that the process of a finalized composition – as Clouse (ibid.) and Raimes (1985: 229) observe – is not linear. It is rather 'recursive' as the latter author terms it. Clouse makes it clear that while working on a particular stage, writers often return to a previous stage to add a new idea, or to express an already written idea in a better way.

Accordingly, it is recommended that writing teachers draw their students' attention to the 'recursive' facet of the process by practicing to go through its stages as required, and subsequently derive benefit from the approach as expected.

Student-Teacher writing conferences

Jarvis (2002) suggests writing teachers set up conference interviews with individual students with the aim of supporting their writing development. He reports Heald-Taylor (1994) as stating that there are two types of conferences: content conference and skill conference. In a content conference, the teacher asks the learner to add information to the content of his or her composition. During a skill conference, the teacher and the student focus on writing aspects, such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The author recommends the teacher to lay stress only on one skill at a time until that skill is learned.

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On the other hand, the teacher should not revise or edit the student's work, because in case he or she does, the writing is no longer the student's; it has become the teacher's.

The claim could be advanced that a student-teacher writing conference can be counted as a key post-writing stage in the writing process with the aim of improving learners' compositions. During such a conference, the teacher provides an oral face-to-face feedback that is very likely to be more beneficial than the comments written on papers. In the presence of the teacher, the student is prompted to keep his or her ears open to the instructor's various remarks, and may ask the teacher for further clarification, whereas a written feedback intended to be studied by the learner on his or her own with no conference on the part of the teacher may not be paid serious attention by some students, and might not even be read by some others. Thus, the outcome of a teacher-learner conference is writing a second finished product that will certainly be better than the initial finalized work.

Develop your own writing process

Taking into account what has been deliberated above, it should be noted – as Clouse affirms that there is no single correct writing process. Every writer can have a different process of his or her own. Therefore, she advises writers to try various procedures for prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing drawing their attention to the fact that some of these procedures will work well, but some will not. The writer needs to continue sampling until he or she develops effective strategies for handling all the stages of writing, and thus can discover his or her own successful process.

It follows from Clouse's above remark that in a purely academic setting, it is the teacher's duty to devise activities for the implementation of the four stages of the writing process that suit the learners' grade level, as well as their overall language proficiency.

To what extent is the Process Approach to teaching writing successful?

Jarvis links the success of the approach in developing the learners' writing ability mainly to their understanding of the process. He states, "Process writing will assist ESL students, whatever their ability level, improve their writing. Once an ESL student understands the process and trusts that the teacher will accept and approve of their invented symbols and spelling, the ability to write improves dramatically."

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It could, therefore, be held that as students generally need enough time and practice to become good writers, they also need practice in adopting the process writing, so that they can make sense of its nature, and can thereby use it in the right way. In a word, understanding the writing process and being familiar with its use can lead or contribute to desirable results.

Conclusion

This section of literature review has looked at the difficulties learners experience in writing in English as a foreign language, and has accordingly suggested ways that can help surmount those difficulties, and can subsequently assist students in becoming proficient learner writers.

Those difficulties are of three types: psychological, linguistic, and cognitive. More focus has been laid on linguistic difficulties, in that these are the most frequent.

One serious psychological obstacle to writing fluently and effectively is that many learners are not confident or are not enough so in their ability to write. Teachers should, therefore, influence students in such a way as to make them have trust in their own potential, and feel positive about improvement.

Linguistic difficulties lie in the various types of mistakes and errors learners make in their pieces of writing. Extensive reading in English has been proposed as one solution common to all the kinds of inaccuracies discussed above.

Cognitive complications with writing lie mainly – according to what has been examined earlier – in many learners' inability to generate thoughts and in many others' incapability of organizing ideas on paper. As regard such hindrances, we have noted that engaging students in doing extensive writing activities and familiarizing them with the use of process writing can really help to redress the situation.

For the part of the approaches to teaching writing, three of these have been considered: the Humanistic Approach, the Holistic Approach, and the Writing Process Approach.

As its name indicates, the Humanistic Approach underlies particular values and affective factors that are of a significant role in motivating students, and thereby attaining given learning objectives.

As for a holistic approach to teaching writing, it seeks to develop writing proficiency through the integration of the other communicative skills. One line of argument for this principle is that there is no way of teaching language learners a language skill more effective than teaching it in relation with the other skills.

Given the claim that writing is the most difficult language skill to acquire, adopting the Process Approach to teaching or learning writing can be deemed a workable answer. The approach implies that the learner has to go through specific phases before he or she can eventually produce a potentially-acceptable composition.

Above all else, practice is decidedly indispensable. In order for these approaches or any other ones to be effective, students need to be very often offered ample opportunities to practice writing in class, and encouraged to do a lot of writing activities outside school on their own for various purposes and addressed to a variety of audience. Such measures would certainly contribute to their becoming proficient users of language for written communication.

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2. Research Methodology

This chapter gives an account of the research methodology used to consolidate the various arguments and assumptions related to the subject matter of the present study. It examines the research instruments utilized by the study and the diverse objectives, as well as the procedures followed to guarantee the reliability and validity of certain such instruments. It also describes the measures taken to ensure a good design of questionnaires and a successful conduct of interviews, which would make it quite easy to collect data and analyze them. The chapter equally sheds some light on the various groups of participants and the rationales behind their choice.

2.1. Context of the study

As was noted in the Introduction, the present study was conducted in the Tunisian context on the communication difficulties secondary school students – the subjects of the study – experience in the course of their learning of English as a foreign language.

Profile of the subjects

The detailed profile of the subjects is provided in this table:

Nationality	Tunisian
Age	Ranging from 15 to 22
Native language	Arabic
Academic level	1st, 2nd , 3rd , and 4th year secondary
Cycles of schooling	. Basic education: 2 cycles: 1st cycle lasts 6 years, and 2nd cycle lasts 3 years . Secondary education: 4 years
Foreign languages studied	. French as from 3rd year basic education . English as from 6th year basic education

Table 1: Profile of the subjects of the study

2.2. Research instruments

The research instruments used by the study include questionnaires, interviews, documentary studies, and observation notes derived from a personal teaching experience, as well as tests taken by fourth secondary graders in the national final baccalaureate exam.

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Questionnaires and interviews

These are meant to support the assumed variety of reasons behind the low proficiency level in English of a great many secondary school students, and hence the serious communication difficulties they experience, and also to provide more information about such difficulties and their underlying causes.

Depending on the results of particular questionnaires and on the content of certain interviews and documentary studies, other questionnaires and interviews are conducted for the purpose of gathering suggestions for overcoming the causes of the students' communication difficulties, and for improving their communicative competence.

Characteristics of questionnaires

These are outlined below.

- The questions that are to be asked depend on the various assumptions and/or the objectives intended to be achieved.
- The wording of questions is meant to be easy to understand. Therefore, attention was paid to avoid using low-frequency vocabulary items, technical and ambiguous terms.

Above all, the majority of questionnaires administered to students were written in Arabic, so as to guarantee they understand all the questions well and answer them. Concerning some other questionnaires, the items on which the questions were asked were written in English, but the instructions and the options to be answered (e.g. through ticking or circling) were written in Arabic.

We resorted to this procedure after having noticed that many students were somewhat reluctant to respond to questionnaires written in English and showed no real interest in doing so, even though the instructions were orally explained in Arabic.

- The great majority of questionnaires, especially those administered to students were easy to answer, as they simply require them to tick or circle one option out of several. However, some questions necessitate some written explanations or suggestions on the part of the students. In order for the students not to see these as a burden which may require of them an intellectual effort, and in order to ensure they respond to all the questions, they were told that writing down certain explanations or suggestion was optional.

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- Equally, to ensure the recipients would not respond to the questionnaires at speed or carelessly, they were asked to take enough time to complete them; they were told they could answer them during their free time if they wished and return them when they had finished.
- The layout of the questionnaires has also been taken into account to ensure the recipients' interest in reading the questions carefully and answering them. So, for the sake of a good presentation of questionnaires: a) the questionnaires were typed; b) enough space was left between the questions; c) the instructions were made clearer through typing them in a different typeface.

Piloting the questionnaires

This consists in evaluating the questionnaires in terms of the wording of questions, and the way they are presented on paper, as well as regarding whether all the questions are answerable, and the time it would take the respondents to answer all the questions.

The objective of such a process is to spare the respondents any difficulties they may come across in completing questionnaires, and subsequently to make data quite easy to collect and fairly plain to analyze at a later stage.

Piloting questionnaires may not be so easy a task. Therefore, we sometimes had certain experienced EFL teachers, after they had returned a questionnaire, to raise any criticism or make any comments on it. Some other times, we posed them the following questions to make the piloting easier for them:

- Were the instructions clear?
- Did you find it easy to answer all the questions?
- Were there any unclear questions? If so, which one(s) and why?
- Were there any sensitive questions, which you did not like to answer? If so, which one(s)?
- Would you like to change any questions or add any others?
- How long did it take you to answer all the questions?
- Any comments?

Characteristics of interviews

Interviews are not as numerous as questionnaires for the simple reason that not anyone is willing to be interviewed, and not anyone is knowledgeable about particular

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topics. Therefore, we selected participants whom we knew for sure that they were knowledgeable about the subject of the interview. Apart from this, the interviewee was informed about the topic of the interview in advance, so that he or she would prepare himself or herself for it. We also intended that the interview be not lengthy in terms of the time it would take, and in terms of the number of questions that would have to be asked, so as not to take much of the interviewee's time.

Documentary studies

These include books, journal articles, and electronic articles that have dealt with the issue – as cited above – in terms of its causes and the possible ways of remedying it.

Documentary studies are, of course, the central focus in the Literature Review Chapter, and are equally relied on in the subsequent chapters to provide more consolidating proof of the diverse assumptions and issues.

The Heuristic Method

Relying on a personal teaching experience to make assumptions related to the problem, and offer suggestions that can contribute to working it out could be reckoned as a handy research instrument, which would imply the adoption of a heuristic method. Such a method as defined by *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2000) refers to a way of teaching or learning in which one learns from their own discoveries and experiences.

The Heuristic Method usually concerns the learner, but it may equally involve the teacher as a learner. Within this setting, I – as an EFL teacher – have learned a great deal about the aspects of my students' communication difficulties and the reasons behind them. This is why certain assumptions related to the problem derive from what I have personally learnt and found out in the course of my teaching career.

English Tests

We have used the English tests designed for the fourth form secondary students taken during the school year, as well as those taken in the national final baccalaureate exam. We have relied on the scores for these tests assigned to students during the academic year for the purpose of providing enough proof of the claim that the underachievement problem concerns a high percentage of learners, but not a limited number. Our use of the scores for the tests taken in the final baccalaureate exam by

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students coming from different areas aims at justifying the assumption that the problem touches roughly all Tunisian students, and not students of a particular area of the country.

2.3. Participants

Participants in the context of the study are – apart from the subjects – those groups of people to whom questionnaires were assigned and individuals with whom interviews were conducted. These include the following:

Secondary school students

These are, as noted above, the subjects of the study. They include students of the four academic levels living and studying in different areas taking into consideration the assumption that communication difficulties are a common issue among a respectable percentage of the student population in the whole country.

Two large groups of first year secondary students (one from Bousalem, Tunisia and one from Ras Al-Khaima, United Arab Emirates), each totaled 105 individuals, were administered a questionnaire on the use of Arabic – the native language of those students – in EFL classes.

The reason behind the subject of the questionnaire is that it has been noticed that Arabic is used in EFL classes in both countries, so we wanted to know those students' opinions about the extent to which the use of their mother tongue in English lessons is advantageous, and also about how much Arabic may be used in this respect.

The questionnaire was assigned only to students of the mentioned academic level. The rationale for this is that Arabic is supposed to be more often used with this level than with the other higher levels, since it is the lowest academic level, and students have not learned English as much as the other levels. Therefore, we would like to know to what extent this can be justifiable.

The motive for administering the questionnaire to Emirati students, although the principal focus in discussing the problem is on Tunisian students, is that it was noticed that Arabic is more used in Emirati English classes than it is in Tunisian English classes. Due to this fact, therefore, the aim is to show which students' EFL learning is more deeply affected by the use of the learners' mother tongue, either advantageously or detrimentally,

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so as to reach a convincing conclusion on whether the L1 can be adopted as a teaching technique in the foreign-language classroom.

Secondary school students were queried about matters associated to the theme of the study through questionnaires; only one second secondary female grader, whose level of proficiency is excellent and pronunciation is somewhat native-like, was interviewed about the factors that helped her achieve such level. Her responses are meant to consolidate the recommendations for what would subdue the students' learning difficulties and help them achieve communicative competence.

Freshmen English majors

Taking into account the principle of the communicative approach that focuses on meaning and fluency at the expense of form and accuracy**,** among the implications of which is that grammar should not be taught explicitly, about 140 freshmen majoring in English from *L'Institut Supérieur des Sciences Humaines de Jendouba* were asked about their attitude towards grammar; whether they could develop their oral and written fluency without studying grammar in class; and whether this language area should be taught as an independent subject in the preparatory and secondary stages.

The main rationale behind the choice of these participants is that they can compare the method they were taught grammar at the secondary stage and at university, and can express their preference for which way is beneficial to developing their learning of grammar, and hence their oral and written fluency

Tunisian secondary school EFL teachers

The grounds for including these among the participants are that they are claimed to be more au fait with the students' learning problems and communication difficulties and their causes than any other parties.

The results of the questionnaires these participants were administered and the contents of the interviews that were conducted with them can, therefore, support particular hypotheses related to the causes of the problem. Additionally, in a similar setting, given the fact that they are asserted to be actually familiar with the reasons behind the mentioned problem, they can offer effective suggestions for helping to puzzle it out and for contributing to assisting the learners in becoming proficient users of the language.

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Native EFL teachers

I intended to interview a number of native EFL teachers, but I did not find enough. So, I interviewed only two British teachers who were working at the Higher College of Technology, in Ras Al Khaima, United Arab Emirates. One was interviewed about the role of exposing students to various situations of language input in the success of the learning process, and the other one was interviewed about the effect of using the students' first language on learning English as a foreign language.

The reason behind interviewing those native teachers of English is to compare their points of view to those of non-native teachers, and draw a certain conclusion.

ELT inspectors

I planned to interview several ELT inspectors, but I could interview only one, who was willing to help. I equally intended to interview some other Arab ELT inspectors working in the United Arab Emirates during my work there, but I could do only one Egyptian ELT inspector about the use of Arabic in EFL classes. The purpose of interviewing ELT inspectors is that since they are potentially more experienced and more knowledgeable about foreign-language teaching and learning, they may provide more convincing arguments about the causes of the students' learning problems and communication difficulties, and may propose more efficient solutions, whereas the rationale for interviewing ELT inspectors of different nationalities is to compare various standpoints and make appropriate inferences that would support or refute particular arguments or assumptions.

Lay people

I interviewed twenty or so Tunisian lay people working in tourist areas about the factors that helped them with the ability to communicate fairly well in some foreign languages. The aim of the interview was to provide further proof that – as Parrot (1993: 192) holds – fluency in using language develops spontaneously as a result of the need for communication, and hence to underline the necessity of raising the students' awareness of their need for English currently and/or at a later time, so as to boost their interest in learning.

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2.4. Reliability and validity

Reliability refers to the extent to which a test or a data-collecting procedure provides similar or roughly similar results when used by different people or when utilized on various occasions by the same people.

To guarantee the reliability of questionnaires, they were administered to different groups of students studying at the same school and to students of other schools. They were also administered to a number of EFL teachers working at different schools. The same was done concerning interviews: several different people were interviewed on the same issue.

Validity denotes the extent to which a test or a data-collecting procedure measures what it is expected to measure.

To ensure the validity of questionnaires and interviews, the questions were well-prepared and revised before distributing a questionnaire, and before an interview took place. Questionnaires were also piloted after they had been returned.

Conclusion

This chapter has accounted for a number of research tools we have relied on to back up the different hypotheses and arguments related to the topic of the present study, and stated their various objectives. It has put some more emphasis on certain instruments, specifically questionnaires and interviews, mainly through describing their characteristic features and the procedures followed to make them reliable and valid, so as to attain particular goals. The chapter has equally reported on the different communities of participants and explained the rationales behind their selection, and also the purposes of the questionnaires administered to them and the interviews conducted with them.

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3. Exposure to English and certain pedagogical issues

As alluded to in the Introduction, it is assumed that what lurks behind EFL secondary learners' communication difficulties are two different substantial setbacks. These are the woeful lack of exposure to and practice of the language; and certain shortcomings of the teaching methodology. This chapter will look at the following issues:

- Investigating whether the students benefit from extensive exposure to English and the ensuing effects on learning the language;
- Considering the extent to which the students' communicative competence can be brought off through the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching;
- Dealing with the use of the mother tongue in EFL classes, and hence its impact on the learning process.

3.1. The importance of exposure to the language

The process of learning a language takes place within the environment in which we live. Indeed, a person can learn a language from his or her family, from the people he or she deals with, from mass media, at school, and from other sources. Therefore, it is definitely unjustifiable to contend that a foreign language can be learned only at school, especially to the extent of having a good command of it and being able to communicate in it effectively.

In the case of a high percentage of Tunisian EFL students, learning the language is restricted to the classroom. Elsewhere, students are not exposed to English whatsoever. For instance, they do not interact with native speakers, because there are hardly any such people in their places of residence, or they are claimed to be "too difficult for them to understand." Moreover, as noted in the Introduction, despite the availability of satellite English T.V and radio stations; and the Internet, the majority of students do not listen to or read any English on those mass media for particular reasons. This certainly deprives EFL learners of considerably important opportunities for being exposed to English, which

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would make the improvement of their communicative competence an objective that is actually hard to achieve. The results of the following questionnaire could reinforce the above claim.

One hundred and seven fourth form secondary students were questioned on whether they watch any English broadcasts on T.V for the purpose of improving their English. The results of the questionnaire are listed below:

- Only 5 students state they watch English broadcasts for the purpose of improving their English
- 18 students watch English films, but not usually for the purpose of bettering their English. They explain that while watching, they concentrate on the subtitles to understand what is expressed in English.
- The rest of the students (i.e., 84 students) do not watch at all, or they rarely so do; they affirm that it is too difficult for them to understand English, especially when spoken by native people.

Additionally, even in the classroom, the amount of time during which the students are exposed to English is too little to contribute to effective learning. Equally – as mentioned in the introduction of this study – most classes have only a few English periods per week. Having felt the necessity of exposing students to more English, education authorities assigned four hours per week for second secondary arts graders and five hours for third and fourth arts graders as from the school year 2007 – 2008. But, fourth year technical science and fourth year sports students have two-one-hour sessions, and all the first secondary graders and other levels specialized in all the other disciplines still have three one-hour-English sessions a week. All these amount to 3.19 periods a week on average, which is too insufficient time for learners to be exposed to and practice the language extensively. This would lead us to the inference that English is taught merely as a curricular discipline. What further justifies such an inference is that English as a school subject is allocated different coefficients – some of which are very low – according to the academic level and the area of specialization.

The number of English periods secondary students have weekly and the coefficients allocated to the language as a school subject are shown in the two tables below.

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Academic level	1st year		2nd year				
Area of specialization	Core syllabus	Sports	Arts	Sciences	Economics	Computing	Sports
Periods per week	3	3	4	3	4	3	3
Coefficient	1.5	2	3	2	2	2	2

Table 2: Number of English classes per week and coefficients (1st & 2nd year students)

Area of specialization	Experimental science		Technical science		Computer science		Maths		Economics		Sports		Arts	
Academic level	3rd	4th	3rd	4th	3rd	4th	3rd	4th	3rd	4th	3rd	4th	3rd	4th
Periods per week	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	5	5
Coefficient	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1.5	1.5	3	3

Table 3: Number of English classes per week and coefficients (3rd & 4th year students)

Source: Department of Curricula and Textbooks, Ministry of Education, Tunisia

What may have added spice to the situation is that the predominant use of French as the first foreign language in the country could be claimed to have contributed to causing English to take a back seat, and thus seems to be taught solely as a mere academic school subject although it has been reckoned to be a language of international communication. The predominance of French is manifest in a number of aspects:

- French is taught as of the third year basic education, whereas English is taught starting from the seventh year. Until the mid 1990s, English used to be taught starting from the tenth grade;
- Until the mid 1970s, all the secondary school subjects, except Islamic studies and Arabic were taught in French, and nowadays, all scientific secondary school subjects are still taught in French;
- A number of Tunisian newspapers and magazines are printed in French, but not a single one in English at present;

- Despite the arabization of the Tunisian administration, French is still used in many particular administrative documents; and in many others, both Arabic and French are used;
- Due to the fact that the foreign language that is widely used in Tunisia is French, many tourists and politicians including native speakers of English who visit the country communicate in French with local people.

These aspects of the prevalent use of French have helped Tunisian secondary school students to be potentially better at French than at English at the level of school results and communicative performance, as well. This implies that one key factor that actually assists learners in being fluent in a foreign language is exposing them to it frequently inside and outside the classroom through different ways and helping them to practice it amply in various sociolinguistic situations.

Taking into consideration the fact that the majority of classes have 3 one-hour English lessons per week, 112 EFL teachers and 223 secondary students were assigned a questionnaire on whether the mentioned number of English sessions students have weekly can offer them enough exposure to the language to the extent of helping them learn it effectively. In case they do not agree, the respondents were also asked to suggest how many English classes per week students need to have (see Appendices A 4 c and C 2).

The results of the questionnaire administered to both groups of participants are outlined in the tables below:

Answers	Students' answers	Teachers' answers
Yes	85 = 38.11%	23 = 20.53%
No	137= 61.34%	83 = 74.10%
I cannot decide	1 = 0.44%	6 = 5.35%

Table 4: Is the amount of in-class exposure to English sufficient?

Number of periods suggested	Students' answers	Teachers' answers
4	26 =18.97%	35 = 33.01%
5	62= 45.25%	56 = 52.83%
6	24= 17.51%	15 = 14.15%
More than 6	25= 18.24%	0 = 0.00%

Table 5: Number of English classes suggested

These results make it clear that the preponderance of both students and teachers do not agree with the fact that most secondary classes have only three one-hour periods of English per week. Such results, thus, prove the above claim that the students are not

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exposed to enough English input in the classroom, a fact – as alluded to earlier – deemed an instrumental cause of the low proficiency level of a quite high percentage of learners. By implication, therefore – as put forward by both groups of respondents – it is strongly recommended to assign all students, irrespective of their academic levels and areas of specialization, at least five English classes per week.

Just as the number of weekly lessons should be increased, so should the coefficient for English as a school subject, too. Both measures, together with other particular courses of action can work well against the belief and the practice that English is taught simply as a curricular school subject. One instance of those courses of action that can be actually a useful contribution to the leaning process is teaching students some subjects in English.

Overall, the optimum way out to surmount the issue is exposing students to various situations inside and outside the classroom, where they can listen to, speak, read, and write English, so as to improve their level of proficiency in the language, and bring off their communicative ability. English clubs at school and/or somewhere else where there are films and plays to watch and live concerts to attend can best serve the purpose. English broadcasts on radio and T.V. stations dedicated specifically and purposefully to EFL students according to their different academic levels can equally be of much help, especially when directed by foreign-language assistants or experienced EFL teachers, in order to assist learners in how to greatly and properly benefit from these situations.

Stressing the considerable importance of exposing learners to English listening situations in developing their listening ability, Rost (1991: 8) recommends EFL teachers to introduce their classes to other speakers of English, personally or through use of video and audio tapes: "Expose them to different types of people and situation."

In the same context of underlining the necessity of exposing non-native learners to English situations outside school, I interviewed British teachers working at a higher college in the United Arab Emirates. One of these was Mrs. Sue Griffiths. She held that exposing EFL students to listening situations, especially to those where they take an active part as listeners and speakers, is really vital to their learning a foreign language. She also affirmed that her students were equally aware of such a fact. She added that whenever she talked to them complaining about their low standard in English, they told her they wanted

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to go to England, because only there could they be able to hear English all the time and get "immersed in it", which would help them to "learn it quickly."

I also interviewed a second secondary grader, whose level of proficiency is excellent and accent is to some extent native-like American, about the factors that have helped her acquire such a level. Bearing in mind the importance of affect to language learning, I first asked her whether English was her favorite subject, or one of her favorite subjects. She answered, "Yes, I adore English." As to the other factors, she said she has been keen on watching American movies since she was seven; she has watched more than one hundred movies. She added that listening to English songs and reading books have also helped her.

I asked her what pieces of advice she would give her classmates to improve their level in English. She said there are many ways that can help them: for instance, if they are not keen on reading English books or if they cannot do so, they can learn lyrics of songs, watch movies, and write diaries.

On the basis of what has been considered so far, it can be affirmed that there is definitely a conspicuous difference between the proficiency level of students who profit from exposure to English situations outside school and that of those who do not. The interviewed student referred to above is a case in point; there is actually no comparison between her level and her classmates'. Another example proof is that students living in Tunis and its suburbs and tourist places, such as Hammamet and Sousse are potentially better at English than those living in other areas. Indeed, those living in Tunis and its suburbs, for instance, benefit from many factors which help them to be proficient in English:

- The availability of many libraries and bookshops from which they can borrow and buy English books;
- The possibility of dealing with a lot of English-speaking tourists and also expatriates living there;
- The possibility of going to the British Council Library and the American Cultural Centre, where they can read English books, magazines and newspapers; and equally listen to English material on audio and video tapes.

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Conclusion

In brief, in the light of what has been examined above, it could be maintained that learning a foreign language effectively cannot be fulfilled by confining learning solely to the classroom, but it can rather be the result of what is taught in class and what is learned from other situations outside school, where the students are exposed to the language and encouraged and helped to play an active role as listeners, speakers, learner readers, and learner writers.

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3.2. Communicative Language Teaching and its implementation in EFL classes

One principal principle pertaining to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is its extreme focus on meaning and fluency at the expense of form and accuracy. From such a principle, emanate two other principles underlying the attitude of the approach towards error correction and its giving priority to oral proficiency over written communication.

These CLT principles along with certain issues will be examined below with the aim of demonstrating their impacts on the teaching-learning process, and subsequently drawing the conclusion whether the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching in EFL classes has been at the level of the expected results.

For starters, relying on Richards and Rodgers (1986), we shall provide an account of the background and the characteristic features of the approach with the object of making it easy for the reader to refer to them if need be as regards the aforementioned examination.

3.2.1. Origins of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching originated from the changes in the American and British teaching traditions by the end of the sixties after Audiolingualism in the USA and the Situational Language Teaching in Britain had been rejected for specific reasons.

Audiolingualism declined for two main reasons: as Richards and Rodgers (1986: 59) put it, the theoretical bases of the Audio-lingual Method were denounced as being unsound at the level of language theory and learning theory. More important was the failure of this teaching method to carry out the desired practical results. In fact, due to the nature of skills acquired through Audiolingualism, the learners were often unable to communicate effectively in real situations outside the classroom, and many found the audio-lingual learning activities monotonous and inadequate.

The rejection of the Situational Language Teaching was mainly prompted by the objective of what was called at that time the Council of Europe to develop cultural and educational cooperation between European countries. Therefore, as education was one of the council's most important activities, a group of experts – by the early seventies – made

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use of studies dealing with the needs of European language learners. One of these studies was particularly an introductory one by the British linguist D. A. Wilkins. In this study, Richards and Rodgers state that Wilkins suggested "a functional or communicative definition of language that could serve as a basis for developing communicative syllabuses for language teaching" (1986: 65). The authors (ibid.) maintain that

> Wilkins's contribution was an analysis of the communicative meanings that a language learner needs to understand and express. Rather than describe the core of language through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary, Wilkins attempted to demonstrate the systems of meanings that lay behind the communicative uses of language. He described two types of meanings: notional categories (concepts such as time, sequence, quantity, location, frequency) and categories of communicative function (requests, denials, offers, complaints.)

All these factors brought the Communicative Language Teaching into worldwide prominence. In the view of American and British proponents, this approach – also sometimes called *the Notional-functional Approach* or *the Functional Approach* – "aims to (a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication" (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 66).

From this view spring the CLT different characteristic features. These are described below.

3.2.2. The characteristic features of CLT

Theory of language

The Communicative Language Teaching originates from a theory of language which reckons language as a system for the expression of meaning, and advances the claim that its primary function is for interaction and communication since its structure reflects its functional and communicative uses.

Applying this theory to foreign language learning in the scope of Communicative Language Teaching implies that such learning lies in acquiring linguistic competence to

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carry out various types of functions. Instances of the functional uses of language as cited by Halliday (1975), quoted in Richards and Rodgers (1986: 70 –71) are:

a. The interactional function: using language to create interaction with others;
b. The personal function: using language to express personal feelings and meanings;
c. The imaginative function: using language to create a world of imagination;
d. The representational function: using language to communicate information.

Theory of learning

This theory focuses on practice as a means to acquire communicative skills. There are three principal elements, which support the learning process. One of these is what might be termed the communicative principle. It consists in activities involving real communication. A second element is the task principle. It includes activities in which language is used to carry out meaningful tasks. A third element is the meaningfulness principle. It is manifested in using language, which is meaningful to the learner.

Richards and Rodgers (1986: 72) state, "Learning activities are consequently selected according to how well they engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use (rather than merely mechanical practice of language patterns)."

Objectives

Language teaching will reflect the specific needs of the learner. Such needs may be available in any of the four language skills, each to be considered from a communicative standpoint. "Curriculum or instructional objectives for a particular course would reflect specific aspects of communicative competence according to the learner's proficiency level and communicative needs" (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 73).

Syllabus

The syllabus appropriate to the Communicative Language Teaching is one which will include some or all of the following: functions, notions, themes, tasks, and structures. Ordering will be taken into account according to the learners' needs. It is obvious, therefore, that the syllabus which is compatible with CLT is a functional-notional one.

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Arguing for the communicative approach and the above-mentioned type of syllabus that can suit it, it could be claimed that, for learners to communicate effectively, they should be taught the notions and language functions of everyday life and the appropriate situations in which they should be used. Simply put, learning language functions and notions implies how to communicate comfortably and appropriately.

Nunan (1988: 36) quoting Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983: 17), who are in favor of adopting the functional-notional syllabus, states that both authors listed a number of benefits of this type of syllabus including the fact that:

a. It provides for the teaching of everyday real-world language;
b. It recognizes that the speaker must have a real purpose for speaking, and something to talk about;
c. Communication will be intrinsically motivating, because it expresses basic communication functions.

Types of activities

The types of activities applicable to a communicative approach to language teaching ought to be such ones which engage the learners in communication through the use of communicative processes as information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction, so as to help the learners carry out the communicative objectives. Examples of such activities are cited in what follows:

Richards and Rodgers (1986: 76) quote Littlewood (1981) who, they state, "Distinguishes between 'functional communication activities' and 'social interaction activities' as major activity types in Communicative Language Teaching. Functional communication activities include such tasks as learners comparing sets of pictures and noting similarities and differences; working out a likely sequence of events in a set of pictures; discovering missing features in a map or picture, etc. Social interaction activities include conversation and discussion sessions, dialogue and role plays, simulations, skits, improvisation, and debates."

Learner roles

Communicative competence, the goal of language teaching and the types of learning activities required to carry out such a goal necessitate a really active learner as negotiator

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and interactor. Breen and Candlin (1980: 110), cited in Richards and Rodgers (1986: 77) describe the learner's role within CLT:

> The role of learner as negotiator – between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning – emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way.

According to this approach, then, the learner is no longer a passive recipient, but he or she should be a dynamic agent learning as much as participating in the learning process.

Teacher roles

The learner's roles as described above determine those of the teacher, which makes the learning process a common task between both parties. Freire (1988: 67), who voices disapproval of the traditional role of the teacher, refers to this fact arguing, "The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach." Therefore, the principal role assumed for the teacher is a facilitator of the communication process. Larsen-Freeman (1986: 131) reports Littlewood (1981) as stating:

> As such, he has many roles to fulfil. He is a manager of classroom activities. In this role, one of his major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. During the activities, he acts as an advisor, answering students' questions and monitoring their performance. At other times, he might be a 'co-communicator' – engaging in the communicative activity along with the students.

The role of instructional materials

The fact that CLT aims at an effective use of language in real communicative situations requires instructional materials, some of which are really authentic, whose essential function is to promote linguistic communication. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986: 79 – 80), there are three types of such materials: text-based, task-based, and realia. Text-based materials are usually textbooks whose contents are meant to be in keeping with the goal of the communicative approach. Task-based materials "are in the form of one-of-a-kind: exercise handbooks, cue cards, activity cards, pair-communicative

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practice materials, and student-interaction practice booklets." Realia are authentic materials, such as pictures, maps, magazines, graphs, charts, models of real objects, etc. All these materials can provide a variety of communicative activities, which can help achieve the desired goal.

3.2.3. A critical glance at CLT

A critical glance at Communicative Language Teaching as regards the extent to which the students' communicative competence can be achieved through adopting this approach in EFL classes centers upon some of its principles and the requirements of implementing it successfully.

The CLT focus on meaning and fluency

As noted above, one major CLT principle is that meaning is given paramount importance at the expense of form. This principle derives from the language theory from which CLT originates, and which views language as a system for the expression of meaning.

Laying much emphasis on the primacy of meaning to the detriment of form is subject to criticism, because meaning and form are interdependent in constituting a language, which cannot be acquired or learned successfully unless it is focused on as a completely integrated system. Therefore, as far as foreign-language learning is concerned, focusing on meaning and fluency to the detriment of form and accuracy, or vice versa is very likely to result in a serious deficiency related to such learning or to its failure. Such an assertion is not only a purely personal conviction, but it is also derived from the dissatisfaction many EFL teachers and some ELT inspectors have felt about CLT, and equally from a great many learners' complaints that they have not been taught explicit grammar.

One hundred and twelve EFL teachers were given a questionnaire on whether grammar ought to be taught explicitly to secondary students as an independent subject as is the case at university, as a measure that can help them master it well, which will assist them with communicative competence. Eighty-two respondents (73.21%) gave an affirmative answer.

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Similarly, in respect of the discontent felt about CLT due to its focus on meaning at the expense of form, Nunan (1989: 13) maintains that due to the negative sides of C.L.T. focus at the expense of language forms, many linguists have recently taken into consideration the importance of grammar as

> an essential resource in using language communicatively…[they] maintained that it was not necessary to teach grammar, that the ability to use a language (knowing-how) would develop automatically if the learner were required to focus on meaning in the process of using the language to communicate. In recent years, this view has come under serious challenge, and it now seems to be widely accepted that there is value in classroom tasks which require learners to focus on form.

In this quotation, Nunan implicitly refers to the 'strong' version and the 'weak' version of CLT. In fact, due to the drawbacks resulting from its emphasis on meaning, thus giving grammar a secondary position, there has been a shift towards a real focus on grammar as an indispensable ground for using language communicatively.

Without fail, without the use of grammar, meaning cannot be conveyed, or it cannot be communicated clearly. Putting it in different terms, without grammar, incomprehension, misunderstanding, or ambiguity are very likely to occur in many different situations. Let us take the following examples:

. **Afternoon they to be will London flying the in.*

. *Flying planes can be dangerous*.

Although we can guess the meaning of the first example, it is totally meaningless according to the way the words are arranged. Only when the words are put in the correct order can they make up a meaningful sentence. The second sentence is ambiguous, because *flying planes* may mean planes that fly, or someone who makes planes fly. To make one of both meanings clear, we can use the full infinitive *to fly* instead of *flying*: *To fly planes can be dangerous.*

Leech, Deuchar, and Hoogenraad (1982: 3), in turn, underscore the key role of grammar in language as communication asserting that it is

> the mechanism according to which language works when it is used to communicate with other people. We cannot see this mechanism concretely, because it is represented rather abstractly in the human mind, but we know it is there, because it works. One way of

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> describing this mechanism is as a set of rules, which allow us to put words together in certain ways, but which do not allow others. At some level, speakers of a language must know these rules; otherwise they would not be able to put words together in a meaningful way.

The essence of this citation is that language cannot accomplish its principal function of communication without grammar, because of its syntactic role in conveying messages. This is why Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad (1982: 4) reckon it to be the most important constituent of language asserting, "The term PHONOLOGY is often used to mean the system of sounds in a language, and SEMANTICS, the system of meaning; and GRAMMAR is the central component of language, which relates phonology and semantics, or sound and meaning."

How does CLT view grammar teaching?

Thompson (1996:10) states, "There have been a number of applied linguists who have argued strongly and in theoretically persuasive terms that explicit grammar teaching should be avoided." Krashen (1988), quoted in Thompson (ibid), argues that one reason for such a view is that teaching grammar is unnecessary because that language area can be acquired unconsciously through exposure to the language.

This view is a subject of argument. Krashen seems to go to extremes with it. Acquisition of grammar as viewed by Krashen cannot really take place unless it is refined and consolidated by explicit teaching. Teaching grammar explicitly spares learners confusion and wrong usage. In other words, it helps them with communicating meaning appropriately. A simple example Nunan (1998: 103) uses in this context concerns how the passive and the active voice should be taught. Nunan argues that apart from teaching students how to change active sentences into the passive and vice versa, they should be given chances to investigate when it is communicatively appropriate to use the active or the passive. He holds that learners ought to be shown that passives are used to carry out certain communicative ends; to enable the speaker or writer to lay the communicative emphasis on the action rather than on the doer of the action, or to avoid mentioning the agent for one reason or another. Therefore, one could claim that without being taught these grammatical structures in depth, the learner can never know the different

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communicative purposes they are used for. Considering them as alternative grammatical forms, he or she may even have a false view about them, as Nunan (ibid.) puts it stating:

> If the communicative value of alternative grammatical forms is not made clear to learners, they come away from the classroom with the impression that the alternative forms exist merely to make things difficult for them. We need an approach through which they learn how to form structures correctly, and also how to use them to communicate meaning.

Opposing the CLT negative attitude towards grammar, it could be affirmed that form and meaning play a complementary role in carrying out effective communication. Therefore, during the process of foreign-language learning, we should not concentrate on one at the expense of the other, either explicitly or implicitly; both of them ought to be attached equal weight.

The effect of the CLT view against explicit grammar teaching

The CLT emphasis on meaning and fluency to the detriment of form and accuracy has caused many non-native learners of English to be very weak at grammar, and hence unable to express themselves appropriately in many different communicative situations because of wrong use of syntax; and also incapable in other situations of conveying meanings in different ways, by reason of their ignorance of sentential transformations. Many other learners can hardly express themselves; they rather hesitate and stammer a lot trying to do so using single words or phrases instead of full sentences.

Many students' low standard in grammar has caused them some sort of psychological obstacle to learning. In fact, being aware of their weakness at this language aspect, they have become reluctant to speak English lest they make errors. They also seem to have lost so much self-confidence that they avoid participating in learning activities for fear of not performing well although they are constantly encouraged to take part in lessons and express themselves the way they like.

Such a psychological obstacle reveals some kind of sensitivity towards grammatical errors, which implies the importance of accuracy in using language communicatively. Indeed, a grammatical error made by any person, whatever their level of proficiency in any language may be, is usually judged as being more serious than other types of errors.

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For example, relying on a personal teaching experience, while correcting exam papers, my colleagues and I usually penalize grammatical errors more than we do the other error types. We also do the same when we test speaking: the mark allotted to the student often depends on how accurate his or her English is.

When I was working as an EFL seconded teacher at *L'Institut Supérieur des Sciences Humaines de Jendouba*, I asked about thirty freshmen English majors to jot down the reasons behind many learners' inability to communicate in English effectively. One of the reasons a number of the questioned students mentioned was the fact that they did not study grammar explicitly at secondary school. One of the students wondered why grammar should not be deeply taught as an independent subject in the preparatory and secondary stages since it is taught as such at university. This point of view led me to administer to a larger group of 143 freshmen English majors the same questionnaire that had been administered to EFL teachers on whether grammar should be taught explicitly to secondary students as an independent subject. 129 (90.20%) responded favorably.

Oral proficiency is prioritized over written communication

Communicative Language Teaching has been one of the language teaching approaches that give top priority to oral proficiency. The types of activities the approach involves could affirm this assertion. Such activities, as described by Littlewood (1981), cited in Richards and Rodgers (1986: 76) are divided into two categories: "functional communication activities" and "social interaction activities". In the twelve tasks involved in these two categories, which Littlewood mentions as examples, there is no real single writing task. Such tasks seem to be meant to train the learner for so much oral proficiency rather than written communication that it might be thought that the learner's future needs for language use are simply limited to using it orally. Thompson (1996: 12) refers to this matter stating, "For many learners, the main uses that they are likely to make of language are oral: getting around in the foreign country if they visit it, talking to visitors from that country, etc. […]. Therefore, the emphasis is likely to be on speaking and listening skills."

Nevertheless, no one can normally deny that language is used for both oral and written communication. Thompson (ibid.) rectifies the view in the previous quotation clarifying, "It is […] important to recognize that communication does not only take place through speech, and that it is not only the speaker (or writer) who is communicating.

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Communication through language happens in both the written and spoken medium, and involves at least two people." For this reason, apart from listing the above referred to tasks, which are all related to oral practice, one should have included a list of tasks associated with written communication. Examples of such tasks may be ones about writing various types of letters to different people, as well as writing the relevant replies to these letters.

Another example proving the CLT emphasis on oral production to the detriment of written production is a lesson described and commented on by Larsen-Freeman (1986: 128 – 130). The lesson contains sixteen steps, none of which involves a writing activity. These are listed below.

1. The teacher distributes a handout that has a copy of a sports column from a recent newspaper.
2. The teacher tells the students to underline the reporter's predictions and to say which ones they think the reporter feels most certain of and which he feels least certain of.
3. The teacher gives the students the directions for the activity in the target language.
4. The students try to state the reporter's predictions in different words.
5. The students unscramble the sentences of the newspaper article.
6. The students play a language game.
7. The students are asked how they feel about the predictions.
8. A student makes an error. The teacher and other students ignore it.
9. The teacher gives each group of students a strip story and a task to perform.
10. The students work with a partner to predict what the next picture in the strip story will look like.
11. The students are to do a role-play. They are to imagine that they are all employees of the same company.
12. The teacher reminds the students that one of them is playing the role of the boss, and that they should remember this when speaking to her.
13. The teacher moves from group to group offering advice and answering questions.
14. The students suggest alternative forms they would use to state a prediction to a colleague.
15. After the role-play is finished, the students elicit relevant vocabulary.

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16. For their homework, the students are to listen to a debate on the radio or watch it on television.

A further example that could equally justify the above claim is that in the Tunisian baccalaureate English examination, a few years ago, the free writing task was allotted almost one sixth of the total mark of the test; it was allotted seven marks out of forty, whereas reading comprehension was allotted fourteen, language (i.e., grammar and vocabulary) was allotted sixteen, and an error correction exercise was allotted three marks.

No wonder, concentrating much on listening and speaking skills at the expense of writing skills can, in the best of cases, help the learner to be successful in using the language orally, but he or she is very likely to encounter serious difficulties in using it in writing. As an EFL teacher, I have noticed that many students are so weak in writing that they do not do the production-writing task at all in their exam papers. For instance, in the end-of-term test (December, 2005), 34 out of 139 (almost 25%) first form secondary students of mine did not do the free writing task. In 2009, I corrected 71 English papers at the baccalaureate resists. Thirteen candidates (18.30%) did not do the free writing task at all; and twenty (28.16%) got no mark for the same task. There are, of course, a number of reasons for this low level in writing; one is the CLT focus on oral skills to the detriment of writing skills.

Addressing the problem is quite simple; it merely consists in overcoming the cause. Plainly put, as language is used for oral and written communication, and in order to succeed in helping the learners to be proficient users of a foreign language in both its spoken and written forms, we should emphasize on all the language skills in the process of foreign-language teaching.

The CLT treatment of learners' errors

Another CLT principle against which a major criticism can be raised is the attitude of the communicative approach towards the learners' errors. Correction of errors in CLT may be totally neglected or uncommon. A line of argument for such a principle is that "errors are seen as a natural outcome of the development of communicative skills" (Larsen-Freeman 1986: 129). A further reason for this attitude is that error correction should be avoided lest it will interrupt the natural flow of the learners' interaction, and become the subject of activity. Above all, the principal justification for tolerating the

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learners' errors is, of course, derived from the principle of giving high priority to meaning and fluency over form and accuracy.

The problem is compounded by ignoring the students' errors totally or tolerating them frequently. This affects the learners' level of proficiency in the L2 very negatively, especially if the students notice that the teacher does not pay attention to their errors during oral interactions, and does not penalize their linguistic inaccuracies in all pieces of written work. As such, the teacher's reaction to the learners' errors makes the students reluctant to seek improving their linguistic knowledge, which would very likely harm their standard in the target language. The following anecdote is a simple example illustrating the above-cited learners' attitude towards accuracy resulting from the CLT principle of error tolerance.

After I told a relative of mine about the CLT focus on meaning and fluency at the expense of form and accuracy, she began to show no care about linguistic accuracy when she talks to me in English. I asked her to try to be as accurate as possible, but she said earnestly, "Since you understand what I mean, why should I bother myself being linguistically accurate?!"

Therefore, due to concentrating much on meaning and fluency, and avoiding error correction, the learner – after the language course is over – might end up with a limited erroneous linguistic repertoire which cannot guarantee him or her communicative ability for the reasons mentioned so far, nor can it be actually refined through using language outside the classroom, because the teacher will always remain a model for the learner to follow.

Another line of argument against the CLT giving precedence to fluency is that fluency can work only during specific social interactional situations, such as between a doctor and a patient, a hotel receptionist and a tourist, a company manager interviewing a job applicant, a salesman and a customer, etc.; but when it comes to situations where oral or written English must be used correctly, fluency must – of course – be combined with accuracy. Examples of such situations may be a speech delivered by a political personality, a news bulletin broadcast on the radio or TV, a newspaper article, etc.

Is it not annoying that foreign-language learning theorists and EFL teachers listen to a pidginized interaction replete with linguistic inaccuracies, or read a student's

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composition including verbless sentences, incomplete utterances, "distorted" verb forms, and with hardly any correct use of mechanics; and yet with hardly any marks with the teacher's red pen; and despite all these deficiencies allotted a pass mark?! All this occurs for the sake of the CLT slogan "meaning and fluency rather than form and accuracy". Below is an interaction of roughly the same features as described above.

Learner: China, yes.
Teacher: Uh huh, in Greece. What about in Greece. Many bicycles?
L: Mmm. Bicycles, motor.
T: Uh huh, in Australia, er, bicycle, er, we wear a helmet.
LL: Helmet. Yes, yes.
T: Special (gestures) helmet.
LL: Ohh. Kong.
L: Malaysia, same, same.
T: Same in Malaysia?
LL: Yes, yes.
L: Moto, moto.
T: In China a little or a lot?
L: Motor. Some motor bicycle.
T: Motor bike.
L: Yes, yes. Bicycle, no. China, bicycle no. motor, yes.
T: Ah huh.
L: Cap, cap.
L: Cap.
L: Hat on, hat, hat.
T: Hat.
LL: Hat, hat.
T: Ah, in Australia, motor bike, yes. Yes, yes, yes.
Bicycle, yes, good (oh). Children, special helmet (helmet).
Helmet, mmm. Special helmet.

(Nunan 1989: 144)

As it may be conspicuous in the above extract, there is total focus on meaning solely. Where fluency is concerned, it could be maintained that even such a language aspect is not available in such an interaction, because the learners seem to be struggling for expressing meanings. This is clear in their verbless "pidginized interlanguage", to use the terms of Seedhouse (1997), and their repetition of many words. The teacher does not rectify any of the learners' utterances directly or indirectly either in terms of grammar or at the level of vocabulary. He or she rather intentionally "[downgrades] his or her own language to a

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minimal, pidginized interlanguage," Seedhouse states, to make it compatible with the learners'. He refers to the outcome of such an interaction, which is maintained by the teacher's contributions arguing, "The fact that the teacher accepts every interlanguage form produced by the learner without correction or upgrading could, of course, result in fossilized errors. One has to question how students could ever reach any level of linguistic proficiency in a classroom which contained only such an interaction" (pp. 337– 338). Such interactions, then, in which there is extreme emphasis on meaning, total absence of error correction, and linguistic downgrading can never help learners develop their learning skills, but rather cause them to have a stagnant low level of linguistic knowledge, and hence a very weak communicative competence.

The question at issue, in this respect, is: how can the teacher contribute to effective learning? This can be decidedly achieved through laying emphasis on both fluency and accuracy, as Seedhouse suggests and terms the *dual focus*, and using error correction as a mechanism that assists in covering both aspects in successive learning activities or simultaneously during the same activity. So, how should error correction be exploited, so as to carry out such a role and contribute to the success of the learning activities?

In this context, Edge (1989: 20) holds that when we resort to error correction in our classes, "We have to be sure that we are using [it] positively to support learning." Therefore, in order to make error correction really beneficial, the teacher should mainly take into account when to correct and how to correct, and perhaps of less importance how much to correct. In other words, one wonders whether it is better to correct the learners' errors immediately or at a later stage; whether it is advisable to allow self-correction, peer correction, teacher correction, or have recourse to a more beneficial way; and whether one ought to correct all the students' errors or only specific types, or some of them.

An instance of an error correction technique, which I sometimes use in my classes, and which has proven to be advantageous, could answer the above questions. This consists in assigning a few students to jot down the errors their colleagues make during a meaning-focused activity. Once this is over, the lesson is to be proceeded with a form-focused activity devoted to correcting the errors made during the previous one. A consolidating post-correction activity may be giving the students a passage including the common errors to correct.

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As for how much should be corrected, it depends on how serious the errors are, how often they are made, and how much time correction should take according to the time allotted to each activity of the lesson. Usually, errors of high level of gravity, such as those which actually impede comprehension, and consequently obstruct communication, should be given priority, paid more attention, and if possible, allotted more time to deal with as they can be considered the most serious ones.

The same error-correction technique is equally suggested by Brumfit and Johnson (1979: 183): "While learners carry out a meaning-focused activity, the teacher notes down errors or deficiencies and uses them as subsequent input for a form-focused activity."

An error correction activity as described above would have the following advantages:

- Form and accuracy are covered in the same lesson along with meaning and fluency;
- The flow of the meaning-focused activity is not interrupted, thus not making error correction the subject of such an activity;
- The learners are spared possible intimidation through immediate error correction during the meaning-focused activity, which would allow them to express themselves freely;
- The error correction activity is competitive, and hence motivating, because every learner tries his or her best to correct errors correctly. If he or she so does, he or she may be praised by the teacher, which would make him or her have more confidence in his or her abilities;
- The learners' attention is focused on accuracy, which would help them avoid the corrected errors and probably other errors in the future.

The *dual focus*

As referred to above, a *dual focus* – as termed by Seedhouse – is emphasizing on accuracy and fluency, on form and meaning simultaneously as manifest in the extract below.

> **L1:** And what did you do last weekend?
> **L2:** On Saturday, I went on my own to Canterbury, so I took a bus and I met L6 - he took the same bus to Canterbury. And in Canterbury, I visited the Cathedral and all the streets near the Cathedral, and I tried to find a pub where you don't see - where you don't see many tourists. And I find one.
> **T:** Found.

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L2: I found one where I spoke with two English women, and we spoke about life in Canterbury or things and after I came back.
T: Afterwards.
L2: Afterwards I came back by bus, too. And on Sunday what did you do?
L1: Oh, er, I stayed in home.
T: At home.
L1: On Sunday, I stayed at home and watched the Wimbledon Final. What did you do on Sunday?
L2: On morning.
T: In the morning.
L2: In the morning, I took the bus…

(Mathers 1990: 109)

In this extract, a dual focus is quite noticeable. The learners are able to express meanings easily. Such easiness reflects their fluency in communicating their personal experiences; this is why the teacher's contribution is limited only to correcting all the linguistic forms, which implies the focus on form and accuracy.

The teacher's correction performed as such in the above extract has positive characteristics:

. It does not interrupt the flow of the interaction;

. It has no negative effect on the learners. For instance, it does not intimidate them; they rather use it in their following utterances;

. It makes the focus on form and accuracy explicit;

. Perhaps most important, and on the basis of the previous characteristics, it has helped to carry out the dual focus.

Relying on Seedhouse's comment on how the teacher, in the above extract, has performed error correction, we examine below how immediate correction can be carried out.

Seedhouse refers to an error correction technique which Iles (1995) calls *camouflaging* of repair. In the paraphrased terms of Seedhouse (ibid.: 342 – 343), two of the features of such a technique, as its name indicates, are:

. The teacher should produce the corrected forms without any explicit indication that an error has been made;
. The teacher should not shout or whisper the corrected forms, so as not to draw the learners' attention that a deficiency has occurred. In other words, he or she ought to make correction penetrate unfelt into

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> the learners' utterances, so that it does not become conspicuous and does not turn into the subject of the activity, thus keeping the natural flow of the interaction intact.

Referring to the different benefits of error correction, it could be held that it should be a permanent part of every lesson, because neglecting it totally or even occasionally is likely to result in the learners' paying no attention to their errors, which would negatively affect their level of proficiency in the target language. Arguing as such automatically underlines the role of error correction – performed in the ways described above – in improving the learners' linguistic knowledge, and hence contributing to developing their oral and written communicative ability. Therefore, taking into account the advantages of error correction and, of course the disadvantages of not practicing it in class, one could advance the claim that it is a deficiency to view that error correction may be absent or infrequent. Such a principle derives from a major inadequacy: it is the CLT focus on meaning and fluency at the expense of form and accuracy. Such an inadequacy and specific constraints could be claimed to prevent the communicative approach being at the level of the desired results. So, let us see what these constraints are.

3.2.4. Constraints

Apart from the CLT drawbacks that have been considered so far, there are certain constraints, which are likely to hamper the successful implementation of the approach in EFL classes: the low level of proficiency of a high percentage of learners in the target language, the scarcity or unavailability of instructional materials, and large classes.

The students' low level of proficiency

The fact that the teacher is no longer the sole source of knowledge, and that the learning activities compatible with CLT should be learner-centered implying – as indicated above – that the learner is no longer a mere passive recipient, but rather a really active agent contributing to the success of the learning process, requires students whose language proficiency level is good or at least acceptable, so that the various learning objectives can be achieved. In many classes, however, the students having a good command of English represent a very small percentage. For instance, in four classes

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including 139 first year secondary students of mine, only 10 of them got pass marks in English during the first term of the academic year 2005-2006, which equals 7.19%, and the majority of low marks ranged from 0.25 to 5 out of twenty.

The marks a number of students got for English in the 2009 baccalaureate exam may be deemed another proof of the high percentage of low-achievers among secondary EFL learners. We collected the marks of 866 students from Abul Quacim Shebbi Secondary School, Ghardimaou and Enfidha Secondary School, which are located in two different areas of the country. The marks are out of 20. These are presented in the table below categorized into six ratings.

Ratings & marks	Very poor: 0 – 4.75	Poor: 5 – 7.75	Below average: 8 – 9.75	Average: 10 – 12.75	Good: 13 – 15.75	Excellent: 16 – 20
Number of students	513	174	69	65	35	10
Percentage	59.23%	20.09%	07.96%	07.50%	04.04%	01.15%

Table 6: Samples of students' marks for the 2009 baccalaureate English exam

Relying on a personal teaching experience and on the statistics shown above, it could be asserted – as mentioned previously – that, in many schools, the number of students of a good or a satisfactory level of proficiency in one class is less than the number of group-work activity groups, which would make it very difficult, if not impossible, for learning activities to be learner-centered, and hence communicative. This situation leaves the teacher on the horns of a dilemma: if he or she designs activities compatible with the class academic standard, only the brilliant students can benefit from these activities; the weak ones become outpaced, and if he or she designs learning activities which suit the low learners' standard, the top ones feel that they are wasting time, and are not making any learning progress.

Scarcity of instructional materials

Another difficulty, which can seriously obstruct the use of the communicative approach, is the severe shortage of some suitable teaching materials and the unavailability of other specific ones, which are necessary for carrying out communicative activities. For instance, in many schools, there are only a few radio-cassette recorders, which are shared

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by all the English teaching staff. If two or more teachers happen to have a listening lesson at the same time, one of them will be obliged to try to make do with other undesirable means, such as using his or her own voice, or turning the listening material into a reading text, which ELT inspectors totally disapprove of.

In December 2010, fifty-seven EFL teachers working in different schools in Ghardimaou, Jendouba, and Tunis and its suburbs were asked in whether there were enough instructional materials in their schools. Forty-nine teachers (85.96%) answered in the negative, but only eight (14.04%) answered in the affirmative.

The same teachers were also asked how much they think that the lack of teaching materials affect their teaching performance while adopting CLT. The results are as outlined below.

Answers	**Number of answers and percentage**
Not at all	0 = 0%
Little	4 = 7.01%
Much	31 = 54.38%
Very much	22 = 38.59%

Table 7: Effect of lack of teaching materials

The results of the first questionnaire are a plain proof of the severe lack of teaching aids in a big number of schools, and the results of the second one indicate that the lack of instructional materials is a serious hindrance to the successful implementation of CLT in the foreign-language classroom.

On his or her own expenses, the teacher can, of course, help with providing particular authentic materials, such as magazines, newspapers, charts, pictures, models of real objects, realia, etc., but when it comes to equipment like T.V sets, video-cassette recorders, overhead projectors, it would be a matter beyond his or her material ability. However, some such materials, such as authentic advertisements or newspaper or magazine extracts cannot be used with all the students, especially those of first year secondary classes, because of linguistic difficulty. Swan (1985b: 85) refers to this problem stating that learners faced with authentic material that is not carefully selected may find it so difficult that they get bogged down in a morass of unfamiliar vocabulary. Swan equally quotes Eddie Williams (1983) who seems to warn against the use of

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authentic texts with too difficult a level of language, because they often have an effect opposite to that intended, as they oblige the reader to focus on the code.

The apparently main if not the only reason behind the scarcity of instructional materials in general, and the unavailability of specific ones, is material because providing such materials is certainly costly. There are, of course, other possible reasons: some administrators think that the teacher can do his or her lessons with the simple teaching aids available, or even with the traditional blackboard and chalk only, and some teachers, on the other hand, believe that CLT is demanding and tiring. The real reason, however, is a question of awareness. Should administrators and some teachers know about the constant innovations in the field of teaching methodologies, they might get rid of the traditional views they have about the teaching-learning process. Those parties should know that if we often engage our students in the same activities using the same teaching materials, lessons become boring. For this reason, they should be mindful of the value of the variety of activities carried out by various types of teaching equipment, so that we can guarantee the learners' interest, and consequently achieve success. They ought equally to be made aware that making use of a multiplicity of instructional materials in a variety of realistic communicative situations can help foster creative ability in the learner.

Richards and Rodgers (1986: 79) point to the crucial role of instructional materials stating:

> A wide variety of materials have been used to support communicative approaches to language teaching. Unlike some contemporary methodologies, such as Community Language Learning, practitioners of Communicative Language Teaching view materials as a way of influencing the quality of classroom interaction and language use. Materials thus have the primary role of promoting communicative language use.

Therefore, if instructional materials have the primary role of enhancing the use of language communicatively, it is axiomatic that many communicative tasks can never be carried out without the help of the necessary teaching aids.

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Large classes

Teaching large classes is always a serious challenge for teachers, especially for those who have not been previously trained to adapt to the situation, because crowded classrooms can give rise to a number of problems, some of which are usually too difficult for teachers to solve on their own.

As far as CLT is concerned, the problem is more serious, because one of the requirements of this approach is good classroom atmosphere, so that the teacher and the learners can manage the learning activities successfully. Yet, large classes represent a real hindrance against the achievement of this purpose. In fact, a crowded classroom does have a very negative effect on the teacher and the students at more than one level, and consequently on the teaching-learning process. For instance, it represents a health problem: it is unhealthy for everybody to be confined in a crowded classroom, especially in winter when the cold obliges them to keep the door and windows closed most of the time. Perhaps more challenging is the fact that there is not enough room for the students and the teacher to move about, in particular during group work activities which necessitate communication between the different groups.

No doubt, it is the teacher who suffers most. Teaching a large class certainly affects the teacher physically and psychologically, which may bring his or her diligence to the minimum. The following teachers' complaints about large classes can further illustrate the situation.

- *Once I get into the classroom and look at the crowd of students, I feel tired even before beginning to work.*
- *I get nervous even when a student turns back to talk to his colleague.*
- *Forty students; it's hellish!*
- *When I look at the pile of papers waiting for correction, I feel dizzy.*
- *That class! It's a 'market'! (She refers to noise and indiscipline). I don't like it.*
- *'An army'! (She refers to the big number of students of a certain class). Too many and too weak! They make me dislike my job.*
- *Believe me, if they gave me half a salary, I would resign now.*

Indeed, taking his or her different roles into account according to the requirements of the CLT various learning activities, it is definitely very tiring for the teacher to do what

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should be done in the classroom. For instance, it is hard for him or her to check the work of all the students during a particular activity whether they work individually, in pairs or even in groups. If he or she often does so, it takes considerable time, which would be at the expense of the time allotted to the other activities of the lesson, and also to the detriment of the syllabus, which he or she should finish, covering in time. The teacher's inability to check all the students' work in class, or the fact that he or she does not do so intentionally for the mentioned reason may result in the weak and shy students' unwillingness to take part in the learning activities. This matter and the teacher's feeling that as Hayes (1997: 113 – 114) points out, "Slow learners perform very badly in large classes [, and] if they cheat or simply copy, they will also learn nothing" would create an extra challenge for the teacher, because in such situations, it is the brilliant students who usually take the lion's share of participation.

The teacher's burden is not limited only to the classroom; at home, he or she also has a lot to do: correcting the students' written work and preparing for the lessons of next classes, which equally makes him or her weary.

In brief, a large class having a majority of students of low-language proficiency and the abundance of pair- and group-work activities, along with the variety of instructional materials they require would make implementing Communicative Language Teaching in EFL classes beyond the teacher's reach. Therefore, it is unwise to oblige teachers directly or indirectly to adopt an approach that cannot guarantee the achievement of the desired learning objectives. What is sensible is to give teachers freedom to make use of any teaching approaches and methods that can contribute to the success of the learning process, because what actually matters is not the means utilized to achieve a particular end, but achieving the end by any means.

Conclusion

The interdependence of meaning and form in forming language, and equally in achieving the goal of language learning, communicative competence, in both its spoken and written forms certainly contradicts with the CLT extreme focus on meaning and fluency at the expense of form and accuracy. This CLT major principle and the other ones deriving from it; and the issues compatible with them have resulted – as conveyed above –

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in serious pedagogical deficiencies. These together with particular daunting challenges, such as the lack of the requisite instructional materials have made Communicative Language Teaching too demanding and very difficult to implement in EFL classes. All this could lead us to argue that this approach has not been at the level of the expected results, and hence can affirm the claim that adopting CLT in EFL teaching for a long time is one of the factors that have led to the inability of so many non-native learners to communicate in English effectively.

Therefore, a sensible alternative approach to foreign-language teaching could be one that moderates the principles of CLT. Briefly, in other words, an approach that lays emphasis on both meaning and form; on fluency and accuracy, which implies adopting a semantic-formal syllabus.

Given that all teaching approaches and methods have strengths and weaknesses, perhaps a more reasonable approach to language teaching would be one that incorporates all the positive sides of a number of approaches and methods including traditional ones, because what is modern and new is not always beneficial and effective, and what is traditional and old does not necessarily imply that it is defective and useless. An eclectic approach would be the optimum alternative, especially if it is successfully adopted according to specific factors, such as the teaching materials at hand, the overall learners' level of proficiency in the target language, and the students' future language needs.

The same 112 EFL teachers who were questioned about whether grammar should be taught explicitly were also queried on whether the eclectic approach can be the best alternative to Communicative Language Teaching or to any other approach to teaching English as a foreign language in Tunisia. Seventy-nine teachers (70.53%) approved of the idea; eighteen (16.07%) did not share the same opinion; and fifteen (13.39%) stated that they could not make a decision on the matter.

The results of this questionnaire can be said to constitute a further justification for the above arguments against the successful adoption of the communicative approach in Tunisian EFL classrooms, and also in other EFL settings elsewhere, precisely where there are barriers similar to the above-considered ones that can obstruct its implementation.

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3.3. The use of the mother tongue in EFL classes

It should be noted that the thematic connection of this topic with the two previous ones (3.1 and 3.2) lies in the assumption that the use of the learners' mother tongue in EFL classes adds, on the one hand, to the problem of the insufficient exposure to and practice of the language, and on the other hand, it is assumed to present a further pedagogical deficiency together with the fact that the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching has been claimed to fall far short of the expected learning results.

The use of the mother tongue in foreign-language teaching has always been a controversial issue. The controversy lies in the advantages and disadvantages the L1 represents in the foreign-language classroom. In the context of this research, focus will be placed on the impact of using Arabic in teaching English as a foreign language on the learning process. In the course of considering this issue, the following points will be covered:

- The background of the L 1 use in the foreign-language classroom;
- The various situations when and the different reasons why teachers and learners use the mother tongue;
- The extent to which the students' mother tongue can be used as a technique for teaching a foreign language.

Background of the L1 use in FLT classes

Using the students' mother tongue in the foreign-language classroom implies translating from the target language into the source language or vice versa to explain particular language items. It is also utilized to give or clarify instructions related to learning tasks.

Such a teaching tool in the field of foreign-language teaching methodology is tightly associated with the Grammar-Translation Method, which monopolized foreign language teaching, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Due to the advent and development of modern teaching approaches and methods, however, the use of the mother tongue has been badly viewed, and hence inadvisable because of various reasons. Harbord (1992: 350) states that the rejection of

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using the mother tongue in the foreign-language classroom dates back to the appearance of the Direct Method at the turn of the century. He adds that the development of an irregular teaching job for young people visiting Europe made it necessary for teachers to adopt the English-only approach. By the same token, Larsen-Freeman (1986: 18) argues that since the Grammar-Translation Method was not actually successful in making students able to use the language communicatively, the Direct Method became renowned. She explains that the Direct Method "has a very basic rule: no translation is allowed. In fact, [this teaching method] receives its name from the fact that meaning is to be connected directly with the target language, without going through the process of translating into the students' native language."

When and why the mother tongue is used

Relying on a personal teaching experience, the EFL teacher and learners use the mother tongue in various situations and for different reasons. For the part of the teacher, I might suggest that he or she uses it in situations, such as:

- Giving instructions related to a learning activity;
- Dealing with learners' misbehavior during lessons or exams;
- During a visit from outside the classroom; either by a student from a neighboring classroom, or somebody from the school administration;
- When he or she fails to express himself or herself in English appropriately.

It is presumed that EFL teachers have recourse to the mother tongue, because they may believe that it represents certain advantages, one of which is that it overcomes the learners' fear of the difficulties of the target language, especially beginners. Another potential benefit of the L1 use in EFL classes is that it is thought to facilitate learning for learners and teaching for teachers, which saves much time. For instance, in case of L2 unfamiliar lexical items, through the use of the mother tongue, the learners can understand their meanings more clearly and quickly than through any other techniques.

In addition to the above-mentioned would-be advantages, many teachers tend to use the learners' native language as a convenient teaching technique with learners whose standard in English is very low. Justifying resorting to the students' mother tongue because of such a fact, some teachers of English often complain with some exaggeration saying,

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"Even when I explain to them in Arabic they can't understand, let alone when I use English."

Where learners are concerned, they equally use their native language in EFL classes in diverse situations and for specific reasons. Instances of these are the following:

- When the teacher addresses them in their mother tongue, they directly respond in the same language;
- During pair-work and group-work activities, they talk to one another in their native language even if the teacher advises and encourages them to always speak English. They do so, because during such activities they feel somewhat free from the teacher's guidance and control, and because they may not be able to express themselves in English all the time;
- Many Tunisian learners' use of their native language in English classes stems from a previous habit dating back to their learning of French in primary education. In fact, teachers of French used to ask pupils to write down the new French lexical items with their Arabic equivalents in a special notebook. So, when they start learning English, they do the same even without being asked by the teacher. This habit is also manifest in the fact that many such students have English-Arabic dictionaries. Some of them take them even to the classroom, and sometimes use them during lessons.

How beneficial is the L1 use in foreign-language classes?

Atkinson (1987: 242) presents three advantageous reasons for the use of the students' mother tongue in the foreign-language classroom. The most important of these, as he contends, is that such a "translation technique" is one of the preferred learning strategies of most learners. In a similar framework, Harmer (2001: 131) argues that students use their native language

> because it is an entirely natural thing to do; when we learn a foreign language, we use translation almost without thinking about it, particularly at elementary and intermediate level. This is because we try to make sense of a new linguistic (and conceptual world) through the linguistic world we are familiar with.

Perhaps one important justification for the EFL non-native learners' use of their native language is their reliance on cognate words, which can help them with

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comprehension. Larsen-Freeman (1986: 10), in her discussion of the principles of the Grammar-Translation Method, refers to this advantage asserting, "Learning is facilitated through attention to similarities between the target language and the native language." Swan (1985b: 85) seems to be so much in favor of using the mother tongue in teaching a foreign language that he claims that the latter cannot be learned without the use of the former. He argues:

> It is a matter of common experience that the mother tongue plays an important part in learning a foreign language**.** [...] Interlanguages notoriously contain errors which are caused by interference from the mother tongue; it is not always realized that a large proportion of the correct features in an interlanguage also contain a mother tongue element. In fact, if we did not keep making correspondences between foreign language items and mother tongue items, we would never learn foreign languages at all.

The second reason Atkinson offers for the L1 use in the L2 classroom resides in the fact that allowing the learners to use their native language implies a humanistic approach in the sense that it permits them to say whatever they want. The third reason is that – as noted above – it saves time. However, it should be underlined that mentioning these reasons is not a request for a vast use of the students' mother tongue, but rather a motive for its restricted use in specific situations (Danshev 1982, cited in Harbord 1992: 351).

Wondering whether the L1 use in EFL classes is justifiable, one could assert that it is so because of the advantages it offers, as has been pointed out so far, but such advantages cannot really be confirmed before considering the disadvantages of its use, and especially its overuse and their effect on the learning process. Examples of such disadvantages are the following:

- As far as listening comprehension is concerned, the constant use of the mother tongue in English classes is very likely to lead the learner to acquire an undesirable habit consisting in thinking directly of the mother tongue equivalents for the English lexical items. This would make him or her lose concentration on the listening material, and thus his or her comprehension ability is likely to be reduced to the minimum;
- Reducing, to a great extent, the learner's chances of being exposed to more English material;

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- The possibility of making the learner's learning of the target language limited to translating only individual lexical items rather than complete utterances or working on global contexts, which would consequently result in his or her inability to express himself or herself properly in the L2. What follows can definitely justify the final point above.

An Egyptian teacher of physical education, who worked with me in the United Arab Emirates, told me he had learned English for twelve years, but I noticed, and he himself affirmed that he could not express himself in a few utterances in English. Asked about the cause, he assured that the teaching method that was used during the time he had been learning English was really a complete failure, because that language was taught mainly through translating almost every word from English directly into Arabic.

Dealing with the adverse effects of the L1 overuse on both the learner and the teacher of English, Atkinson (1987: 351) warns that excessive dependency on the mother tongue is likely to result in some or all of the following:

> - The teacher and/or the students begin to feel they have not 'really' understood any item of language until it has been translated.
> - The teacher and/or the students fail to observe distinctions between equivalents of form, semantic equivalence, and pragmatic features, and thus oversimplify to the point of using crude and inaccurate translation.
> - Students speak to the teacher in the mother tongue as a matter of course, even when they are quite capable of expressing that they mean [in the target language].
> - Students fail to realize that during many activities in the classroom, it is essential that they use only English.

It is interesting to note that the L1 use in EFL classes, in the course of time, may become overuse, which does not have a detrimental effect only on the learner, but also on the teacher. For instance, as the learners are satisfied with the use of their native language as a teaching technique, the teacher is likely to become reluctant to use other appropriate techniques, which would negatively affect his or her teaching methodology. Another negative effect of the L1 use on the teacher is that he or she himself or herself may become so dependent on it that his or her ability to communicate in English becomes at stake.

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A questionnaire was assigned to 57 Tunisian EFL teachers on how much Arabic may be used in teaching English. They were asked to justify their opinions if they wish to.

Twenty teachers (about 35%) answered with ‘not at all’, and offered no explanation for their point of view, whereas thirty-seven teachers (about 65%) responded with ‘a small amount’. Some of them accounted for their opinion stating that Arabic can be used (a) with beginners, (b) to explain instructions during a test to further clarify what to do, (c) to explain particular abstract key vocabulary items, which students cannot understand through the use of other techniques.

I also interviewed a few native EFL teachers and two non-native ELT inspectors asking them their opinion about the use of the mother tongue in EFL classes. All of them affirm that it has a negative effect on the learning process, and some of them express total disapproval even of its limited use in the foreign language classroom. For instance, Mr. Chris Bonnington, a British teacher at a higher college of technology in the United Arab Emirates, claims that using the native language in teaching English “obviously represents a huge problem,” because it enormously decreases the chances to listen to more English material. He adds qualifying the teacher of English who uses the learners' mother tongue as a ‘robber’ of these chances stating, “Every time the teacher of English uses the learners' native language in an English class, he or she is robbing the students of the opportunity to hear the message in English.”

Mr. Saad Hafiz, an Egyptian ELT inspector working in the United Arab Emirates shares the same opinion arguing that the use of the native language in EFL classes does have a serious effect on the learners' standard in English. He refers to the reason behind this problem asserting that it is due to the fact that the teachers who are appointed to teach the lower primary pupils in the UAE are usually not highly qualified. They resort to using Arabic in English classes, because they are not able to use English during a whole English lesson. He adds that once pupils get accustomed to the habit of their first teacher's use of their native language, they expect and ask their next teacher to do the same, which prevents them from enough exposure to English, and thus leads to a low command of this foreign language. Therefore, Mr. Saad Hafiz recommends that teachers of English should be highly qualified, and that we should never, under any circumstances, use the mother

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tongue in EFL classes, especially during the early stages of the learning process, so that the students will not get used to it.

Mr. Ali Souli, a Tunisian ELT inspector, in turn, roughly adheres to the above-expressed opinion stating:

> There was a time when I personally was dogmatic about the sole use of English in my EFL class, even with beginners. I still believe in the feasibility, importance, and effectiveness of using English exclusively in our EFL classes, providing that body language and various teaching aids are used. However, there are some cases in which the teacher may occasionally resort to his learners' mother tongue. For example, when the learners are absolute beginners, and the instructions are too difficult to understand in the target language. Occasionally, an abstract notion needs some explanation in the mother tongue. Teachers should not make a habit of it; otherwise, their learners will always expect immediate explanation in the mother tongue.

Accordingly, on the basis of the above-voiced viewpoints, the use of the learners' mother tongue in the foreign-language classroom is inadvisable.

So far, we have seen the EFL teachers' and the ELT inspectors' opinions of the use of the native language in EFL classes. Now let us see the students'.

One hundred and five first-year-secondary students from Khaled Ibn Al-Waleed Secondary School in Ras Al-Khaima, United Arab Emirates and one hundred and five others from Bousalem Secondary School, Tunisia were administered the same questionnaire as stated above on the use of Arabic in EFL classes. The results are as outlined below:

Answers	**Number of UAE students' answers out of 105, and percentage (rounded up or down)**	**Number of Tunisian students' answers out of 105, and percentage (rounded up or down)**
Not at all	0 = 0 %	14 = 13%
Some	38 = 36%	47 = 45%
Much	67 = 64%	44 = 42%

Table 8: Students' opinions of the amount of Arabic that may be used in EFL classes

The results of the questionnaire reveal the following:

First, it is conspicuous that the UAE students favor the use of Arabic in EFL classes more than Tunisian students do. Concerning the UAE students, none of them objects to using

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Arabic in EFL classes, and those who are in favor of using much of it in English lessons represent the majority with a high percentage of 64%.

Justifying their opinions, most of the UAE students claim that the use of their mother tongue in EFL courses helps them understand quickly and better.

Taking into consideration those students' rate of opinions and the above-mentioned justification, one could deduce the following interrelated facts:

- Their opinion and justification are mainly the result of their EFL teachers' constant use of Arabic as one of the predominant teaching techniques;
- They have been very probably accustomed to, and are very much in favor of an easy and less time-consuming teaching technique during the process of their learning English. This is no other technique than the use of their mother tongue.
- They see no harm whatsoever in using much Arabic during English lessons; on the contrary, they seem to believe that it is really advantageous.

What follows illustrates the above argument.

- During my first year in the U.A.E. as an EFL teacher , a primary education class of mine protested against me, complained to the headmaster, and some of them complained to their parents that I always used English in class, and that I was “too difficult” for them to understand.
- Another secondary education class objected strongly to the way I used to introduce new lexical items during pre-listening and pre-reading activities. I asked them how I should have done, and they told me in case of a listening lesson, I should write the new words on the board, and directly tell them their Arabic equivalents. But concerning reading, there was a wordlist at the end of each unit; they told me before moving to the while-reading activities, I should refer them to that list and translate the new words related the reading passage into Arabic. I tried my best to convince them of the serious effects of such a technique, but in vain. Unfortunately, I found myself obliged to use that technique unwillingly in order not to alienate the students and the school administration.
- Whenever I asked my students about the meaning of a word, they told me its Arabic equivalent, but they did not try to explain it in English.

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- Once, I attended a listening lesson done by a colleague of mine in the U.A.E. He introduced the majority of the new lexical items in Arabic, and while he was checking comprehension, his students also answered in Arabic.
- Emirati secondary school students are taught translation from English into Arabic by the EFL teacher. English textbooks include passages meant for translation. This fact might lead students to believe that Arabic should be used as a constant teaching technique in EFL classes.

All this has contributed – according to what I have personally noticed – to the fact that most of the students' proficiency in English is generally restricted to mere knowledge of the Arabic equivalents for individual English words, and memorization of a set of grammatical rules, without being able to express themselves in complete utterances.

A more serious problem is that the great majority of those students are not fully aware of the adverse effects of overusing their mother tongue in EFL classes; and due to this fact, they have been so much used to it that even the teacher cannot help using it as a frequent teaching technique sometimes even against his or her own will.

As for Tunisian students, those who totally disagree with the use of Arabic in EFL classes represent a minority who are generally good at English. They believe so, because they think that using only English in teaching English gives them more chances of practicing the target language, which helps them to learn it more effectively. They maintain, however, that using Arabic in English classes has a detrimental effect on the learners' standard in English. They claim that it is likely to make a good or an average standard bad, and make a bad one worse.

These students' opinion may, on the other hand, be the result of a general belief in Tunisia that a teacher using Arabic in EFL classes is a failure.

Another opinion against the use of Arabic in EFL classes is that some of the questioned Tunisian students say they prefer using French to using Arabic in teaching English. From this opinion, one can deduce the following:

- These students disapprove of using their native language in English lessons, because they are aware of its negative effects on the process of learning English as a foreign language;

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- They seem to believe that learning English as a foreign language through French as another foreign language has more advantages and/or less disadvantages than learning it through their mother tongue;
- It is likely that they know that the similarity between English and French, which lies particularly in the big number of cognate words that can help them with comprehension, and hence with better learning;

Those who think that some Arabic can be used in EFL classes are generally, according to what I have noticed, of average level in English. Many of these students claim that their mother tongue is necessary for explaining new lexical items, because – in their opinion – they cannot grasp their meanings unless the teacher explains them in Arabic.

Those who state that a lot of Arabic should be used in EFL classes are usually of low standard in this foreign language. Examples of their justifications are: "*I don't understand anything of English*."; "*I'm very weak at English*."; "*English is too difficult for me to learn*."; *Etc.*

Unlike those of the UAE students, Tunisian students' opinions, especially those that are totally against the use of Arabic in EFL classes, as well as the overall justifications reflect some awareness of its negative effects on their standard in English as a foreign language and on the process of learning as a whole. Such awareness with the teacher's assistance can be an important step towards an effective solution.

How could the use of L1 in EFL classes be dealt with

As the teacher is directly or indirectly involved in the situations when and the reasons why the mother tongue is used in EFL classes, he or she is invited to puzzle out this dilemma for the sake of a successful learning process. Therefore, he or she should begin by himself or herself. He or she should avoid using the mother tongue, and ought equally to encourage the learners to do so. From the beginning of the year, the latter should be made aware of the necessity of the constant use of English and the serious disadvantages of using their native language, and consequently the negative effects on their standard in the target language. The teacher should always remind the students of such effects whenever he or she notices that there is tendency to use the mother tongue.

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The teacher also ought to resort to efficient measures that would really make the students refrain from using their native language and promote the use of English only. One of such measures as Harmer (2001: 132 –133) suggests is choosing convenient learning activities, which the learners are able to perform in English. Another important course of action, which can help develop the students' constant use of English, is creating an English atmosphere through making English the classroom language, as well as the language to be learned. Harmer proposes even anglicizing the learners' names to give them more chance of making the classroom actually English. Also as a solution to the learners' native language use in Harmer's opinion is using persuasion and other inducements. He states that teachers all over the world spend much time advising and ordering their students to refrain from using their mother tongue, especially during speaking activities, and it often works. "If it doesn't," Harmer (2001: 133) suggests, "we can stop the activity and tell the students there is a problem. This sometimes changes the atmosphere, so that they go back to the activity with a new determination."

Perhaps a more efficient solution to the problem is having some students – especially, the brilliant ones – work it out. Indeed, during group work activities, each of such students acts as group leader, one of whose jobs is to keep the members of his or her group speak English. Another student supervises all the groups, and allots marks to each one according to how much English has been used during the activity. At the end of the activity, the winning group is applauded or awarded a symbolic prize.

Ur (1996), cited in Harmer (ibid.) proposes almost the same solution; he suggests designating class supervisors to keep their fellow students speaking English.

Personally, I sometimes resort to such a solution, and it proves really beneficial. This is seen in the following advantageous characteristics:

. It is motivating;

. It can make all the students participate in the learning activities, even the weak and the shy ones;

. It saves time since all the learners are induced to take part in the learning activities;

. It is fun, because it is a sort of game.

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Conclusion

Taking into consideration the situations when and the reasons why teachers and learners use the mother tongue in EFL classes as noted above, and equally the results and the analysis of the results of the questionnaire administered to students, one could deduce that the mother tongue is overused and misused. As argued above, the overuse of the students' L1 in the L2 classroom has serious effects not only on the learner's standard in English, but also on the teacher's professional experience, and hence on the learning process as whole. It is misused, in that it is not used in meaningful communicative activities, but simply to explain vocabulary, grammar, and the instructions of different tasks; rather than using it as a sound means that can help to carry out the various goals of learning activities. This would make one advance the claim that overusing Arabic in EFL classes is at the same time one of the factors that have contributed to so many learners' low standard in English and also an aspect of it. Therefore, for fear that the mother tongue will be overused and misused in EFL classes, an English-only approach to teaching English as a foreign language would be imperative. Only in very exceptional situations, such as explaining few specific abstract lexical items, or when the instructions of learning activities are too difficult for beginners to understand – as proposed above in Mr. Souli's opinion – may the teacher resort to using the learners' mother tongue. Even in such cases, the teacher ought to make the target language always present via different ways. For instance, when explaining instructions, the teacher can say half the instruction in the mother tongue, and the other half in the target language, or he or she can firstly say the instruction in the L1 and then in the L2, so as to constantly make the students bear in mind that full priority is to be always given to the target language rather than to the mother tongue.

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4. Problems and difficulties with language skills

4.1. Listening comprehension

The nature of listening comprehension, what is noted in the Literature Review Chapter and the results of a questionnaire – which will be considered later – reveal that this language skill poses more difficulties for learners than the other skills do.

Before discussing those difficulties, this section examines the role of listening in language learning with the purpose of drawing the teacher's attention to raise the students' awareness of such a role, so that they will show keen interest in the skill, and have every intention of improving their listening ability. The examination will involve a brief reference to some literature, and rely on a few language-learning theories and language-teaching approaches, which are not to be dealt with in depth, but as succinctly as possible in such a way as to serve our purpose.

4.1.1. The role of listening in language learning

In the context of language learning, listening is an active process. What makes it as such is what it requires, and what it aims at. In fact, this language skill necessitates attention to the spoken messages, intention of comprehension, and trying one's best to understand input, so that learning can be effected.

What listening necessitates is what makes it different from hearing. Hearing may be an accidental passive action, whereas listening is an intentional active operation. Therefore, if attention to the spoken material and intention of comprehension are available on the listener's part even without his or her ability to understand, we still speak of listening, though learning cannot occur as there has been no comprehension. Roughly, the very argument is echoed in Underwood (1989: 2): "Although we may appear to be inactive while listening, we must actually engage in the activity of constructing a message in order to be described as a listener. Whilst hearing can be thought as a passive condition, listening is always an active process."

It is undeniable that no one can ever learn a language without having been adequately exposed to it in a great diversity of situations, and in a wide variety of ways

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through listening, at least in its simple and passive form, that is mere hearing. Dealing with the role of listening in second language acquisition, Dunkel (1991) quotes M. Long (1985) who "points out that current theories of second language acquisition, such as the Information Processing Model (McLaughlin, Rossaman, and McLeod 1983), the Monitor Model (Krashen 1977), the Intake Model (Chaudron 1985), the Interaction Model (Hatch 1983), all put up the key role listening plays in the development of a learner's second/foreign language."

Emphasizing the key role of listening in language learning, Gary Buck, in turn, (1995: 121) refers to the theorists Asher (1977), Postovsky (1974) and Gary (1981) who, he says, "Have argued that language learning should start with listening comprehension, and that providing large amounts of listening is the best way to teach a second language."

In the same context, Nunan (2002: 238) affirms, "Listening is assuming greater and greater importance in foreign language classrooms. There are several reasons for this growth in popularity. By emphasizing the role of comprehensible input, second language acquisition research has given a major boost to listening." Rost (1994: 141–142) explains why listening is necessary for language learning claiming, "[It] is vital in the language classroom, because it provides input for the learners. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin. Listening is thus fundamental to speaking."

The stature of listening is also implicitly manifest in particular language-learning theories and language-teaching approaches. Of these theories and approaches, we consider the following:

The Behaviorist Theory

This theory has been very well-known in the field of language learning. It is based on two principles: imitation and reinforcement. Behaviorists believe that the individual learns language through imitating what he or she hears from the environment in which he or she lives. He or she is reinforced positively when he or she imitates or responds to messages correctly, but he or she is reinforced negatively when he or she fails to do so. The process through which learning is achieved is called *habit formation.* It takes place as a result of the constant positive reinforcement.

Listening is one of the principal grounds on which this theory is based, because imitation entirely depends on it, and responding to messages whether correctly or

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incorrectly relies on it too, as it supplies the learner with input. Additionally, the constant positive reinforcement encourages the learner to be more and more attentive, and hence to try to be a skilled listener, so as to make correct responses.

The Monitor Model

Also of considerable popularity as a language-learning theory is Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model. As described by McLaughlin (1987: 20), this theory is based on five hypotheses:

a**.** *The Acquisition-learning Hypothesis*;

b**.** *The Monitor Hypothesis*;

c**.** *The Natural Order Hypothesis*;

d**.** *The Input Hypothesis*;

e**.** *The Affective Filter Hypothesis*.

Perhaps the most relevant hypothesis of this theory to the role of listening in language learning is *the Input Hypothesis*, which is also called *the Comprehensible Input* by reason of the predominant value of comprehension for language acquisition. McLaughlin (1987: 36) quotes Krashen who argues for the importance of *the Comprehensible Input* in language acquisition stating, "Humans acquire language in only one way – by understanding messages, or by receiving comprehensible input."

Although it is not explicitly conveyed, the role of listening in learning a language according to this hypothesis seems to be evident. It is the medium through which input is carried to the learner, so nobody can ever make out a message without having listened to it attentively.

Nevertheless, this hypothesis represents a serious drawback, which lies in restricting acquisition only to comprehension, thus disregarding the great role production plays in learning a language. Clearly put in other terms, the comprehensible input is not enough at all to learn a language if we, especially, take into account the irrefutable actuality that a language cannot be effectively learned unless it is practiced via various types of significant interaction. To further illustrate this claim, one can refer to babies who can understand a great deal of linguistic input, but cannot respond to messages linguistically. For this reason, one cannot say that they have acquired a language, but being able to make out messages is one of the stages that can pave the way for their learning a language. The

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same matter applies to many non-native adults who can understand a lot of target language input, but cannot communicate linguistically. Briefly, ignoring production is in a certain way neglecting linguistic communication, the objective of language learning. As Krashen seems to go to extremes with his theory, McLaughlin (1987: 51) argues for "a more balanced view of the second language learning [that] gives equal weight to internal and external factors and to production and comprehension."

However, a possible argument in favor of Krashen's theory is that, as far as listening is concerned, the Comprehensible Input can be said to coincide with what Nunan (2002: 240) terms *non-reciprocal listening.* It is a listening situation, such as listening to songs, monologues, announcements in places of public transportation, etc., during which the listener listens to spoken material without being able to interact with the speaker or make any prompt oral responses.

The Discourse Theory

As described by Ellis (1985: 259), the Discourse Theory, which – he reports – was proposed by Hatch in 1978, originates from a theory of language in which communication is considered as the axis of linguistic knowledge. Ellis refers to Hymes's description of communicative competence maintaining, "Language should be considered in terms of how the learner discovers the meaning potential to language by participating in communication."

It is clear that, according to this argument, communication is a means to an end, and this end is consequently the development of that means itself, as it were. In other terms, the learner can develop his or her communicative ability by searching for meaning through communicating with others. This is equally conspicuous in Cherry's terms (1979: 122) cited in Ellis (1985: 259): "Through communicating with other people, children accomplish actions in the world and develop the rules of language structure and use."

The name of this theory and the fact that it relies on communicating with others to achieve language learning make it clear that listening is a necessary element in the process of such learning. In the last quotation, the language learners referred to are children. So, it is obvious that Ellis points to the child's acquisition of language. According to this theory, children learn language through the use of their oral and aural skills. By playing an active role as a listener and speaker, the child can develop his or her knowledge of the forms of

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language and the ability to demonstrate such knowledge through communication in sociolinguistic situations.

The Natural Approach

This approach was introduced in 1977 by Tracy Terrell in collaboration with Stephen Krashen. Richards and Rodgers (1986: 129 –130) quote both authors as arguing that according to the Natural Approach, there is much emphasis on the primacy of meaning, and thus on communication as the central function of language. In a similar setting, Brown (1994: 70) accounts for the language theory of this approach according to which meaning is considered as the core of language, and vocabulary, not grammar, is its kernel.

It is, in fact, true that vocabulary is the essence of language, because communication without it is impossible, whereas it is possible without correct use of grammar. If, for instance, somebody says, *"Yesterday, he go cinema"* or *"Nobody don't come yet",* the message is quite comprehensible. Yet, this does not mean that the Natural Approach neglects grammar. Grammar does have a role, but it is secondary in comparison to vocabulary. Richards and Rodgers (1986: 130) refer to this role stating that it lies only in determining how vocabulary is utilized to construct messages.

In respect of the place of language skills in the Natural Approach, Richards and Rodgers (1986: 135) point to Krashen and Terrell (1983) who assert that the primary aim of the approach is to develop basic communication skills through listening and writing. Richards and Rodgers report that both authors list the goals for language courses under four areas. Two of these concern the listening skill and the other two relate to the writing skill. These are the following:

a. Basic personal communication skills: oral (e.g., listening to announcements in public places);
b. Basic personal communication skills: written (e.g., reading and writing personal letters);
c. Academic learning skills: oral (e.g., listening to a lecture);
d. Academic learning skills: written (e.g., taking notes in class).

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Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language-teaching method developed by the American Professor of psychology James Asher. As defined by Richards and Rogers (1986: 87), the method "attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity." In fact, while teaching language through T.P.R., the teacher starts the learning activity by giving commands in the target language and initiates performing them physically, and the learners follow him or her immediately doing the same individually or collectively.

The role of listening while teaching a foreign language via Total Physical Response is actually paramount, in the sense that the learner acts much more as a listener and a performer than playing any other roles. Another reason justifying the chief importance of listening while using T.P.R. is the fact that the role of the learner as a performer thoroughly depends on his or her role as a listener. In other words, the learner cannot respond physically to the teacher's instructions correctly unless he or she listens to them attentively and understands them well. This is why this teaching method is referred to as the Comprehension Approach, as Richards and Rodgers (1986: 87) state.

4.1.2. Listening problems and difficulties

Much as I am familiar with the various problems and difficulties EFL teachers and learners encounter during listening sessions, I assigned two hundred and twenty-three secondary students a questionnaire to further assess the actuality of such obstacles and equally to know about the learners' general attitude towards listening comprehension. The questionnaire queried about the problems and difficulties they encounter during listening comprehension sessions, and the potential positive effects the language skill has on their EFL learning.

The purpose of the second enquiry was to investigate the students' attitude towards listening comprehension.

The overall different listening problems and difficulties the students jotted down are listed below translated from Arabic:

- *I can't understand;*
- *The voice is not clear;*
- *Speakers speak fast;*
- *I cannot remember all the ideas;*

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- *When I try to understand the meaning of some words, I miss much of the listening text, so I like to read a text, not to listen to it so that I can understand better;*
- *Poor quality tape-recorders;*
- *I cannot concentrate for a long time;*
- *The pronunciation is difficult to understand;*
- *Sometimes the listening passage is very long, so I cannot remember everything and answer all the questions;*
- *Sometimes, I can't hear anything because of* noise*;*
- *I often have low marks for listening comprehension;*
- *It (he or she refers to listening) is complicated;*
- *The listening text is sometimes boring;*
- *It is not interesting.*

As for the second question, only several students answered it. A few answers as regards the positive effects of listening comprehension on their learning of English are the following:

- *Listening helps me with a good accent and correct pronunciation;*
- *Listening improves my speaking and writing skills;*
- *It is amusing.*

Two main different inferences may be drawn from these answers:

a. The fact that the majority of the students did not answer is likely to imply that due to the various problems and difficulties they encounter during listening sessions, they seem to believe that listening comprehension does not have any real positive effects on their EFL learning.

b. Conversely, those who answered have a positive attitude towards listening comprehension. This is conspicuous, especially in the first two answers. The respondents seem to be aware of the role of listening in improving the other language skills.

Let us now examine the various listening problems and difficulties, which are claimed to intervene with the development of the learners' listening ability, and suggest what could remedy the situation.

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According to the students' answers to the first question stated above, and relying on a personal experience as an EFL teacher, the problems and difficulties Tunisian EFL learners encounter with listening comprehension can be classified into three categories:

a. Difficulties resulting from the phonological characteristics of the English language;

b. Difficulties related to listening texts;

c. Difficulties stemming from low-quality listening equipment and inappropriate class-room acoustic environment.

4.1.2.1. Phonological features

Phonological interference

Interference or language transfer consists in the fact that the learner's mother tongue or another source language interferes with the target language in certain language areas, such as phonology, vocabulary, and grammar, which may cause learning difficulties for the students.

Where phonological interference is concerned, due to the fact that there are some L2 phonemes do not exist in the L1 – as alluded to in the Literature Review Chapter – the non-native learner is likely to be confused and led to misunderstanding or incomprehension. For instance, as the phonemes */p/* and */v/* do not exist in Arabic, some Arab learners of English may unnoticeably assimilate them to approximately similar ones, which exist in their native language. Thus, a learner may mispronounce *park* and *vast* as *bark* and *fast* respectively, and may equally mishear them as such, and consequently may encounter comprehension difficulties in case such words or other minimal pairs containing the mentioned phonemes occur in listening materials.

Stress and intonation

Another reason why some non-native learners are likely to face comprehension difficulties during listening situations is their unfamiliarity with the stress and intonation patterns of English, which actually play an important role in comprehension.

As defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002: 516), stress refers to "the pronunciation of a syllable or word with more respiratory energy or muscular force than other syllables or words in the same utterance." According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*

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(2006), intonation denotes "the rise and fall of the voice in speaking, especially as this affects the meaning of what is being said."

Stress has two functions: it shows the correct pronunciation of words. Perhaps more significant – as far as comprehension is concerned – the function of stress is to put emphasis on specific words in an utterance; those words which carry the information the speaker wants to communicate or the meaning he or she intends to convey. By the same token, one essential aspect of the importance of intonation is to express the different meanings of the same utterance. For instance, "*You should be early*" when said in a low-pitched voice can convey advice in a situation where a fellow student counsels his or her colleague to come early to attend a lecture from the beginning, so that he or she can understand its contents well. The same utterance can communicate blame when articulated in a high-pitched voice in a situation as when a boss is angrily addressing one of his employees who is often late for work.

Stressing the importance of intonation patterns to the comprehension of different messages, Brown (1994: 240) asserts, ["They] are very significant not just for interpreting such straight-forward elements as questions and statements and emphasis, but more subtle messages like sarcasm, endearment, insult solicitation, praise, etc." In a word, stress and intonation give every language a typical rhythm, which plays a key role in communicating various messages. Therefore, failure to produce the correct rhythm compatible with the intended message on the part of the speaker may cause the listener to misunderstand or misinterpret it.

Reduced forms

Reduced forms are one of the phonological features characterizing spoken English. Reduced forms can be categorized into two broad types. The first type includes reduced forms, which represent changes affecting the morphology of individual words and utterances, usually reducing the number of their syllables, and consequently the way they are pronounced. Brown and Hilferty (1986) refer to this type as involving four processes: (a) contraction (e.g., *she's* for *she is* or *she has*), (b) elision (e.g., /mə**ʊ**sli/ for *mostly* and /m**ʌ**s**t**əv/ for *must have*), (c) assimilation (e.g., *wanna* for *want to*), and (d) reduction (e.g. *howarya* for *how are you).*

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The second type of reduced forms concerns changes causing the number of words of a message to be reduced to limited specific items that can still communicate the message. Here is an example:

Boss: *You should be early!*
Employee: *Sorry; the traffic...*

In this short interaction, the employee's message as concerns the reason why he was late for work may be quite comprehensible although it is not expressed in a full sentence: what caused him to arrive late for work was that the traffic was dense.

Reduced forms do cause non-native learners serious comprehension difficulties, especially to those who have not sufficiently exposed to the phonological aspects of spoken English. This is true, in particular concerning the first type, which necessitates that learners be made familiar with through practice. The second type is much less challenging if students rely on suitable situational contexts.

How to surmount the difficulties with phonological features

It is imperative for non-native EFL teachers to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the phonological features of the English language, and make their students familiar with them, so as to spare them learning difficulties.

Concerning the English phonemes, familiarizing non-native learners with them can be carried out through theory and practice. In terms of theory, EFL teachers should teach their students phonemic symbols during the first periods of the course, which can help them distinguish between the different sounds of English, and can also assist them in looking up the correct pronunciation of words in a dictionary. The teacher can equally make use of diagrams of the vocal apparatus to show the students the places and manners of articulation of the different sounds concentrating on the problematic ones.

At the level of practice, the teacher can resort to drilling exercises: the students repeat individually and collectively after the teacher, then after a native speaker tape-recording the consonant sounds /b/, /p/, */v/*, */f/*, */th/*, */s/*, */th/*, /z/ and other problematic ones if need be. The teacher can, then, move to having the students do the same with words containing such sounds, preferably concentrating on minimal pairs so that the learners can recognize the acoustic contrasting features of the pairs of phonemes which they

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mistakenly substitute for one another. Here are some examples: ***b**light / **p**light; **b**lo**b** / **p**lo**p**; **v**ault / **f**ault; **th**ither /**z**ither; **s**ong/ **th**ong, etc.*

After this is sufficiently practised, the activity can be proceeded with full sentences, such as:

- ***Th**is **i**s **e**xactly **s**imilar to **th**e **z**ebra I **s**aw **th**ree day**s** ago over **th**ere in **th**e **z**oo.*
- ***P**eter **B**ar**p**ey **b**ought a **p**ur**p**le **b**asket**b**all for his **p**u**pp**y **B**oo**b**y to **p**lay with.*

To avoid boredom, which may be caused by much repetition, and in order to arouse the learners' interest, the teacher can resort to practicing tongue-twisters, an exercise which is fun and competitive. Here are some examples:

- ***V**igilant **V**ietnamese **v**eterinaries **v**ainly **v**accinated **v**ixens **v**ictims of **v**ery **v**icious **v**iruses.*
- ***F**ifty- **f**ive **f**unny **f**at **F**rench **f**ellows **f**ound **F**innish **f**ried **f**resh **f**ood.*
- ***T**heodore **th**ought **th**irty-**th**ree **th**ugs **th**ieved **th**ree **th**ousand **th**ick **th**imbles from the **Th**rifty **Th**imble Company.*
- Las**t** ***S**unday **S**ir **S**ebas**t**ian **S**axton **s**ent **s**ixty-**s**ix **S**wi**ss** **s**tuden**t**s **s**ight**s**eeing **s**outh **S**weden.*

The funny aspect of such an exercise consists in the fact that the students will laugh amicably at themselves and at one another while trying to fast pronounce the utterances correctly in class and also outside the classroom. But, its competitive characteristic is that the students can compete over winning points or extra marks which the teacher can allot every student according to the number of successive times they say out the utterance correctly.

Another practical amusing exercise is asking the students to listen to and correct the teacher saying out sentences containing mispronounced words.

It should, therefore, be noted that non-native learners need not always be exposed solely to the full forms of English or to the standard language of textbooks. With the help of teachers and foreign language assistants, they ought to be offered extensive opportunities for exposure to and practice of all forms of English inside and outside the classroom.

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In the matter of reduced forms and the stress and intonation patterns of English, the solution would be familiarizing non-native learners with them to spare them any listening comprehension difficulties due to these phonological features.

Perhaps before actually tackling reduced forms, and in order to gradually familiarize the students with them, the teacher can begin by introducing the weak and strong forms of certain prepositions, auxiliary verbs and modal auxiliaries because uttering weak forms in combination with certain other words make up specific reduced forms.

At the beginning, the teacher can hint at weak and strong forms maintaining that they are related to stress. Then, the students can listen to native speaker material the script of which they have on handouts, and mark *'w'* if the auxiliary or the proposition is pronounced weakly and *'s'* if it is pronounced strongly before they deduce the rule. Below is an extract of our own that can be exploited for working on these forms.

Company manager: What part of the city **do** you come **from**?
Job applicant: I come **from** the West End.
CM: **Were** you born there?
JA: Yes, I **was**.
CM: **Have** you got any children?
JA: Yes, I **have**; boy and a girl.
CM: **Does** your wife work outside the home?
JA: Yes, she **does**. She **has** a part time job; she **has** to stay **at** home **for** some time **to** take care **of** the kids.
CM: How many foreign languages **can** you speak?
JA: I **can** speak two foreign languages: French and Spanish.
CM: What company **were** you working **for**?
JA: I **was** working **for** Last Fashion Cry.
CM: How much **do** you expect **to** be paid?
JA: About a thousand pounds, I **would** say.

The students can then be given a table to transcribe the auxiliaries and prepositions pronounced in their weak and strong forms as shown in Appendix D.

The rule the students can deduce – as roughly stated by Bowler and Parminter (1992: 29 –30) – is: the weak form is used when the auxiliary or the preposition is at the beginning or the middle of the utterance, and when it is unstressed; but the strong form is used when the auxiliary or the preposition is at the end of the utterance, or when it is stressed.

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In the next step during the process of familiarizing the students with reduced forms, the teacher should give them examples, and then can ask them to give other examples of their own if they know any. Afterwards, he or she can give them handouts on which are printed a list of reduced patterns with their full forms, and ask them to read them out alternately. Teachers can get lists of reduced forms from various sources. An example list of about three dozen common patterns is in Ur (1984: 46). Later, the teacher can resort to dictation exercises. Using, at first, his or her own voice, he or she dictates to the students sentences containing various types of reduced patterns, and asks them to write down their full forms. Then, the opposite can be done: the teacher reads out full forms of utterances, and the students say out the reduced patterns corresponding to them. After noticing that the students have achieved some familiarity with reduced forms, the teacher can expose them to listening materials in native speakers' voice, and engage them in working on these phonological features following either of the two previous procedures according to the style in which the material is delivered.

Practicing stress can be initiated by asking the students to mark on a script where they think the stressed and unstressed words are. It may be beneficial for them to do this at first without listening to the listening material before they check their work while listening to it Ur (1984: 43). Later, the teacher can have the class listen to the text again, and identify the stressed words and the unstressed ones. After this exercise has been done and corrected, the teacher can ask individual learners to read out the text with correct articulation of such words for the sake of more practice.

Another listening activity would be a competitive one including work on reduced forms, stress, and intonation. The class can be divided into three groups, each works on one of these phonological features while they are listening to conversation between native speakers or a song by an English or an American singer on tape. The first group is to recognize and write down the full forms of reduced patterns. The second group is to write down a number of stressed and unstressed words. The third group is to write down a number of words pronounced with a rising intonation and words pronounced with a falling intonation. The teacher can play the material two other times, and the three groups should change turns, so that each group ends up by working on all the mentioned phonological

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features. While performing the activity, each group is granted a certain number of points for each correct answer, and the winning group can be rewarded.

A possible homework assignment can be asking the students to write down the stressed and unstressed words of the main stories of a radio or TV news broadcast, and also the ones uttered with a rising intonation and those uttered with a falling intonation. Another homework activity that can be assigned to the students is writing down the common reduced patterns they hear when listening to broadcasts on auditory and visual mass media.

If practiced extensively in the classroom under the teacher's guidance and help and equally by the students outside the classroom on their own, all these activities can considerably assist learners in getting accustomed to the phonological features treated above, and encourage them to be independent listeners of different listening materials in native speakers' voice.

4.1.2.2. Difficulties related to listening materials

Delivery of listening passages

As noted in the Literature Review Chapter, delivery of listening passages in native speakers' voice is characterized by the speed rate and the variety of accents in which the listening material is delivered. A great many students often complain that authentic listening materials are delivered at speed and in different accents that are unfamiliar to them, which causes them comprehension difficulties.

The fact that native speakers of English have different accents is, generally speaking, due, on the one hand, to geographical and cultural differences. In other terms, such differences have brought about various accents; that is why the British, the Americans and the Australians have their own accents. Additionally, people from different regions of the same country have various accents and dialects. In this respect, one could say that the expression *British English*, seen from a geographical angle – and as far as spoken English is concerned – may be said to be inappropriate; it can be replaced by *English English* (English spoken by English people), because the English, the Scots, the Welsh, and the Irish have different accents in English. On the other hand, it has resulted from the

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heterogeneity of English that lies in the diverse styles (formal, informal, and colloquial) used in a wide range of situations.

Doubtless, the various accents of native speakers of English, therefore, can cause comprehension difficulties to the non-native listener both as a learner and a teacher and to the native listener, as well. In this context, although Underwood (1989: 1) believes that listening in one's native language is to a great extent easy as it requires little or no effort, particularly in comparison with listening in a foreign language, she does not deny that "we sometimes have problems when listening in our mother tongue." She instances that "for some listeners, particular accents make listening difficult. Someone from the south of England may have problems understanding a speaker from the north; a New Zealander may fail to follow the speech of an American."

Without fail, the variety of native accents causes more comprehension difficulties to the non-native listener than to the native one. The problem is really far more serious – as Ur (1984: 20) contends – for those who are accustomed to listening only to their own teachers' accents, as well as for those who are exposed only to the English of textbooks as Brown (1994: 240) asserts.

As we are concerned mainly with the problem of delivery in listening passages recorded for non-native learners by native speakers, let us see what makes these listening texts difficult to follow and what could be done, so as to overcome this problem.

Many non-native EFL teachers affirm they have noticed that before and while taping listening materials, it seems that neither textbook designers nor native speakers took into account avoiding what may block the non-native listener's comprehension. Indeed, many of these listening materials are delivered at speed, and the native speakers recording them may not even realize that they are speaking rapidly.

Fast delivery often hampers comprehension for more some reasons. One is the fact that it is very likely to disperse the listeners' attention, especially that of those having a low command of the L2 or of those who usually focus on the meaning of all the unfamiliar terms while listening to material delivered by a native speaker. Fast delivery would make it difficult for the learner to grasp some and sometimes a considerable amount of the listening material content, because by reason of rapid speech many words seem to be missed out or pronounced unclearly. That is why after having listened to material taped by

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a native speaker, some learners at times ask their teacher to read it out for them, so that they can understand better, because on the one hand, they are used to his or her own accent, and on the other hand, they usually expect him or her to read it at normal speed.

Dealing with the impact of delivery rate on comprehension, Buck (1995: 119) maintains, "Speech rate determines how fast listeners must listen, and can have a considerable influence on comprehension. Basically, as speech rate increases, comprehension tends to gradually decrease until it reaches a certain critical level below which it falls off very rapidly."

Misunderstanding or incomprehension becomes more serious if besides fast delivery, the passage is recorded in an unfamiliar accent involving certain spoken English features, such as glottal stops, flaps, and reduced forms, which allows more speed in speech. Take, say, the following couple of sentences pronounced with glottal stops and flaps:

Give me just a little bit of butter and a bottle of water. It doesn't matter whether the water is hot or not.

It would certainly be very difficult for a non-native listener to decipher the meaning of the two sentences unless he or she is familiar with glottal stops and flaps.

As a possible solution to the problem of fast delivery, Buck (1995: 124) propounds longer pauses between ideas as well as redundancy:

> It is important to know that the major problem processing fast speech is not the speed of the actual pronunciation, but the number of the words or ideas per minute. So speak quickly, even very quickly at times, but allow longer pauses at natural breaks between idea units. Processing may fall behind during the idea units and then catch up in the pauses. Another little trick is to build lots of redundancy into what you are saying. Some scholars argue that simple repetition is better, while others suggest that you shouldn't just repeat your words, but say things again differently. Try both and watch students for signs of comprehension.

Resorting to pauses between idea units can be effective. Pauses can be allowed, especially in long listening passages, so that listeners can find some time to reflect upon what they have listened to. Such pauses, however, should not be unnecessarily extended, nor should they be as long as low-level students like, so as not to make such a procedure

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really time-consuming to the detriment of the following activities of the lesson. Longer pauses between idea units or between the sections of a listening material may be an exception during listening tests in order to help students achieve good or satisfactory results.

Redundancy can equally be actually useful; perhaps not mere repetition of exactly the same utterances, but that consisting in rephrasing ideas through certain strategies, such as explanation and lexical and/or structural simplification. This can make input comprehensible or clearer for listeners.

Generally speaking, to familiarize non-native learners with the various native accents and fast delivery, such learners need first of all to be made familiar with the above-examined different phonological features of spoken English. Achieving familiarity with these can pave the way for foreign-language learners to get used to the variety of native accents at various speed degrees. Such a goal can be accomplished through adequate exposure to listening materials.

Density of unfamiliar lexis

The abundance of unfamiliar words in listening passages can present an actual dilemma for both the teacher and the learner on more scores than one. In fact, if the teacher does not explain all the unfamiliar lexical items, the students – especially those having the habit of reflecting on the meaning of individual unfamiliar words while listening to spoken material – may run the risk of misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Another matter which may oblige the teacher in one way or another to introduce all the new words is the fact that students are expected to be tested on them.

Apart from the new vocabulary, the teacher – during the pre-listening phase – sometimes tends to check the students' knowledge of some previously-learned lexical items the meaning of which may have been forgotten, and which the former thinks are necessary for understanding the different ideas of the new listening text. This is very likely to add to the problem of the extra time the pre-listening stage may take to the detriment of the rest of the session. In short, this dilemma must be confronted and a solution found.

Should the teacher be obliged – as referred to above – to explain all the unfamiliar lexical items in listening or reading passages, he or she can resort to homework

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assignments. He or she can ask the students to look up the words left unexplained in class, and use them in a context appropriate to the one in the listening or reading text. To encourage the learners to do the homework seriously, the teacher should try his or her best to correct their work and reward good performance.

One fact that might spare the teacher going through the entire unfamiliar lexis in reading and listening passages is that many students often resort to dictionary work even without being asked by the teacher, just to enrich their English vocabulary. Even students who are – for one reason or another – not interested in English sometimes find themselves obliged by a certain need to look up unfamiliar words for the sake of comprehension. Take, say, the following situation by Allen (1983: 94):

> Suppose someone reads a horoscope that states, "People who were born on July 3rd are generous and extravagant. They are usually popular with members of the opposite sex; it is easy to love them. Although artistic and creative, they have certain faults. They are sometimes obstinate and often gullible." If the reader [or listener] of the horoscope was born on July 3rd, any unfamiliar words (such as **extravagant, obstinate,** and **gullible**) will almost surely be looked up and learned.

The problem of the density of unfamiliar words in listening passages can be worked out through simplifying the text. This solution is put forward by some ELT authors. Rost (1990: 163) advocates, "A final aspect of input to be considered concerns simplification; altering or planning text features and topics in order to make the input more accessible to learners".

Simplifying listening or reading texts can be advisable with elementary and preparatory level students, especially in case of authentic materials including low-frequency vocabulary and complex syntax. In reality, however, this solution is not that effective. Simplifying texts is not defectless. Rost himself quotes Klein (1987) as pointing out that in introducing modifications, the teacher may err in three ways. Maybe the most serious of these is the fact that, Klein claims, "The teacher's modifications may hinder comprehension if modifications alter the intended message." Field (1998: 13), in turn, disapproves of the mentioned solution and proposes what can be termed *an easy task versus a difficult text*: "Instead of simplifying the language of the text, one simplifies only

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the task that is demanded of the student. If the text is above the language level of the class, then one demands only shallow comprehension."

It ought to be noted that introducing new lexical items is not the only activity that can usually be performed during the pre-listening phase. This activity should normally be limited to demonstrating a few words only, those that are intrinsically important to the comprehension of the listening passage for the following reasons:

. Introducing all the new words during the pre-listening phase requires much time at the expense of the time allotted to the other activities of the lesson. As Field puts it, "A long pre-listening session considerably shortens the time available for listening." Hence, time should be divided between the three phases of the listening lesson according to how much each one should take.

. It is boring for the students and the teacher to spend one third of the session explaining a long list of vocabulary items.

. Devoting much time to explaining unfamiliar words may cause the learners to acquire an undesirable habit consisting in focusing all or much of their attention only on learning vocabulary, rather than on the various listening activities.

Accordingly, textbook designers – though they might not expect the teacher to explain all the unfamiliar lexical items in a listening text – should avoid including so many new terms in the teacher's guidebook under the vocabulary subskill section.

On the following page is a listening passage containing too long a list of presumably unfamiliar words and expressions meant to be explained during the pre-listening stage. The purpose of including it here is to show how many terms need to be introduced.

Without fail, not all the list of vocabulary items in the passage considered to be unfamiliar to the learners should be included in the vocabulary subskill section in the teacher's guidebook for certain reasons. Many of those words, such as *able*, *computer*, *mobile*, and *technology* are normally familiar to first-year secondary students, and the meaning of many others can be guessed by relying on contexts.

However, the lexical items that need to be introduced by the teacher in the pre-listening phase could be *brought up*, *be on one's feet*, and *get on well with*. These are instances of phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions whose meaning is totally different from the meaning of the individual words composing them. These terms look

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misleadingly easy, especially to the foreign-language learner, particularly when he or she tries to make out their significations through relying on their individual constituent words.

Another word that should be explained by the teacher is *chef*. The students may misunderstand it, because in the context of the passage it is a false friend of the French word *chef* when it, for instance, means *leader of something, head of family, head of government*, etc.

TITLE	**It's all in the preparation**
TAPESCRPIT	**Section 1** The most important thing to me is being healthy and able to enjoy life. It's a good time being a teenager, much better than when my mother was a teenager. They didn't have the technology we have now and they didn't have half the entertainment. My mother was already married when she was my age, 19. She was one of 6 children, and she shared her clothes with her sisters, whereas I just go out and buy them whenever I want. I bought a mobile phone when I was 16. Mum thought it was unnecessary at first, but I persuaded her that I needed one. I still live at home, so I use it to tell her when I'm going to be late. **Section 2** ''I really love my freedom, being able to go out and have fun. I'm lucky living here, but if I was in London I'd have to be more careful because it's not very safe. When I go out at night, I always make sure I'm in a big group of people. I love my job. I wanted to be either a chef or a nurse. My friend became a nurse, so I became a chef. I can't see myself sitting in an office working with a computer. Studying at chef school wasn't very hard, because my father was a chef when he was my age and my mum taught cookery. I want to become the best and work in all the top places. **Section 3** When I started here, the kitchen was full of men, but didn't mind. It's always a good laugh, but it would be nice to have a woman to talk to. I've been brought up as the only girl with two brothers and I've always been to mixed schools. So, I do get on well with the men. Everybody's very interested in making sure you're happy, and if you don't understand something, they take the time to explain it to you. It's a young person's job – you're always on your feet, running around. But, when you get older, you can make a wedding cake every so often, and that keeps you going because they're so expensive. My friends think it's great. They often say, ''Come round and make us dinner. Make us a cake.'' One of them is a nurse, another's a nursery nurse, and most of the rest are at university. They are studying to get the qualifications they need to become what they want, but I think I'm luckier – I've got a job and money while they are struggling on a student loan.''
VOCABULAY [meant to be explained]	Able – be to – brought up – chef – computer – cookery – entertainment – expensive – explain – freedom – get on well with – hard – have fun – healthy – interested – laugh – loan – lucky – make sure – mobile – necessary – rest (the) – use (v) – nurse – persuade – qualification – run – safe – struggle – technology – wedding – whenever – whereas.

Teacher's guidebook (first year secondary education, Tunisia, 2001: 10 – 11)

Field (1998: 12) voices a similar view that only a few vocabulary items should be explained in the pre-listening phase. He argues:

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> Pre-teaching of vocabulary has now largely been discontinued. In real life, learners cannot expect to have unknown words explained in advance: instead, they have to cope with a situation where parts of what is heard will not be understood. It may be necessary for the teacher to present two or three critical words at the beginning of the lesson – key words without which any understanding would be impossible. But, these should ideally be restricted to two or three. "Critical" means absolutely indispensable.

Stressing that students "have to learn to cope with a situation where parts of what is heard will not be understood" as Field upholds, implies that learners should be taught not to concentrate on individual words, particularly those unfamiliar ones which may block comprehension. As put forward in the Literature Review Chapter, they should rather be trained in relying on contexts, which would help them to be able to guess the meaning of unfamiliar lexis, misheard or even mispronounced words, as well as the signification of homophones and minimal pairs.

In the very framework, Brown and Yule (1983: 59) favor contextualizing messages, and seem to deeply believe that resorting to such a strategy would ensure better comprehension. Both authors point out that the listener "has not only to understand the verbal message, but to understand it in the context in which it occurs." On the other hand, they echo Field's above argument taking the view that we ought not to train learners to expect that they should be carrying out one hundred per cent correct understanding, and that they fail if they do not succeed in doing so. Brown and Yule so believe, in the sense that "a student trained in such expectations constantly experiences panic as he practices listening. He expects not to understand, since he has so often failed to in the past, and he stops trying to understand, as soon as he fails to recognize a word or an expression" (pp. 59 – 60).

In a word, relying on contexts may be the optimum way out of all the causes of comprehension difficulties examined so far in this section. In this respect, we consider below two types of contexts that both can assist learners in comprehension.

The first type is the one that helps the learner deduce the meanings of individual unfamiliar terms. It consists in the items that surround a particular word, and contribute to clarifying its signification. McCarthy and O'Dell (1994: 2) refer to this type of context

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recommending: “When you read or listen to English, it is sometimes possible to guess the meaning of a word you don’t know before you look up or ask its meaning. Decide first what part of speech the word is, and then look for clues in its context.”

The second type is the situational context. It helps a listener or a reader to fathom out the different messages a speaker or a writer intends to communicate even if the listening or the reading material includes many unfamiliar words.

For the part of listening comprehension, the situational context – as its name indicates through the term *situational* – involves specific factors necessary for comprehension, namely – as Underwood (1989: 3) states – knowledge of the topic being dealt with, identification of the speaker(s), their mood, relationship between the interlocutors, place and time where and when the speech or the conversation takes place, etc. Underwood (1989: 4) holds that if the listener manages to know these details, “comprehension is much easier.”

The first type of context implies applying a context-based approach to learning vocabulary. If students get familiar with making use of such an approach, it can be effective in developing in them successful strategies for grasping the meanings of unfamiliar words. Ying (2001) quotes researchers (Kruse 1979; Nation 1980; Gairns and Redman 1986; Oxford and Crookall 1988) who, he reports, agree that

> to learn words in context and not in isolation is an effective learning strategy. A word used in different contexts may have different meanings; thus, simply learning the definitions of a word without examples of where and when the word occurs will not help learners to fully understand its meaning. Learning an isolated list of words without reference to the context is merely a memorization exercise, which makes it difficult for learners to use the words in spoken and written language. Looking at the context in which the word appears seems to be the best way of learning vocabulary.

In this respect, Ying examines twelve context clues, which can help the learner infer the meaning of new lexical items. We shall consider only six of them, because some of them are almost alike. These, explained and exemplified in our own words, are the following:

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a. ***Definition***: Occasionally, the speaker or the writer defines words to help the listener or the reader with comprehension.

Example: We would like more students to specialize in *horticulture*: the science of growing fruit, flowers and vegetables, so as to increase our national production and decrease the rate of our dependence on importation.

b. ***Summary****:* A summarizing clue helps to conclude a situation or an idea with an expression. Such an expression is what can be deduced from the situation or idea.

Example: Although he is rich, he neither helps the poor nor does he himself seem to live comfortably; he still has neither a house of his own nor a car, and he never spends any money on holidays; he is really *mean.*

c. Example*:* The writer or the speaker often helps the reader or the listener to recognize the meaning of certain words or illustrate them by giving examples.

Example: I have bought some new *stationery* for my secretary: paper, pencils and pens.

d. ***Synonyms and antonyms****:* The listener or the reader can find the meaning of a new lexical item in the same sentence in which it is used, especially if he or she realizes that there is a relationship of synonymity or antonymity between specific pairs of words.

Example: *Industriousness* and *assiduity*, not *laziness* and *absenteeism* are the two main characteristics I would like them to be available in all my employees.

f. ***Comparison and contrast****:* The meaning of certain words can be figured out through conveying similarities and differences.

Example: Unlike many other birds of prey, the *owl* is active only at night.

In this sentence, we have both similarity and difference, which can make the meaning of *owl* quite clear. The similarity is that the owl is a bird of prey like other ones, such as the eagle, the hawk and the falcon. But, the difference is that it is active only at night. So, *owl* refers to a nocturnal bird of prey.

g. ***Morphology***: The learner can guess the meaning of words through considering internal morphological features, such as affixes (prefixes and suffixes) and root words.

Example: *Neocolonialism*. Through knowing that the prefix *neo* means new or modern, and that the suffix *ism* denotes theory, doctrine, or policy, and also relying on the root word *colony,* the learner can infer the meaning of *neocolonialism.* This refers to a modern

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policy in which a powerful country uses political and economic power over a poor country for its own benefits (*Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners 2002).*

As McCarthy and O'Dell (1994: 2) advocate, the first step towards recognizing the meaning of an unfamiliar term is to identify its part of speech. Suffixes can help the learner recognize the word-class of a multitude of words, and also derive one word-class of a term from other ones if he or she is familiar with the various nouns, adjective, and verb suffixes. The common such suffixes with examples can be found in the same reference aforementioned on page 16.

Prefixes can be used with the four main parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) at the beginning of words, thus changing their meaning. Learners need to know the meanings of the diverse prefixes, so as to be able to comprehend the signification of the words to which they are added. The teacher can provide the students with a list of the common prefixes with their meanings and examples to learn. Here is one:

Prefix	**Meaning**	**Examples**
anti	against	anti-war antisocial anticommunism
auto	of or by oneself	autograph auto-pilot autobiography
bi	two, twice	bicycle bi-monthly biannual bilingual
ex	former	ex-wife ex-student ex-president
ex	out of	excogitate excommunicate
mal	bad / badly	malformed maltreat malnutrition
micro	small	micro-computer microwave microscopic
mis	badly / wrongly	misunderstand mistranslate misinform
mono	one / single	monotonous monologue monogamy
multi	many	multinational multi-purpose multiracial
over	too much	overdo overtired oversleep overeat
post	after	post-war postgraduate post-revolutionary
pre	before/in advance	preschool prearranged premarital
pro	in favor of	pro-government pro-revolutionary pro-secession
pseudo	false	pseudo-scientific pseudonym
re	again or back	retype reread replace rewind
semi	half	semicircular semi-final semi-detached
sub	under	subway submarine subdivision
under	not enough	underworked underpaid undercooked

Table 9: Meanings of prefixes (McCarthy and O'Dell 1994: 18, slightly modified)

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To the context clues examined above, one can add the following:

a. Collocations: This term refers to words which are frequently used together. The learner can understand certain new words through their use with specific other ones, which are familiar to him or her.

Example: torrential rain. Relying on the word *rain*, the learner can guess the meaning of *torrential* (fast and heavy).

b. Onomatopoeia: Onomatopoeic words are those which are formed with sounds resembling or indicating their meanings. So, the learner may be able to recognize the sense of certain unfamiliar lexical items just through his or her uttering or hearing their correct pronunciation.

Examples: *baa; buzz; crack; meow or mew; moo; splash, etc.*

Both types of context clues lead us to point to two processes typical of listening or reading comprehension. These are "bottom-up" and "top-down". As Nunan (2002: 239) roughly puts it, the bottom-up processing consists in decoding the sounds of a language in a linear way into words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and full meaningful texts before finally deriving meaning.

This process can be asserted to correspond to the first type of context, in the sense that the learner, during such a process, relies on analyzing the grammatical structures of messages to get meanings across, because knowledge of grammatical rules is useful in recognizing the signification of words.

The top-down processing actually coincides with the second type of context, the situational context. As referred to above, it implies that the listener uses background knowledge of the situation, the topic, and the speaker(s) to interpret messages.

Nevertheless, it is a common undesirable practice that many EFL students are often engaged directly into listening comprehension activities without being previously equipped with what can really help them with comprehension. Foreign-language learners should, therefore, be adequately trained in applying the bottom-up and top-down processing skills, so that they may be spared comprehension difficulties due to certain phonological features, such as stress and intonation patterns, and reduced forms, and equally those that may result from the abundance of unfamiliar lexical items. Getting the

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students accustomed to implementing such skills can actually promote their proficiency in listening, and hence contribute to their autonomous learning.

Intra-English false friends

EFL learners are very likely to experience comprehension problems because of what is termed intra-English false friends. These refer to pairs of English words – as is the case for some other languages – whose morphology leads the non-native learner to think that they are antonyms. Examples of such words include items, such as *valuable/invaluable; patch/dispatch; hinge/unhinge; etc.* Therefore, in order to spare learners misinterpretation and ambiguity, they need to be made aware that many such words beginning with '*in', 'de',* and *'dis'* do not have a negative meaning, and thus are not opposites of the words that do not begin with these initial syllables, because these are not negative prefixes, but part of the root. So, it would be recommended to supply the students with a table including the common intra-English false friends defined and illustrated with example sentences.

Lexical interference

Tunisian EFL learners do not normally experience any problems resulting from phonemic interference, because they are familiar with the English phonemes through French, which they start learning as the first foreign language some years before they start English. However, another type of interference, which may cause them comprehension difficulties because of their learning of French, is lexical interference. This lies in the existence of many false friends in English and French, such as *achieve (E) / achever (F); actually (E) / actuellement (F); car (E) / car (F), etc.*, which can cause them confusion and misunderstanding.

Accordingly, the teacher is invited to address this issue. He or she should draw the learners' attention to differentiate between false friends as exemplified above, and cognates, such as *responsibility (E) / responsabilité (F); independence (E) / indépendance (F); etc.* On such a basis, the teacher can also supply the students with another list of the common false friends with illustrative examples, so as to spare them misuse during speaking activities and misunderstanding or incomprehension during listening exercises. On the following page is an example of a list compatible with the level of secondary school students with example contexts that may be misleading. In making such a list, I have relied on *Harrap's Shorter* bilingual dictionary (1996) to translate the false friends.

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French words + English equivalents	English words + French equivalents	Example contexts likely to cause confusion or misinterpretation
1. achever *vt to finish; to end; to conclude*	**1.** achieve *vt* (accomplish) *atteindre, accomplir (un but)*	**1.** We finally have achieved what we intended to do.
2. actuellement *adv now, at present, at the present time*	**2.** actually *adv* (really); *en fait, réellement,vraiment*	**2.** The government was actually trying to reach an agreement with the trade union representatives.
3. assister *v* (assister à qch) *to be present at sth; to attend sth*	**3.** assist *vt* (to help sb. or sth.) *aider, aider qn à faire qch.*	**3.** All of them eventually agreed to assist the investigation.
4. attendre *vt to await; to wait for; to expect*	**4.** attend *vi être présent; vt aller à ; assister à.*	**4.** All of us attended Mr. Simpson's lecture.
5. car *nm bus, coach*	**5.** car *automobile, voiture*	**5.** The sixth man took a taxi there; the car couldn't hold more than five persons.
6. extra *adj* (de qualité supérieure) (vin, repas, etc.) *first-rate, first-class ;* (remarquable) *fabu*lous	**6.** extra *adj a-* (additional) *de plus, supplémentaire b-* (spare) *de réserve, de rechange*	**6.** Take! This is a free extra nappy for your baby.
7. journée *nf daytime;* toute la journée *all day long, the whole day*	**7.** journey *n voyage, trajet* (of short distance)	**7.** She waved him goodbye and said, "Have a good journey! See you tonight at the concert."
8. librairie *n bookshop*	**8.** library *n bibliothèque*	**8.** I often borrow books from the public library, and return them on due date.
9. passer (examen) *to take or sit an exam*	**9.** pass (an exam) to succeed in an exam *réussir à un examen*	**9.** As he was ill and could not concentrate well, he did not pass the exam.
10. propre *adj. clean*	**10.** proper *adj convenable approprié*	**10.** Your clothes are not proper for the ceremony you will attend.
11. phrase *n. sentence*	**11.** phrase *n. expression ; locution (adverbiale etc.)*	**11.** Pick out a phrase and a sentence from the text showing such an attitude.
12. rester *vi stay, remain, keep, be left*	**12.** rest *v* (to take a rest) *se reposer, prendre du repos*	**12.** He had taken a rest at home for a few days before he went back to work.
13. regarder *vt look at*	**13.** regard *vt a-* (admire, respect) *avoir de l'estime pour ; b-* regard as *consi-dérer comme; c-* as regards *concernant*	**13.** She has fallen from grace; I no longer regard her as I used to.
14. sensible *adj sensitive*	**14.** sensible *adj sensé, raisonnable*	**14.** She is really a sensible person; she always thinks over any decision before she finally takes it.
15. travail *n* (pl. travaux) *work.* travailler *v to work*	**15.** travel *n voyage(s); v voyager, faire des voyages, aller en voyage*	**15.** Starting from next week, I will be traveling by night.
16. veste *nf jacket, coat*	**16.** vest *n* (for men) *maillot /tricot de corps;* (for women) *chemise;* (for baby) *brassière*	**16.** The missing boy was wearing brown sandals, blue shorts, and a red unbuttoned shirt over a white vest.

Table 10: Instances of interlingual false friends

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The teacher should deal with these false friends and have the students discuss the illustrative sentences concentrating on how they may be misinterpreted or confusing. For instance, sentence 2, *The government was actually trying to reach an agreement with the trade union representatives* may puzzle the learners with the past tense verb *was* (implying a past time reference) and the adverb *actually* which they may mistake for the equivalent of the French *actuellement* (implying a present time reference). Sentence 9, *As he was ill and could not concentrate well, he did not pass the exam* may be misinterpreted, in the sense that thinking that *to pass an exam* means *passer un examen,* the learner may misunderstand it as *since he was ill and could not concentrate well, he did not sit for/take the exam* instead of *he failed the exam* or *he did not succeed in the exam, because he was ill and could not concentrate well.*

The teacher can ask the students to look for other examples of false friends, and illustrate them with sentences in both languages with the aim of encouraging some bilingual dictionary work that may be useful to them for contributing to using English and French accurately.

Length of listening extracts

The mere length of listening passages may not be reckoned so serious a problem that it can cause comprehension difficulties to learners, especially as long as they are familiar with using sound strategies for comprehension. However, the reason for its examination herein is that some particular teaching techniques sometimes used for exploiting long listening passages are likely to have a negative effect on the learners' comprehension, and that certain tasks demanded of the students make it difficult for them to carry out the expected performance during lessons, and achieve good or satisfactory results in listening tests. This section, therefore, aims at consolidating the above claim, and offering a few suggestions that can help puzzle out the problem.

Let us, for starters, refer to examples of long listening passages and demonstrate what may make those that are not normally long as such.

What determines the length of certain listening texts is the type of content. For instance, a listening text can be a narrative whose natural development of events makes it long. A long listening passage can also be an argumentative material including several interlocutors expressing a wide variety of opinions and beliefs and making, opposing, or

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welcoming suggestions about a certain topic. A further example of a long listening extract can be one including a number of characters with many different personal details, such as some physical description, age, job, etc.

Furthermore, a factor that can make particular listening passages long or longer is redundancy. This takes various forms and has diverse purposes. An instance of these involves some additional elements related to previously-stated ideas meant to inform the listener about a fact or a concept. As referred to earlier, redundancy may also be manifest in some explanatory paraphrases of specific messages aiming at clarifying them for the auditor or helping him or her understand them better.

In general, a long listening passage requires more attention and concentration, which necessitates more physical and intellectual effort on the part of the learner listener. But, all this cannot be guaranteed throughout the whole listening session, because the students are likely to get bored, panicked, and tired; for they cannot keep listening attentively to a lengthy material for so long. Trowbridge (1980: 108) states that fatigue can occur progressively during listening because of the strain of listening, which may be caused by some factors, one of which is attending to material that is too long for the attention span of listeners.

Undoubtedly, the more the students get bored and tired, while listening to a long passage, the less their attention and concentration become, which would make them run the risk of misinterpreting or not understanding some or many messages. This equation is expressed in Ur (1984: 19) who refers to the negative effect of long listening texts on the listener's comprehension: “It is certainly a fact that in a long listening comprehension exercise a learner's grasp of the content is much better at the beginning and gets progressively worse as he goes on.”

Consequently, a long listening passage should not be exploited entirely for comprehension. According to how long it is, it can be divided into two or three sections to be exploited differently. One section can be treated for listening comprehension including tasks, such as true/false statements, sentence completion, answering open-ended questions, etc. It can also be exploited for intensive listening (by analogy with intensive reading, to use Rixon’s terms 1986: 10). This implies listening to shorter texts with the aim of extracting specific information. Another section can be exploited through *shadow*

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reading. This technique consists in allowing the students to follow along on the tape script or part of it while listening to input delivered by a native speaker. *Shadow reading* mainly aims at helping the learners improve their pronunciation. Hamdi (2001:5) states that engaged in such an activity,

> [the] learner can […] be guided to focus on a specific facet of pronunciation in the listening input (such as intonation, stress within phrases, suprasegmental stress, segmental sounds, linking between adjacent words, etc.) and finally, to imitate the speaker paying special attention to the sound or intonation structure of the utterances repeated.

S*hadow reading* can thus, be a good opportunity for learners to practice – as noted above – various phonological features, such as stress and intonation patterns, and reduced forms to further their familiarity with them.

If the passage can be divided into three sections, the third one can be treated for reading comprehension or a speaking activity. In case the text is a narrative, the latter activity can, for instance, be asking the students to imagine and discuss what the following events and the end of the story may be. The third section can equally be exploited for a writing exercise consisting, say, in paraphrasing and/or summarizing it in writing after having listened to it on tape or read it from the tape script.

Perhaps as opposed to intensive listening, without dividing it into sections to be dealt with differently, a long passage can be exploited for extensive listening, (equally by analogy with extensive reading in the terms of Rixon 1986: 10). This implies listening to longer texts for one's own pleasure, and involves global comprehension.

A task that is often a subject of students' complaint is one that is related to a material involving a number of characters with various personal details. The task consists in filling in a table in this respect. In the table, the names of all the characters are mentioned, and the students have to complete it with the right pieces of information of each character. The students disapprove much of such a task, because since they cannot remember the exact details relating to the right character, they are very likely to provide some or many incorrect answers. It is, therefore, advisable to limit the task to two or at most three characters out of four or five, and also decrease the number of personal details to be

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supplied, firstly because such a task is a matter of more memorization than comprehension. Secondly, for a reason of motivation taking into account that many students assert that one reason for their dislike of listening is the fact that they have low marks for it, learners should be sometimes presented with certain simple tasks, so that they can have good or pass marks for this language skill.

Another way of making the task within the reach of the learners is that the teacher can supply certain details, and the students have to complete other specific ones. This technique can actually be helpful to students, because providing particular details can remind the learner of other specific ones. The learner can, for instance, remember that character X, aged 25 (detail already provided by the teacher) is a taxi driver, because these two details are mentioned simultaneously in the listening passage.

Listening topics

The nature of the topics listening passages deal with affects the learners' physical and psychological readiness for listening to the material, their reaction to it, and their ability to interpret its content.

One of the listening-related problems a group of students mentioned, as response to a questionnaire in this respect (see the beginning of this section) is that *the listening text is sometimes boring*. This obviously refers to the fact – and it is also my experience – that there are listening materials that are certainly not compatible with the learners' affective interests, and are thus considered boring. Such listening materials very probably cause listeners to be bored, and to show no real interest in attending to them. Conversely, listening passages tackling interesting topics are likely to ensure the auditor's concentration and attention, and arouse his or her interest even when the language of the text is beyond him or her. A football fan, for instance, listening in a foreign language to a radio commentary on an important match in which his or her favorite team takes part will be following that commentary until its end, even if his or her command of the foreign language is low. He or she will be struggling for comprehension relying on the limited vocabulary he or she may know, as well as on the diverse stress and intonation patterns the commentator utters. But, suppose that just after the commentary is over, a news bulletin is on. The listener may turn the radio off, as he or she probably has no interest in listening to it.

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Rost (1990: 159) adheres to the above claim arguing, “Texts which are vivid or interesting may be easy to understand even though they contain unfamiliar content or difficult text features (e.g. complex syntax and low-frequency vocabulary).”

Below is an example of material, which – although it is said to be a famous song and meant to be funny – may be reckoned boring as a listening passage. It is on page 77 of book 7 edited in 1998 in the *English for the Emirates* series:

There is a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza,
There is a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, a hole.
Then mend it, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry.
Then mend it, dear Henry, dear Henry, mend it.
With what shall I mend it dear Liza, dear Liza?...
With a straw, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,…
The straw is too long dear Liza, dear Liza,…
Then cut it dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,…
With what shall I cut it, dear Liza, dear Liza?...
With a knife dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,…
But the knife is not sharp, dear Liza, dear Liza,…
Then sharpen it, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,…
With what shall I sharpen it dear Liza, dear Liza?...
With a stone dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,…
But the stone is too dry, dear Liza, dear Liza,…
Then wet it dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,…
With what shall I wet it, dear Liza, dear Liza?...
With water dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,…
How shall I bring it dear Liza, dear Liza,…
In a bucket dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,…
But there's a hole in the bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza,
There's a hole in the bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza, a hole!

As it may be conspicuous, the gist of this listening passage is really trivial. It is of no actual importance to students, especially as mending a bucket is not a practice as common as mending any other useful tool or mechanism. So, it would be absorbing to students should the text, for instance, deal with how to mend a puncture in a bicycle wheel since many of them, as teenagers, are fond of cycling. As concerns its form, it is also clear that this passage is much longer than it should be. What makes it so is the useless excessive

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repetition of several words. It is composed of 22 lines, which can be reduced only to four, or at most to six as follows:

Henry: There is a hole in my bucket, dear Liza.
Liza: Mend it!
Henry: How can I mend it?
Liza: Weld it or put a piece of cloth in the hole.

The question at issue, in this respect, is: how can the teacher manage to arouse the learners' interest in uninteresting listening passages in case he or she – for one reason or another – has to exploit such materials in class.

Briefly speaking, arousing the students' interest in such listening materials is one of the duties of the teacher and a sheer aspect justifying his or her success in contributing to the success of the learning process. Such a matter can be achieved through a variety of learner-centered amusing activities that can be devised according to the type of the material and its content.

Fifty U.A.E. second secondary students and fifty Tunisian students in the same academic level from Ghardimaou were asked to respond to the following questionnaire:
Which three topics of the following would you like listening passages to deal with?
Topics: *weather; description of place; camel racing; holidaying; a football match; detective stories; camping; traveling abroad; going shopping; accidents.*

The results revealed that the majority of Emirati and Tunisian students chose *a football match* as the most favorite topic. This is justifiable, in the sense that football is a worldwide sport, which most young people like very much. The second topic Emirati students chose in order of preference was *camel racing*, because it is a very popular traditional sport in the United Arab Emirates. No Tunisian student, however, chose *camel racing*, because this sport is not practiced in Tunisia, and there are no camels in the north of the country, that is why some students laughed mockingly when they saw the expression written on the blackboard, and one of them said surprisingly, "Can a camel race?!" *Holidaying* was chosen by Emirati students as the third one, and as the second one by Tunisian students. They chose this topic as one of the three favorite ones, because students usually like holidays.

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In a word, the content of listening and reading passages ought to be selected according to the learners' intellectual abilities and affective interests to ensure attention, concentration, and consequently comprehension. Therefore, it is advisable that textbook authors consult the teachers' and secondary students' opinions about the appropriate content of textbooks before finalizing their work.

4.1.2.3. Listening equipment and classroom acoustics

Listening equipment

Many EFL teachers often complain about the scarcity and the low quality of teaching equipment. Roughly, the only commonly-used listening pieces of equipment are radio cassette recorders, but in many schools, these are not available in sufficient quantities. As pointed to in the previous chapter (see 3.2.3.), in many schools there are only a few radio cassette recorders, which are shared by all the English teaching staff. Even some of the available pieces of listening equipment are so unsophisticated that the quality of the sound is too bad to be heard clearly.

If a language laboratory is claimed to be too expensive to be made available in every school, devoting a few modestly-equipped specialized classrooms to English language teaching in every school is not normally beyond the school budget. Among the necessary pieces of equipment that should be available in such classrooms are videocassette recorders. Without fail, listening to material on videotapes is far more helpful for learners than listening to it on audiotapes, inasmuch as the listener can see the speaker's picture, and a lot can be communicated through facial expressions, gestures, objects used by the speaker, and so on, which can really help the onlooker a great deal with comprehension.

Classroom acoustic environment

Another challenge with which EFL teachers and students express their dissatisfaction is the lack of suitable classroom acoustic atmosphere during listening sessions because of internal and external noise.

One factor that can give rise to internal noise is large classes, particularly – as noted earlier – if the teacher is not experienced enough to manage them. Indeed, in crowded classrooms, weak uninterested students are occasionally prone to make undeliberate or intentional noise, as they cannot stay a certain amount of time doing practically nothing.

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Therefore, the teacher's order as "be quiet!", or "stop that and listen!", for instance, while the class is listening to recorded material and doing an activity related to it, can interrupt the activity and may spoil all that has been started.

Extraneous noise comes from various nearby places, such as a public transport station, a market place, a factory, a busy street, and so on. In a number of secondary schools, the playground is inside the school building itself. In such a situation, the attention of students inside classrooms nearby the playground is likely to be discarded from the listening material or any other learning activity, not only by the noise made by their fellow students there, but also by the different sports activities they practice.

As maintained in Anderson and Lynch (1988: 7), a vital condition for the listeners' adequate hearing of the listening input and for their satisfactory performance is providing an ideal listening environment. Fulfilling such a condition in part as far as internal noise is concerned can be quite within the reach of the teacher if he or she manages to successfully assume his or her role as a facilitator of the learning process. To put it precisely and concisely in other terms, puzzling out the problem of internal noise resulting from large classes requires an experienced teacher who can cope with working at ease in crowded classrooms.

As to extraneous noise, the teacher should try his or her best not to make it overwhelm the classroom atmosphere in such a way that it prevents the learners from concentrating on the listening material or interrupts the learning activities in one way or another. This seems difficult, but as it is often stated, a successful industrious teacher can actually meet the challenge by making use of a variety of motivating ways (such as rewarding good performance) and teaching techniques that can help the students ignore outside noise and get engaged in the lesson. The teacher can, for instance, play some music of the type the students like, so as to draw their attention to what takes place inside the classroom, and not keep it attracted by what happens outside. The teacher can play it before the lesson telling the learners that it is meant to make them active and attentive, so that they can do well during the following learning activities. He or she can also play music (for example, a favorite song of the students') at the end of an activity or a few minutes before the whole period is over after having promised the class to so do if they perform as desired.

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In reality, making the students ignore extraneous noise cannot actually be always guaranteed. Therefore, training them in performing well or satisfactorily in a noisy environment may be the optimum solution. Indeed, encouraging group visits to noisy places where there are real-life English listening situations under the guidance of the teacher or brilliant students can help the learners a great deal to cope with extraneous noise during listening sessions. Examples of such places may be an international airport or a railway station, where the students can listen to announcements, a crowded stadium where they can listen to a live commentary on a sports game, etc. The tasks assigned to the learners can be paraphrasing the listening input or jotting down specific details if the materials are short, or summarizing them if they are long or somewhat so.

Attending such listening situations may be claimed to be beyond the teacher and/or the students on more scores than one, but true willingness and using specific motivating stimuli on the part of the English teaching staff and the school administration, and collaboration between those parties can bring about some ability, and hence attain the desired goal.

In Tunisia, English listening situations as those cited above are not frequently available, because apart from Arabic, it is French as the first foreign language in the country that is often used. Tunisian EFL teachers can then videotape instances of similar English listening situations for exploitation in class from T.V channels, from English-speaking countries, or countries where English is used as a second language or as the first used foreign language if they happen to visit any of these countries.

4.1.3. Developing EFL learners' listening ability

Rost (1990) suggests that developing the learners' listening ability should firstly involve awareness of the different comprehension difficulties, and an intention to turn instances of non-understanding and misunderstanding into satisfactory understanding.

The problems and difficulties EFL teachers encounter in the course of their work, and specific ones the learners face during listening sessions should be overcome before developing successful strategies for comprehension in the latter.

In order for the teacher to be actually familiar with all the learning problems and difficulties the students face, he or she should ask them to list such problems and

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difficulties on a piece of paper without mentioning their names, so as to express themselves freely, because certain students are shy or reluctant to tell the teacher about their learning challenges even when they are orally asked. The teacher should adequately examine all the problems and difficulties the students have listed, and try his or her best to find suitable remedies for them.

So far in this chapter, we have treated a number of difficulties and problems non-native learners encounter during listening courses, and suggested possible solutions to them. Certain solutions of these represent specific teaching techniques and learning strategies that can assist the learners a great deal in comprehension. For this reason, and taking into account that listening ability – as Buck (1995) argues – can only be fulfilled by ample practice in using language, relying slightly on Rost (1991), we are going to state, in this section, only what the teacher can do in the classroom, and what he or she can encourage the learners to do outside school, so that they will be successful listeners.

In the classroom, the EFL teacher can do the following:

. Trying his or her utmost to provide a good classroom acoustic atmosphere;
. Making English a regular medium of communication. In point of fact, he or she should address all the learners in English. As suggested in 3.3, even in cases where he or she finds it necessary to use the mother tongue, he or she can translate into L2 what he or she has expressed in L 1, so as to keep using English most often;
. Setting motivating listening activities, and establishing a realistic goal for each activity.
. Offering the students enough opportunities to exchange ideas about various topics of common concern;
. Concentrating on teaching, rather than on testing. In other words, the activities ought not to be dealt with as being tests to be marked, so that the learners can work more at ease seeing that many students feel apprehensive during exams;
. Making the students feel that they are making progress, so that they can become actually confident in their own abilities to use English communicatively.

All this and other procedures, which the teacher can consider useful in contributing to developing the learners' listening skills can actually pave the way for the students to become more autonomous listeners seeking various listening situations on their own outside school. To help them be so the teacher can implement the necessity of:

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- Encouraging and helping the students to make use of English language media, such as the Internet on which they can chat with English-speaking people, TV and radio channels, and audio and video tapes on which they can watch or listen to interesting materials chosen personally, or recommended by the teacher according to how important they are and how compatible they are with the learners' level of language proficiency;
- Prompting the students to seek adequate situations where they can interact face-to-face with native and non-native good speakers of English. Through face-to-face interactions, the learner is urged to play an active role, sometimes against his or her own will, and this is what effective listening entails. It requires an active listener who listens attentively, and tries to respond appropriately, so as not to be a mere passive hearer. One can then affirm that by means of face-to-face interaction, effective linguistic communication can be guaranteed. It cannot take place, of course, unless the speaker and the listener exchange each other's role in turn.

Conclusion

In sum, it could be argued that heightening awareness among the EFL teacher, the learner, and the school administrator about the various listening problems and difficulties, and sensitizing them to the necessity of making each of these parties have every intention of surmounting them according to each one's own ability can help language teachers a great deal succeed in developing their students' listening skills if the mentioned parties have managed to subdue those constraints. If such a success is achieved, other successes can ensue. More precisely, developing the learners' listening skills can provide a major ground for the development of their other language skills, which can contribute to attaining the goal of language learning, communicative competence.

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4.2. Oral expression

Certain foreign-language teaching approaches and methods, such as the Oral Approach, Situational Language Teaching, Communicative Language Teaching, and Total Physical Response lay more emphasis on the importance of oral production than on the other communicative skills in the course of the teaching-learning process. This principle may derive from the fact that language is primarily spoken before being read or written, which would imply that an individual could acquire their mother tongue or learn a foreign language without any formal instruction. Where foreign-language learning is concerned, the principle may equally be claimed to stem from the belief that the learner's life needs require that he or she be more orally fluent than being so in the other language skills.

Granted that language is basically spoken, an individual might be expected to use it quite well for oral communication. In the case of many Tunisian EFL learners, however, communicating orally in English effectively is still an objective that has not been satisfactorily achieved even – as noted earlier – after quite a long time of formal instruction. In this respect, a couple of inquiries are to be raised:

a. What factors lie at the root of these learners' unsatisfactory level of proficiency in oral communication?
b. What courses of action can EFL teachers take to help students develop their oral fluency in English?

4.2.1. Causes of oral communication difficulties

Relying on what I personally noticed, as well as the data collected from a questionnaire administered to three 4th form secondary school classes totaling seventy-four students, the various reasons for the low level of proficiency in oral communication could be summed up in what follows.

The importance of the environment

The environment has a vital role in helping the individual acquire a mother tongue or learning a foreign language. A great many researchers on first-language acquisition and foreign-language learning affirm this view. For instance, Sandström (1966: 115) maintains, "A large number of systematic and thorough investigations recently have

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shown how great the importance of environment is to the development of language. The influence of environment begins remarkably early, and its effects last a long time."

Generally, the quality of acquisition or learning and the time both processes take depend considerably on the amount of language the individual is exposed to through the community he or she lives within and with whom he or she deals in diverse ways. It is argued, accordingly, that a child living in a large family can acquire his or her native language during a period of time shorter than that a child living in a small family takes. Sandström (ibid.) voices a similar utterance stating, "Children living at children's homes have, even very young, distinctly fewer linguistic sounds than children living in families, which means that their use of language will be delayed considerably. This seems to be because children in institutions do not get enough language stimulations from adults."

As noted earlier, one major reason behind the problem is that learners are not sufficiently exposed to English either as spoken by native speakers or non-native speakers. In fact, they do not live in an English–speaking environment, and are not offered any opportunities to interact with native speakers nor are they helped or encouraged to create any on their own outside school. Even in the classroom, the amount of practicing the language is not enough at all to the extent of really helping learners with being proficient in using English orally, due to the fact – as equally pointed out in a previous section – that they have only a few English periods a week. Additionally, where speaking is concerned, too little time is specifically devoted to this language skill in comparison to the other communicative skills. One obvious explanation for this is that – as Miller (2001: 25) points out – English written academic examinations focus much more on reading and writing skills than on oral and aural skills.

Psychological factors

Certain psychological factors could equally be attributed to the issue. It is a personal teaching experience that a number of secondary school students, whose level of proficiency in English has been low since their early years of learning the language, seem to be somewhat frustrated; they have no real interest in learning, no hope of improvement, and no actual intention of trying to do so. This is manifest in the fact that when asked to participate in a particular learning activity, or try to improve their level in English they simply respond: *"I don't understand; "It's too late to catch up"; "It's my own fault from*

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the beginning"; "I don't like English"; The teacher was caring only for a few good students".

Other students, though having somewhat a satisfactory level in oral communication, tend to be often passive; they are reluctant to participate in oral learning activities. As I personally noticed among my students, and as noted earlier in the Literature Review Chapter, one possible reason for such an attitude is apprehension of making errors. This hindrance reflects the learner's lack of self-confidence, and might on the other hand, be due to overcorrection. This may have a far worse effect on those students if it is often done by brilliant classmates rather than by the teacher, in that learners would usually not like to be corrected by their peers.

What may make apprehension of errors more serious is one remarkable difference between speech and writing. In fact, writing as a language skill can allow the learner writer to have enough time to reflect upon what to write, how to write it, and to introduce necessary modifications into what has been written trying to finally produce a respectable composition. Speech, however, does not have such a peculiarity. Speaking fluently requires specific qualities, such as talking flowingly without hesitating or making long unnecessary pauses, which is a task many EFL learners consider beyond their ability. This is likely to cause them to yield to the belief that speaking is a harder skill to develop than the other language skills, and may equally present a psychological obstacle to their attempts to do so unless the teacher intervenes to deal with the state of affairs using sound measures.

Another possible reason behind the learners' lack of self-confidence is poor school results. Low marks are disappointing to students. Having had successive low marks, many students feel discouraged, and thus lose confidence in their abilities; and tend to be reluctant to take part in lessons and work harder for the sake of improvement. What is very likely to make the problem more serious is that sometimes assigning certain learners difficult speaking tests with the intention of causing them to have low marks is resorted to as a tool of punishment for misbehavior. Such a practice is undoubtedly very demotivating. Therefore, teachers should look for effective measures that can address the problem of student misbehavior.

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Contrariwise, a speaking test ought not to be used as an instrument of penalization, but rather as one means that can help learners build or strengthen their self-confidence. Putting it precisely, by way of example, in case a learner has had a low mark for a written test, the teacher can help him or her compensate for it with a good mark in a speaking test. Should the learner find it difficult to give a talk on a topic chosen by the teacher, the latter may give him or her freedom to talk on any topic of his or her own choice, preferably on condition that it is related to the curriculum.

Learners' lack of awareness of the need for English

The learner's awareness of his or her current and future needs for a foreign language can be reckoned as one of the vital stimuli that are likely to prompt him or her to do his or her utmost to achieve effective learning of the language during formal instruction in the classroom and also through autonomous ways outside school.

Nevertheless, due to a number of reasons, mainly the fact that they have a low command of English, and that English is reckoned to be taught as a mere academic school subject – as noted earlier – many Tunisian secondary school EFL learners seem to be really unaware of the importance of the language to their current and future life needs. What could be argued to further prove this claim – apart from a personal assumption – are the results of a questionnaire which was administered to 74 fourth year secondary school students who were asked whether they would choose to learn English if it were an optional school subject.

The result of the questionnaire revealed that 26 out of the 74 students (35.13%) answered in the negative. This result would, on the one hand, show that the percentage of learners having a low level of proficiency in English is high, because a student would normally not choose to learn an optional school subject if he or she were not good at it, or if his or her standard in the subject were not, at least acceptable. On the other hand, the result could affirm the above claim that students are not mindful of the significance of English as an international language and their potential need for it currently or in the future, because if they were so, they might choose to study it even as an optional subject, and try their best to improve their standard.

The question that is to be raised in this respect is how can EFL teachers sensitize learners to their needs for English in an attempt to create a real desire in them to improve their oral proficiency? This will be considered in a later section.

All the factors examined above have resulted in a great number of students' having so poor a lexical repertory that they cannot express themselves orally in English appropriately, either during oral learning activities, or even in speaking tests, which would normally prompt them to try to achieve the desired performance for the sake of getting a pass mark. They are most often lost for words, and say hardly anything, even when they are given a familiar topic to deal with.

4.2.2. Learner communication strategies

Other students whose semantic repertoire is not satisfactory enough to allow them to communicate effectively resort to using a number of communication strategies without being aware they are so doing in order to get their messages across. A threefold question arises in this respect:

a**.** What communication strategies do students use?

b**.** Should EFL teachers encourage students to use communication strategies? Why or why not?

c**.** Can communication strategies contribute to oral communicative competence?

Defining communication strategies

As defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002: 89), communication strategies are ways used by a learner who has a limited command of the language, to express a meaning in a second or foreign language. They put it plainly stating, "In trying to communicate, a learner may have to make up for a lack of grammar or vocabulary. For example, the learner may not be able to say *It's against the law to park here,* and he or she may say *This place, cannot park.* For *handkerchief*, a learner could say *A cloth for my nose.*

Given the appropriate vocabulary and accurate syntactic structures the learner lacks when communicating, and the ways he or she resorts to in order to compensate for such lack, Bygate (1987: 115) refers to the same notion as *compensation strategies* asserting that these are "ways of communicating by improvising temporary substitutes when the speaker lacks normal language."

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4.2.2.1. Types of communication strategies used by learners

These are presented below in order of their frequency of use among students.

Paralinguistic features

These are also referred to as body language. They denote the use of facial expressions, movements of particular body parts, namely the head, the eyes, and the hands to help communicate meaning.

Apart from the use of those body parts to convey messages, Richards and Schmidt (2002: 383) note that according to some linguists, paralinguistic features could also include those phonological characteristics, such as tone of voice that may reflect the attitude of the speaker to what he or she is saying.

It is worthy of note, however, that not all paralinguistic features convey the same meaning in all cultures. For instance, shaking the head is used almost everywhere for negation and disagreement. Yet, the same movement is used by many Indians to say yes or signal agreement. By implication, therefore, foreign-language learners need to be familiarized with the conventional ways of using specific paralinguistic features as utilized by native speakers when interacting with others, so that meaning can be expressed comprehensibly.

Appeal for assistance

In case the learner is lost for words or wants to use appropriate expressions, he or she may ask a classmate or the teacher directly to help him or her with the correct term by saying *"What do you call...?"* or *"Can you remind me…?"* or *"What's the word for…?"* Assistance might also be appealed for indirectly when the learner while speaking makes pauses, and looks at the listener in a way that may make him or her understand that he or she is asking for help.

Topic avoidance

As concerns this communication strategy, Tarone and Yule (1987: 51) point out that the learner simply tries to avoid talking about concepts that require target language items or structures he or she does not know.

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Message abandonment

Tarone and Yule (ibid.) explain that this strategy is manifest in the learner's beginning to talk about a concept, but being unable to continue, he or she stops in mid-utterance.

It could, however, be argued that referred to precisely as such, *topic avoidance* and *message abandonment* cannot really be reckoned as communication strategies simply by reason of the learner's evading to deal with ideas for which he or she lacks appropriate language concerning the former strategy, without any attempt to express them through any type of strategy, and equally due to his or her inability to carry on getting messages across in respect of the latter strategy, without resorting to any way by which he or she can do so, such as appeal for assistance from an interlocutor.

In this setting, Bygate (1987:116) refers to *topic avoidance* and *message abandonment* as instances of communication techniques included in what is called *reduction strategies*. These, he defines, as "Ways in which the speaker can maintain communication by adapting or reducing his or her message when lacking the necessary language. The author (1987: 47) makes it clear that while faced by difficulties in expressing particular concepts due to some tricky structure or shortage of vocabulary, the learner may resort to altering his or her message by, say, avoiding some of its content or abandoning it completely, and looking for something else to talk about.

Word coinage

This lies in the learner's creating new words that do not belong to the target language lexis. An example of word coinage by Tarone and Yule (ibid.) is **airball* for *balloon.*

Transliteration

This strategy consists in writing or saying an utterance from one language using the script or sounds of a different language. Some learners sometimes have recourse to this communication strategy when they are totally lost for words, and cannot mime the intended meaning or do not get assistance from an interlocutor. The Arabic name *Wajdi* (as is the case for all Arabic names) written as such in the Roman alphabet and pronounced according to the way it is written is an instance of transliteration.

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Language transfer

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2006), language transfer is the process of using one's knowledge of the mother tongue or another language when speaking or writing a language they are learning. Richard and Schmidt (2002: 294) put it simply: ["It is] the effect of one language on the learning of another." Both authors distinguish two types of transfer: positive transfer and negative transfer. They spell out that the first type is transfer that makes learning easier, and may occur when the source language and target language have the same form. For instance, both English and French include words that have an identical form in terms of spelling, and can convey the same meaning, such as *table*, *train*, *ticket*, etc. As regards the second type, negative transfer, the authors point out that it is also known as interference. They define it as "the use of a native-language pattern or rule which leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language." As an example, they state that due to the transfer of the French pattern *Je suis ici depuis lundi*, a French EFL learner may produce the incorrect sentence * *I am here since Monday* instead of *I have been here since Monday*.

Literal translation

Another communication strategy used by foreign-language learners that presents a pattern of language transfer, and more precisely related to negative transfer is literal translation or word-for-word translation. Indeed, as shown in the example above, under the influence of a mother tongue or a foreign language, the learner may translate from this language word-for-word, thus making lexical and/or syntactic errors. Many students of mine while speaking or writing English sometimes resort to translating word-for-word from French, especially because both languages have certain features in common (e.g. script, cognates). For instance, instead of saying *I want to use the computer to finish my work in time*, a learner may say **I want utilized the computer for achieve my work at time* relying on the French pattern *Je veux utiliser l'ordinateur pour achever mon travail à temps.*

More serious than the type of errors in the example above is that some learners, who resort to literal translation as a communication strategy, tend to use words that are neither French nor English, but derived erroneously from the former language, and try to anglicize them at the level of pronunciation and/or spelling. For instance, having in mind the French

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sentence *Quelquefois, j'utilise l'ordinateur pour corriger les erreurs que j'ai commises dans mes compositions*, they may say **Sometimes, I utilise the* ***ordinator*** *for* ***corrigate*** *the errors I have done in my compositions* instead of saying *Sometimes, I use the computer to correct the errors I have made in my compositions.*

Circumlocution

This strategy stands for the use of too many lexical items or more words than needed to get a meaning across, instead of communicating it precisely and concisely using the appropriate target language terms. Using this strategy, the learner may mention the definition, the function, or the physical description of an object, or sometimes all these together. For example, for the word *saw*, the learner may say *Tool that has a long blade with teeth used for cutting wood.* The above-mentioned example by Richards and Schmidt '*A cloth for my nose'* for *handkerchief* is another pattern illustrating circumlocution.

4.2.2.2. Is using communication strategies justifiable and conducive to learning?

Doubtless, communication strategies are part of our oral communication, not only in a foreign or second language, but also in our native language. A number of factual reasons support this assertion:

a**.** Human communication is not only linguistic, but includes other communicative features, such as those examined above;

b**.** Not everybody is really fluent in their mother tongue, so they have recourse to communication strategies to compensate for the shortage of linguistic output or appropriate language;

c**.** Despite fluency in L1, we sometimes use some communication strategies to make intended meanings well expressed and clear enough for the interlocutor to understand;

d**.** Not all native speakers of a language can use or understand any register, because they are of different cognitive abilities. This is why in a situation where, say, a doctor sensitizes people to how to prevent or how to deal with a certain disease, does not communicate all his or her messages using a purely scientific language, but tries to simplify them and uses other communication strategies, so that everybody can figure out what he or she is saying;

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e. Specific physical conditions, such as exhaustion and illness, as well as particular emotional states, like fear and excessive joy may cause an individual to hardly produce any linguistic output or express himself or herself appropriately, and may thus resort uncontrollably to using particular strategies, instead;

f. Certain communication strategies, namely kinetic features may – in definite sociolinguistic situations – be more suitable or reliable than using language to accomplish determined communicative goals. Below are a few examples that can confirm this argument.

. For some people, expressing refusal or negation by shaking the head may not be as offending as saying directly no. The same paralinguistic feature is considered less embarrassing or shocking in a situation when, say, communicating a negative exam result to a student or bad news to someone;

. When asking permission to go to the toilet, some students of mine use a hand gesture pointing to going out, because they believe that it is awkward and somewhat impolite to make the request in words;

. In some situations, the only way we can communicate certain secret matters in the presence of others is through using body language.

Accordingly, given the fact that communication strategies are one form of human communication, the foreign-language learners' use of these strategies is an obvious justification for this fact, and on the other hand, a conclusive proof of their unsatisfactory proficiency level in oral production. Despite this proof, however, and ineffective – as communication techniques – as they might be, communication strategies are an inevitable aspect of the learning process. So, they ought to be allowed in the language classroom, in the sense that if we prevent their use for one reason or another (e.g., for the sake of linguistic accuracy or fluency), many learners will keep or fall silent for fear of errors, and hence there will be no communication, and consequently there will be no learning.

Thus, as Rababah (2003) points out, it could be held that the learners' awareness of the nature and communicative potential of communicative strategies needs to be raised. It is necessary to draw the students' attention to the existence of these strategies in their semantic repertory, provide them with their types with illustrating examples, and sensitize them to their use in appropriate situations. Following from these recommendations is

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encouraging learners either explicitly or implicitly to use communication strategies without apprehension of errors. Nevertheless, they need to be made mindful that communication strategies are solely resorted to as a temporary recourse with the aim of paving the way for achieving oral fluency.

Among the ways through which learners can be encouraged to use communication strategies are:

- Tolerating their errors, except those that impede communication;
- Praising learners whenever they manage to perform an oral activity using linguistic output along with communication strategies;
- Showing learners that their oral fluency is evolving for the better, so that they feel self-confident and willing to improve it.

Aside from helping to work out communication difficulties, communication strategies can contribute to language learning in particular ways. The following points can adhere to this claim.

- Allowing and encouraging learners to use communication strategies without fear of errors can represent a psychological stimulus that builds confidence in their own abilities, boosts a real desire in them to learn, and incites them to do their utmost to improve;
- Using particular communication strategies implies making diverse types of errors, which indicates that the student is learning, and not merely imitating incomprehensibly at times what he or she hears or probably repeating what he or she is asked to;
- Some kinds of communication strategies, such as circumlocution, appeal for assistance, and miming sometimes require negotiation of meaning, which is a feature of learning. Learning is not restricted to the vocabulary of the target language, but also includes other language areas in certain situations, namely syntactic structures and pronunciation. Here is a simple personal experience that illustrates this point:

> Once while I was having a walk in Ajaccio, France, two Americans asked me for directions.
>
> “Is there a bank somewhere here, please?” They asked me.
>
> “Pardon, what?” I replied.
>
> “… a bank somewhere here,” they repeated.
>
> I couldn’t make out the word *bank*. First, because I couldn’t hear the last sound of the word well;
>
> I was not sure whether it was /k/ or /g/. Second, they pronounced it the American way, while the

way I used to pronounce the word then was somewhat erroneously affected by the way its French cognate *banque* is pronounced. So, I asked them: "Sorry, what are you looking for?"

Having thought I didn't understand the word *bank*, one of them made a gesture by rubbing the thumb against the index referring to money, and said: "Er, a place, … we want to draw out some money."

"Ah, a bank! There is one just before the end of that street," I finally answered.

In this interaction, communication difficulties were overcome by the use of two types of communication strategies: miming and circumlocution, and on the other hand, learning took place. I personally learned the correct pronunciation of the word *bank*, and remembered a linguistic feature related to contrastive analysis: generally, though conveying the same meaning, cognates have different pronunciation, and sometimes different spelling.

Circumlocution, as a communication strategy, can also be utilized as a technique to teach or recycle vocabulary and grammatical structures, as well as some language functions, such as defining and describing. One way to achieve this – as Wharton (1995) suggests – is through crossword puzzles, which would provide some fun in class that can enhance learning. Indeed, relying on the instructions for the words to be found in a crossword puzzle, the teacher can introduce new lexical items or recycle ones that were seen in previous lessons.

One may propose that the task can be done in pairs or in small groups. Then, the very instructions can be used to teach particular grammatical structures and language functions. Below is an illustrating example.

Number 3 across: A plastic or metal instrument in the shape of a triangle you use for drawing lines and measuring angles. The vocabulary item to be introduced is *set square*.

The teacher can help students by directly providing them with the first letter of the word, or they can recognize it through having found other words having common letters as the word *set square*.

Two grammatical structures, as suggested by Wharton (1995: 47), can be introduced:

a**.** *To use something + for + verb + ing*

or

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b**.** *To use something + to + base form*

A third grammatical structure may be: active sentence: *You use it for doing something* → passive sentence: *It is used for doing something*.

Language functions, in this framework, can include describing/defining an object: *The set square is a metal or plastic instrument in the shape of a triangle used for drawing lines and measuring angles.*

The students can be asked to describe/define other objects following the same pattern.

However, if communication strategies are to be allowed and encouraged as long as they can help learners with their communication difficulties, not all of them – for the sake of achieving oral fluency – should be directly encouraged. Students need to be sensitized to and assisted in getting gradually rid of certain communication strategies, namely those that do not really contribute to their becoming fluent in oral communication. Instances of these are topic avoidance, message abandonment, miming, transliteration, and literal translation.

Topic avoidance and message abandonment are likely to lead the learner to mention ideas that are not relevant to the subject matter of his or her talk or the interaction, or might cause him or her to fall silent, which results in communication failure. As concerns miming, if it is employed frequently, it may cause the learner to avoid attempting to express himself or herself verbally, which constitutes one serious barrier against effective learning. In a similar frame of reference, transliteration and literal translation, in turn, are predictably of no actual role in helping the learner with oral proficiency in the target language, in the sense that the constant use of these communication strategies will lead him or her to depend so much on his or her mother tongue or another language when communicating in the target language that he or she will be unable to convey meanings properly. Referring to the drawbacks of communication strategies, Thornbury (2005: 30) argues:

> It should be obvious that a repertoire of communication and discourse strategies can prove very useful for learners in that it allows them to achieve a degree of communicative effectiveness beyond their immediate linguistic means. However, researchers are in two minds about the long-term benefits of such strategies. While they may

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> provide learners with an initial conversational 'foothold', they may also lead to the premature closing down of the learner's developing language system (or *interlanguage*) – a process that it sometimes called *fossilization*. Certain learners seem to become dependent on their strategic competence at the expense of their overall linguistic competence.

4.2.3. Developing oral fluency: procedures, techniques, and approaches

4.2.3.1. The learning environment

Affective factors

Prior to implementing any practical measures with the aim of developing the learners' oral communicative skills, the teacher ought to take into account the vital role of particular affective factors in contributing to the accomplishment of such an aim. The procedures in connection with those factors, and with which a remedial program may be initiated are examined below.

It is argued that awareness of the causes of a problem is part of its solution. On the basis of this view, learners need to be acquainted with the reasons behind their low proficiency level in oral production and should, therefore, be sensitized to the necessity of having every intention of overcoming them in collaboration with the teacher and the school administration. Indeed, apart from the teacher's personal knowledge of the causes of the problem, he or she can ask students – preferably via a questionnaire – to list all those causes and suggest possible solutions. This certainly makes students aware of such causes, and on the other hand leads them to notice that the teacher is actually concerned with their communication difficulties, which is likely to constitute a psychological drive on their part to try to overcome them.

As mentioned above, one reason for many learners' low proficiency level in English is that they are hopeless of improvement, and are, therefore reluctant to learn. It is primarily the teacher's duty to rid them of this psychological hindrance. He or she is invited to raise their hopes about improvement and make them interested in learning through various ways. Mottoes and proverbs, such as *Where there's a will there's a way*; *If you will you can, etc.* addressed directly to students or introduced purposefully in lessons can be of some help in meeting the objective.

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Another motivational incentive in the same setting is – as Scarcella (1990: 346) recommends – helping students accept communication difficulties as normal. One way of doing so is reminding them that communication difficulties arise even when we use our mother tongue. In this context, the author states, "If learners realize that communication difficulties are a natural part of communication and affect everyone [using any language], their importance will probably not be blown out of proportion." Following from this recommendation is assisting learners in getting rid of fear of errors. Such assistance can consist in avoiding overcorrection on the part of the teacher or brilliant classmates and encouraging learners to express themselves freely without any feeling of inhibition trying to use the target language as possible as they can along with any other possible techniques that can help them get their messages across in case they are short of the appropriate L2 output, which implies encouraging them to have recourse to particular communication strategies, as suggested above.

Sensitizing learners to the importance of English

As Parrot (1993: 192) points out referring to oral fluency, "It is sometimes argued that fluency develops naturally in response to a need to communicate." A fact illustrating this assertion is that many Tunisian emigrants of my acquaintance working in France can communicate fairly well in French though they have had no or little formal instruction. One reason is that they have been living in a French-speaking environment for quite a long time. Another one is the fact that they work in a French environment and deal with local people has prompted and helped them to acquire an acceptable level of communicative competence.

In a similar setting, I interviewed a score or so of Tunisian people doing different jobs in tourist areas about what assisted them in being satisfactorily orally fluent in particular foreign languages. The majority maintained that their fluency has been mainly the result of their awareness of the need to use these languages. More plainly, their being mindful that these languages represent one essential tool of their trade, and also their frequent dealing with native speakers of these languages have assisted them a great deal in oral communicative competence.

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In this sense, it would be imperative to raise the students' awareness of the importance of English as a foreign language to their current and future needs. This can be carried out directly and indirectly.

To directly sensitize learners to the matter, the teacher can draw their attention that English is the most widely-used language in the world, and has thus been reckoned as a language of international communication. This assertion can be confirmed by some facts and statistics. By way of illustration, *New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language* (1993) reports that English is the native or official language of one fifth of the earth's land surface. Additionally, the use of English is widespread in scholarship and scientific research. For instance, 80% of the world's electronically-stored information is in English. More than half the world's scientific and technical journals, as well as newspapers are printed in English; 75% of the world's mail is written in English; and it is the language of three fifths of the world's radio stations. English is also frequently used in international trade. Tarone and Yule (1987: 49) assert, "The use of English as an international language for communication is probably more common than ever before. It must now be a regular occurrence that East-West interaction as between Japanese and Mexican businessmen for example, takes place in neither Japanese nor Spanish, but in English."

Indirect sensitization may be accomplished through engaging students into particular classroom activities, such as role-playing and simulating real-life situations connected to their current and future needs for English.

Creating an English-speaking environment

As discussed in 3.1., exposing learners adequately to language in real-life situations and via diverse learning activities simulating real-life situations, and engaging them in taking an active part in them is the optimum way that can best serve the aim of their becoming fluent in the target language. If, however, in a context where English seems to be learned merely as an academic subject, and there are other daunting conditions hampering the achievement of the mentioned aim, it is recommended to create an English-speaking environment at school. There should be an English club where – during their free time – students can watch English films, videotapes, plays, etc. and engage in activities in which they are prompted to act as active listeners and speakers. As Scarcella (1990: 347)

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proposes, “They can [also] invite native speakers to their classes” or to the club to converse on various interesting topics, such as those that are culturally related to both the L1 and L2. Should inviting native speakers not be possible, it would really be motivating to provide learners with facilities to chat with them on the Internet.

4.2.3.2. Classroom activities promoting oral proficiency

On top of what is discussed above, there are a number of classroom activities that can help develop speaking skills. Some of these are examined below.

Songs

It is argued that what remains in the learners’ minds and is highly appreciated in comparison to the other materials learned at school are songs. Apart from their entertaining function, songs are one of the most effective teaching aids. In nursery and primary schools, they have been used to teach pupils arithmetic, the alphabet of their first language, that of a foreign language, and certain aspects of proper behavior.

In Tunisian secondary EFL classes, however, songs seem not to be attached the importance that shows the crucial role they play in teaching and learning the language. Only a few songs are exploited in the course of the whole academic year mainly for listening comprehension lessons.

No wonder, songs can provide various activities for teaching the four language skills, and some subskills, such as pronunciation, intonation, and spelling. In this respect, a song can be one of the ideal opportunities for adopting an integration-of-skills approach to teaching EFL. Below is a simple example.

Speaking activity: exploiting the title. The teacher tells learners the title of the song before they listen to it, and asks them to guess what its topic is and the audience to whom it is addressed.

Listening activity: (a) listening to the whole song and checking the answers in the previous speaking activity; (b) listening to part of the song and answering comprehension questions.

Reading activity: a typed part of the song can be presented to the learners with missing words to complete in order to test their memory, and maybe their spelling.

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Writing activity: (a) summarizing the song; (b) shadowing in writing part of the song while it is sung.

Taking into consideration the speaking skill, a song has the following benefits:

- It prompts the learner to speak the target language while singing after the singer or on his or her own after listening to it;
- A good song in terms of melody and topic encourages students to learn it by heart, which may improve their vocabulary by remembering lexical items they saw in previous lessons or through guessing the meaning of new terms or looking them up. Additionally, it can equally teach learners new syntactic structures and the use of some appropriate language functions, which can develop their conversational style;
- Many learners prefer and try to speak the target language as a native speaker does. Songs can assist them in satisfying this desire by helping with native-like pronunciation;
- Songs can contribute to familiarizing foreign-language learners with some typical aspects of the target-language community's culture, which is likely to spare them serious communication difficulties when they converse with native speakers on cultural matters.

In order to derive as many benefits as possible from a song, the teacher may have students sing the song. Nevertheless, as it may be embarrassing and demanding to be asked to sing, especially in a foreign language, the teacher can have all the students sing after the tape or the CD, then ask individual brilliant learners to sing on their own before having other individuals do so. To increase the chances for learners to use language autonomously, the teacher can assign students to learn the song by heart and sing it in class during the following periods. Given the fact that testing usually enhances learning, and to ensure everybody does the assignment, the teacher might reckon it as a speaking test.

Of no less importance than the instructional function of songs is their affective role. Indeed, as Orlova (1997:41) claims, "Songs can motivate a positive emotional approach to language learning." One could spell out that this is manifest in the fact that a song can: (a) allow the teacher and students to relax, (b) quieten noisy students, (c) rid learners of feeling bored, (d) increase their attention span, and (e) create in them a liking for learning in a tension-free atmosphere.

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In brief, songs underlie a combination of cognitive and affective learning strategies, which together can achieve outstanding results if the teacher includes songs sufficiently in the curriculum, select the ones that best suit the learners' interests, and exploit them successfully according to the learning objectives he or she intends to reach.

Role-plays and simulations

Both expressions might sometimes be mistaken for being synonymous. Kayi (2006) refers to their being different stating, "Simulations are very similar to role-plays, but what makes simulations different from role-plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items [e.g., realia] to the class to create a [more] realistic environment." Richards and Schmidt (2002: 487) further clarify the difference asserting that simulations often involve a group discussion, but role-plays do not.

One instance of simulated situations can be one where teachers and parents discuss the causes of learners' poor school results and ways of addressing the problem. Another may be a debate between trade unionists and government officials over bettering working conditions and salary increases, whereas role-plays may include a dialogue between a doctor and a patient, a situation where a journalist interviews a film star, a job interview between a company manager and a job applicant, etc.

In role-plays and simulations, students are given roles in real-life situations. These situations would provide them with opportunities to communicate meaning verbally and kinetically in drama-like settings, which makes learning fun and easy. In this respect, it could be claimed that learning through role-plays and simulations can best serve the principle "I hear, and I forget; I see, and I remember; I do, and I understand" (Chinese proverb).

Role-played and simulated situations can be more beneficial to students if, as noted earlier, they relate to their current and future interests and life needs.

Memorization and loud reading

It is my experience that one of the ways many low achievers can participate in lessons is reading the instructions of activities aloud or learning by heart what the class is sometimes asked to. In this frame of reference, another procedure that can maximize speaking opportunities for the whole class, even without any aim of comprehension, is resorting to memorization of poems and loud reading of prosaic selections. These can be

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reckoned as two ways of practicing the language, specially meant for shy and low-achieving learners, which may assist them gradually in language production.

Loud reading is considered to be non-improvised speaking. This is why some ELT authors assert that such type of reading can contribute to oral fluency. For instance, Nicholas (1989: 33) points out that reading aloud is a good way of testing (if not teaching) such aspects of spoken language, as pronunciation, intonation, stress and juncture, and general fluency.

Memorizing poems may be resorted to more frequently, because as is the case for songs, rhythm is very likely to motivate learners and make memorization easy for them.

4.2.3.3. Approaches to teaching speaking

In addition to the above-examined activities, many other ones can be exploited for the same objective adopting particular teaching approaches. Following are examples.

Language-Experience Approach

As defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002: 289), Language-Experience Approach is used to teach reading to young learners. In this approach, students may recount stories and experiences to the teacher, who writes words on visual devices and uses them as a basis for teaching.

It could be put forward that in addition to using the approach to teach reading comprehension, it can also be adopted effectively for developing oral and written proficiency. For the part of the speaking skill, learners need to be encouraged to report – in class – events, incidents, and personal experiences trying to use the target language as possible as they can along with employing some proper communication strategies when need arises. The teacher and brilliant students can also help individual learners express themselves with a few words and nonverbal cues in a way that does not interrupt the smooth flow of their talk.

Similarly, it would be amusing and motivating – as suggested by Hamayan (1989) – to occasionally take learners to field trips, where they can observe live scenes and talk on them there or in class after the teacher has generated the relevant ideas.

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Extensive-reading Approach

As its name indicates, this approach is meant primarily for developing reading proficiency. Nonetheless, as good readers can usually create good speakers, the approach can be adopted to promote oral fluency. This can be achieved by the teacher assigning learners to read short stories – stories of no more than three or four pages – and then summarize them orally in class. The reading can be done by small groups of learners, in each of which there is an excellent student who helps the other members of the group with overall comprehension and with the summary before presenting it in class.

The approach can also include reading particular journalistic selections. As kayi (2006) states, "Before coming to class, students are asked to read a newspaper or a magazine and in class, they report to their friends what they find as the most interesting news." In a newspaper or a magazine, learners can also find jokes or riddles. Apropos these, the author suggests, "The teacher may call a few students to tell short riddles or jokes as an opening. In this way, not only will the teacher address students' speaking ability, but also get the attention of the class."

Free-speaking Approach

By analogy with the free-writing approach, one can adopt a free-speaking approach to teaching the speaking skill. This consists in giving the learner some freedom to talk on any topic of his or her own choice and interests so as to encourage him or her to produce and practice the target language. Activities compatible with the approach may include narrating a short story or an anecdote the student is familiar with, an incident he or she has witnessed, a social issue (e.g. addiction to drugs, unemployment, and juvenile delinquency) that touches and interests, mainly people of his or her age.

Another activity of relevance to the free-speaking approach is story completion. As described by Kayi (2006), "It is a very enjoyable, whole-class, free-speaking activity for which students sit in a circle." Regarding this activity – as its name indicates – the teacher initiates telling a story and stops at a particular event, and each student has to complete it. The author suggests, "Students can add new characters, events, descriptions, and so on."

The story-completion activity has the following benefits:

. Students learn in a comfortable atmosphere, where the teacher acts as a group member;

. The teacher's talking time is minimized, but the learner's talking time is maximized;

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. Being free to complete a story the way learners like implies relying on their imagination, which boosts their creative thinking.

Conclusion

There are a number of interrelated reasons for many secondary school students' low level in oral communication. These are mainly pedagogical and psychological. In point of fact, learning oral English – as the other language skills – is solely limited to the textbook in the classroom. This presents neither sufficient exposure to language nor enough opportunities to help them produce it. Added to this fact is that due to their low command of spoken English, they have no hope for improving their level, and they even seem to be reluctant to take any initiative to try to do so, mainly by reason of being unaware of their current and future life needs for the skill.

The teacher is, therefore, invited to address the issue. In order to develop the learners' oral fluency, the teacher ought to introduce certain affective procedures and take particular pedagogical measures. Here are instances of affective procedures:

. Convincing learners to reckon communication difficulties as natural;
. Helping them to get rid of apprehension of errors;
. Encouraging them to use communication strategies, but assisting them in gradually getting rid of those that do not really contribute to their becoming orally fluent;
. Praising their efforts and showing them that they are making constant progress, so as to help them gain confidence in their own abilities;
. Raising their awareness of the importance of spoken English to their current and future life needs.

Pedagogically speaking, students ought to be engaged in oral and aural classroom activities that are relevant to their affective interests and compatible with the learning objectives intended to be accomplished. Examples of these activities are songs, role-plays, and simulations. In the same context, the teacher should equally adopt approaches to teaching speaking, such as the Language-Experience Approach and the Free-speaking Approach that involve other learning activities of the same aforementioned qualities.

Additionally – as suggested earlier – in order not to restrict learning English only to the classroom, and for the sake of exposing students to more language input, an English-

speaking setting can be created at school or in a youth club where students are involved in diverse activities in which they take part as active listeners and speakers.

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4.3. Reading comprehension

A questionnaire has been assigned to 112 EFL teachers and two hundred and 223 secondary school students on which of the four language skills they prefer. The results of the questionnaire have revealed that the highest percentage of both groups of respondents prefer reading comprehension to the other three language skills with a percentage of 64.28% and 40.90% respectively. Teachers argue that it is the easiest skill to teach and learners claim that it is the least difficult to learn and develop.

With comparison to the other communicative skills, a simple fact that may justify the teachers' standpoint is that reading comprehension does not require so much correction as writing does, and it does not necessitate as many teaching materials as is the case for listening. One possible justification for the learners' attitude is that reading comprehension does not entail as much physical and intellectual effort as listening, writing and speaking do. Comparing it with listening, for instance, it is my teaching experience that almost all learners hold the opinion that it is really easier to work on a reading material that is close at hand, and which they can refer back to whenever they wish rather than struggling for comprehending a listening text, which they may miss a considerable part of its contents even after listening to it several times.

The above arguments, however, do not in reality imply that reading comprehension is that simple to teach, learn and develop. In fact, the reading ability of a high percentage of Tunisian secondary school EFL learners is rather low. This chapter, therefore, aims principally at examining the whys and wherefores of the issue, and attempts to make recommendations that could help remedy the state of affairs.

4.3.1. Definition

Various are the definitions of reading and reading comprehension depending on how they are perceived. For instance, while reading can be defined as "the act or practice of reading" *(Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 1978)* without any explicit or implicit reference to comprehending, another definition associates understanding with reading: "Reading is the process of recognizing written or printed words and understanding their meaning" *(Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners 2002)*. Such an association, one could state, may be made on the grounds that one usually

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reads for a particular purpose in mind whether the meaning of what is read is understood or not. As for reading comprehension, each of the two terms (i.e., reading and comprehension) can be defined apart, or both of them can be explained as a single semantic unit taking into account two interdependent processes, that of reading and that of comprehending.

Listed below are other definitions of reading and reading comprehension that can illustrate what is stated above and may provide us with an insight into the nature of reading comprehension.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006) provides eight entries for the term *reading*. One of these is:

- Reading is the action of someone who reads.
- Reading is the construction of meaning from a printed or written message. The construction of meaning involves the reader connecting information from the written message with previous knowledge to arrive at meaning – at an understanding (Day and Bamford 1998: 12).
- Reading is a mental or cognitive process, which involves a reader in trying to follow and respond to a message from a writer who is distant in space and time (Davies 1995: 1).
- Under the heading *What is reading comprehension?*, Françoise Grellet (1981: 3) writes:

> Understanding a written text means extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible. For example, apply different reading strategies when looking at a notice board to see if there is an advertisement for a particular type of flat, and when carefully reading an article of special interest in a scientific journal. Yet, locating the relevant advertisement on the board and understanding the new information contained in the article demonstrates that the reading purpose in each case has been successfully fulfilled. In the first case, a competent reader will quickly reject the irrelevant information and find what he is looking for. In the second case, it is not enough to understand the gist of the text; more detailed comprehension is necessary.

Generally commenting on the above definitions, one can infer two interrelated processes underlying reading comprehension: recognition and comprehension. Putting it precisely and concisely, reading comprehension implies identifying the script of the

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language in which the reading material is written or printed and the words constituting it, and understanding the messages the writer intends to communicate to the reader. Therefore, any definition of reading excluding reference to comprehension may be reckoned as unsatisfactory, because every act of reading involves - as noted above – a prior particular purpose that cannot be met without taking comprehension into account and intending to carry it out.

Referring back to what Grellet wrote, one notices therein – apart from the two key terms *reading* and *understanding* – her mention of significant expressions related to the reading skill, such as *advertisement, article, reading strategies, reading purpose, gist, and detailed comprehension*. This would lead us to stress the fact that reading comprehension involves three principal interdependent elements: what to read, how to read, and why to read. In other terms, there is a wide variety of reading materials that can be read in a number of ways for a broad range of purposes.

4.3.2. The significance of theory for teaching reading comprehension

Our mention of theory here refers to theoretical teaching of particular reading-related aspects compatible with the level of secondary students. There is, however, no real place for such teaching in secondary EFL classrooms, which may prompt one to wonder about the reasons behind this fact, and then whether theoretical instruction is actually necessary.

One potential reason behind the absence of such teaching might be the belief that the learners can carry out the expected performance without it, or simply with teacher brief explanations if need be before tackling any practical learning activity.

Arguing for the importance of theoretical teaching of specific reading-related aspects, it – generally speaking – is axiomatic that almost all that we do consciously usually derives from theoretical frameworks. Besides, it could be contended that if the teacher limits theoretical teaching to a short explanation before engaging the students into any practical activity, they are likely to forget what was explained, especially at a later time, and consequently may fail to perform as expected. For instance, as far as reading comprehension is concerned, if the learner is not knowledgeable enough about the type of reading materials, the purpose of the act of reading, and the reading technique necessary

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for performing such an act, he or she may read any material adopting any strategy he or she is familiar with. He or she is, for example, likely to spend much unnecessary time reading a long passage thoroughly just to only look for a particular piece of information that needs just some seconds to locate in a specific paragraph. In a similar context, Grellet (1981: 17) asserts, "Students will never read efficiently unless they can adapt their reading speed and technique to their aim when reading. By reading all texts in the same way, students would waste time and fail to remember points of importance to them, because they would absorb too much non-essential information."

Students, then, cannot get actually familiar with expressions, such as *types of reading material, reading techniques, and reading purpose* without being enough theoretically instructed in them. The results of the questionnaire below could confirm such a claim.

Two hundred and sixty-six baccalaureate students were asked whether they know what *skimming, scanning, intensive reading, and extensive reading* stand for, and were requested to write down a brief explanation of each of the expressions in case they are familiar with them (See Appendix C 8). To help them answer correctly the students were reminded that the expressions are related to reading as a language skill.

The results of the questionnaire are as outlined below:

- 258 students ticked no for *skimming* and 8 mistook the term for *skiing*.
- 253 students ticked no for *scanning*, 9 wrongly explained it as related to a particular computing process, and 4 ticked yes without explaining what the term means.
- Two students explained *intensive reading* as 'detailed reading', 5 ticked yes without explaining what it stands for, and 259 ticked no for the term.
- One student defined *extensive reading* as 'marginalized superficial reading', 7 ticked yes without providing any explanation and 258 ticked no for the expression.

These results clearly show that the questioned students are unfamiliar with the above-mentioned reading techniques. It can, nonetheless, be argued that students may use these reading techniques without knowing they do so. Yet, being theoretically familiar with those techniques and practicing them can aid better performance.

One hundred and twelve EFL teachers were questioned whether they are of the opinion that prior to engaging students into practical reading and writing, they should be

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theoretically instructed in particular reading-related aspects (e.g., skimming, scanning, extensive reading, intensive reading, types of meaning, etc.) and writing-related aspects (e.g., purpose, audience, etc.) on the assumption that familiarizing them with these aspects can help them be effective learner readers and proficient learner writers.

The results of the questionnaire are presented in this pie chart:

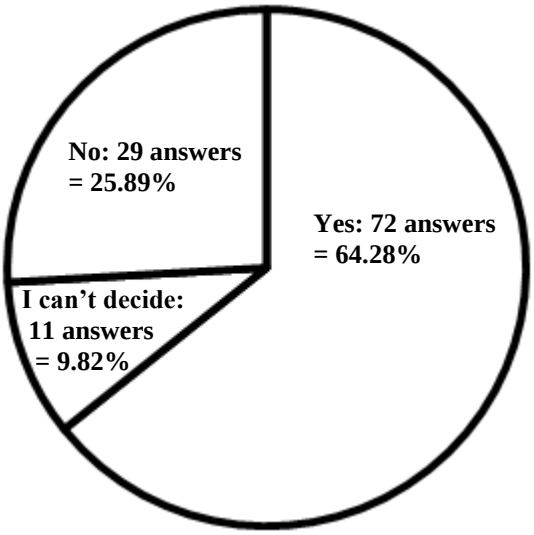

Figure 3: Results of questionnaire on theoretical instruction

As the results of the questionnaire show, the majority of the respondents approve of teaching particular aspects theoretically before tackling learning activities practically, which would imply that they are mindful of the benefits of such teaching procedure. The respondents' standpoint could, therefore, consolidate the contention – as put in a previous section of this chapter – that it is pedagogically defective to engage secondary school learners directly into language skill activities without any prior theoretical teaching of particular features pertaining to each skill and reinforcing it with enough practice. Doing so is like putting the cart before the horse. Accordingly, such teaching ought to be an integral component of our language-teaching pedagogy in the secondary stage. In this respect, it would be certainly helpful to students – in parallel with the textbook – to provide them with a booklet on theoretical teaching of such aspects along with practical exercises on them to do in class and refer to on their own at any time should the need arise.

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Marva Barnett (1989) argues that much knowledge about the mechanism of the reading process and how to merge that knowledge effectively into our reading pedagogy is necessary for teaching foreign or second language reading well.

Part of such knowledge ought to, of course, be what should be taught and how to be taught at specific stages of the learning process. For the part of reading comprehension, the question at issue in this regard is: what should EFL learners need to be theoretically taught prior to engaging into practical reading?

4.3.3. Prerequisites

4.3.3.1. Types of reading material

There are four principal types of text students need to be acquainted with before and while learning to read:

Descriptive text

A descriptive text is one that describes a person, an object, a place, a process, a phenomenon, and so forth. Descriptive texts can be classified into two categories: impressionistic descriptions, such as travel accounts; and technical descriptions, such as reference books (Alderson 2000). In order for learners to recognize descriptive passages, they may be recommended to bear in mind that such type of material usually makes use of specific grammatical elements, namely adjectives and adverbs in an attempt to shape a lifelike image of the look or nature of person or object that is subject of description.

Narrative text

A narrative reading material tells a story about a person or reports an incident, an event, and so on. This type may be easy for learners to identify if they are aware of associating with the mentioned type of text the existence of particular details, such as the number and names of characters, and the time when and the place where the story took place. Examples of narrative passages include anecdotes, jokes, short stories, tales, reports, biographies, historical accounts, etc.

Argumentative text

An argumentative passage is one in which the writer deals with a certain topic and expresses his or her opinions and beliefs about it, and may offer particular justifications,

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so as to persuade the reader of his or her arguments. That is why such kind of discourse – besides being called argumentative – is also termed persuasive.

An argumentative material can equally be a conversation involving several interlocutors, each voicing his or her own points of view, taking issue with, or approving of recommendations about a particular subject or problem.

Expository text

Generally, an expository piece of discourse explains a process or an idea. Unlike argumentative materials that are characterized with subjectivity, expository texts are marked with objectivity, and in comparison with the other three kinds of prose discourse, an exposition has a number of functions, all of which can be reckoned as various instances of explanation. Of these, we list the following:

- Defining a term: The definition may be concise or extensive;
- Explaining a process, e.g., how to do, make, or mend something; how something is done/should be performed following a chronological order;
- Analyzing given data, such as the results of a questionnaire;
- Comparing two or more items, i.e., demonstrating the similarities and differences between them;
- Dealing with the causes and effects/consequences (reasons and results) of an incident, a phenomenon, etc;
- Illustrating a certain fact with statistics;
- Explicating a certain issue through categorizing it, for instance, into classes, types, individual components, and so forth;
- Summing up the content of a printed or written material, such as an article, a short story, or a novella;
- Interpreting publications or parts of publications;
- Translating publications or parts of publications from the language in which it is written into another language.

In addition to the four above-examined kinds of prose discourse – according to the DIALING assessment specifications for Reading Comprehension (version 6, 18 Feb.

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1988, cited in Alderson 2000) – there is a fifth type of reading material. This is the instructional type. It includes personal instructions, such as signs and notes; practical instructions, as recipes; and technical instructions; and statutory instructions like directions, rules, regulations, and law texts.

Practical exercises on the types of text

While on the process of familiarizing the learners with the different types of prose discourse, the teacher may make use of the following practical activities:

- Giving the students a number of short passages and asking them to identify their type and their function;
- Presenting the students with a series of titles and asking them which type of discourse each title can suit;
- Providing the students with a number of diverse comprehension questions and having them recognize on which type of text each of such questions can be posed;
- Supplying the learners with short passages with a few questions on each and asking them, in pairs or small groups, to design other convenient questions;
- Giving pairs or small groups of students different selections of the four prose discourse types with no questions on them, and asking them to design suitable questions on each reading material. This is an activity that can create motivation and build self-confidence in the learners' learning abilities, because constructing questions on reading materials is usually a task of the teacher's; many students may like to act as teacher and want to do the job one day. However, not until the teacher has noticed that the students have become satisfactorily familiar with the four kinds of reading material and showed knowledge of the possible questions that may be posed on each kind that he or she can assign to them such an exercise.

Clues for recognizing text types and for comprehension

It ought to be noted that the learner may sometimes be confused to decide whether the text is of one type or another. For instance, while reading an anecdote in an argumentative passage, he or she may be puzzled about whether the passage is argumentative or narrative. In such a case, it should be made clear to the learner that the reading material is argumentative, but the anecdote is simply used by the writer to

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convince the reader of his or her views. An anecdotal passage may equally be part of an exposition, but not a story told for its own sake. So, what clues can spare the learner such confusion or similar ones, and help him or her identify the text type, and aid him or her with general comprehension?

The title

The title is the name or label given to a text. It usually stands out at the top of the page, and is usually written or printed in the middle of the line in bigger characters and/or in boldface. Sometimes during reading courses, the title of text passes without comment as if it were of no importance. Rather, titles can often help the reader identify the text type easily. For instance, the title *The unicorn in the garden* may make it clear that the reading material is narrative. An interrogative title as *Should human organs be priced?* reveals that the passage is argumentative.

In addition to assisting the reader in identifying the type of reading material the title:

- sometimes explicitly states the main idea of the passage. By way of illustration, a title like *Pollution; a real danger* can elucidate that the main idea is *the dangers* or *the serious consequences of pollution*.
- can serve as a reliable indicator of what the text deals with, e.g. *residential campuses on weekends*. This title does not clearly reveal what the passage is exactly about, but can help the reader make possibly right guesses. Examples of these may be: a- *how students spend weekends on residential campuses* (e.g., revising their lessons, cooking their own meals, going on outings, etc.) b- *cultural activities in residential campuses on weekends*. c- *how boring weekends are in residential campuses, because there are no recreational activities*.
- indicates the tone of the writer, which shows his or her attitude towards the topic treated in the text. Example: *A new nice bomb called globalization*. The oxymoron communicated through *nice bomb* indicates a sarcastic tone, which demonstrates the writer's negative attitude towards the notion. Such an attitude underlies his or her clear disapproval of it.

In a word, the title ought to always be relied on as an important clue to global comprehension and sometimes to detailed understanding of the text. In effect, it can be

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an opportunity for skill-integration activities. For instance, it may be exploited for a pre-reading speaking activity. The teacher may write it on the board, and have the students try to identify the text type, interpret it through making guesses about the main idea, and recognize the tone of the text and the writer's attitude towards its subject matter in case it is argumentative.

The title can equally be exploited for a short post-reading writing activity. The learners can be asked to choose another suitable title to the text, or if they are given an untitled text, they can be asked to choose a title, and then account in writing for their choice.

The author

The author's name may also offer a clue that can help the learners recognize the type of the reading material and provide them with some hints about its contents, on condition that it is familiar to them, or in case they are given some pieces of information about the author by the teacher, such as his or her background, literary works, ideology, and so forth. If, for instance the students know that the writer is a novelist, they can infer that the reading passage must be a narrative, and can then expect particular questions like those associated with the number of characters, the setting, and the plot. Should the author be, say, a trade unionist, the selection is very likely to be an argumentative passage in which he or she might account for some of the laborers' working problems and claim salary increases.

The source of the reading material

The source of the reading material as where it is extracted or adapted from, or published may represent some valuable input into the learners' comprehension, even before reading a single word of the selection by just having a glance at such a source in the end.

In many student manuals, however, the source of a number of reading materials is not mentioned. Textbook designers, therefore, ought to bear in mind the constant necessity of acknowledging text sources for the sake of scientific integrity and with the object of assisting learners in comprehension.

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Comprehension questions

Reading the questions posed on a selection before so doing it may be a beneficial comprehension strategy. It can equally help the learner reader easily identify its type and may provide him or her with handy information about its content. By merely reading a question like, say, *what is the writer's view about…?*, the learner can deduce that the passage is argumentative. Relying on this very question, the students can be engaged in a speaking activity consisting in conjecturing what the following questions might be. These might be: *Do you agree with the writer that…? Why / Why not?*; *What do you think the best solution* to…is?; *etc.*

In this respect, the learners may be provided with a table prepared by the teacher, or preferably by the whole class under the former's guidance including instances of the questions that may be asked on each type of text. This can assist learners in being familiar with the kinds of reading material and in guessing the questions that might be posed on them. Here is one:

Type of text	**General example questions**
Narrative	How many characters are there in this story? **;** What is the relationship of the main character with the other characters based on? **;** Put the following events in the right chronological order. **;** Write a short paragraph in which you sum up the story. **;** Imagine a suitable ending for the story. **;** etc.
Argumentative	Do you agree with the writer that…..? **;** Comment on the writer's reasons for his or her view that…; State a justified personal opinion regarding…. . **;** Do you prefer…..or….? Why? Why not? **;** etc.
Descriptive	What kind of person is character X? **;** Circle three adjectives of the following that best describe character X and account for your choice. **;** Write down two adjectives qualifying place X and pick out details from the passage justifying your answer. **;** Draw a picture of the….as described in the text. **;** Trace the route of the journey on the map accompanying the text. **;** etc.
Expository	What are the causes and consequences of…..? **;** Compare X and Y *;* What is the difference between X and Y? **;** Sort out the……according to type and function. **;** Complete the missing actions of process X.; Put the following steps of process X in the right order. **;** etc.

Table 11: Types of text and instances of questions likely to be posed on them

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4.3.3.2. Reading techniques

Acquiring reading skills depends on theoretical instruction and practical training through plenty of exercises. Where secondary school language learners are concerned, reading teachers should select the skills that are compatible with their academic standard and assist them in becoming effective readers.

One key factor that does take part in the acquisition of particular reading skills is being aware of how to read a text depending on its type, as well as on the purposes of reading. This leads us to examine the four major reading techniques secondary school EFL students need to be acquainted with.

Skimming: Reading a text quickly to identify its gist, (i.e., the main idea) or the most important points.

Scanning: Reading quickly through a material to find particular pieces of information.

Extensive reading: Reading long materials with the main aim of general comprehension, usually for enjoyment.

Intensive reading: Reading shorter texts involving detailed understanding to pick out specific information.

Practical exercises on reading techniques

Instances of possible exercises that can familiarize the learners with the use of the reading techniques referred to above are the following:

a. *What reading techniques can you use in the following reading situations?*

. A timetable of today's flights: You are waiting at an airport for a friend of yours to arrive from a particular place;
. A letter from your boyfriend/girlfriend;
. You want to know the final score of a sports game from a newspaper;
. The lyrics of a favorite song of yours;
. A joke;
. Tomorrow's temperatures in your city in a weather report;
. A fairy tale;
. The location of your country on the world map;
. A love story;
. A T.V guide: You want to know what is on on Saturday evening;
. A poem written by your favorite poet;

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. A newspaper article on the Nobel prizes awarded this year. You want to know who has won the Nobel Prize for literature;
. A magazine article about global warming;
. A novella;
. A cookery book: You want to know how to cook a particular dish.
b. *Give five examples of reading situations suitable for each of the four reading techniques: skimming, scanning, extensive reading, and intensive reading*.

A good exercise on scanning may be giving the students a newspaper index and asking them different questions that require them to refer to particular pages of the newspaper, so that they can answer them.

Dealing with scanning and skimming, Nuttall (1996: 49) suggests that "students need plenty of practice in these techniques; it is a good idea to devise races to practice them, to ensure the necessary pace. Many tasks can be done in groups, which makes the supply of materials more feasible." In respect of scanning, she recommends that exercises on this reading technique must be given orally, so that the teacher can impose speedy performance on the learners. She explains, "It is not scanning unless it is done fast." Following are some instances of the tasks she proposes for scanning:

a. Look at page five and find out when Shakespeare died.
b. Supply a page of advertisement, eg., from a newspaper.
Task: Answer a series of questions asked orally (eg., what tour agent offers holidays in China? Where can you get a holiday for £180?).

Skimming, however, Nuttall states, "Requires closer attention to the text than scanning does; it is difficult to skim if a text has to be shared by more than two people." Several of the tasks the author (p. 50) suggests for skimming follow:

a. Supply a text and a list of topics.
Task: Which topics are dealt with in this text?
b. Supply a dozen or so letters (you might collect suitable items from newspapers or magazines).
Task: Categorize the letters in some way, eg., which letters are complaining about something? Asking for help? Praising? Offering an opinion or an issue?
c. Supply several texts, some dealing with topic X, some not.
Task: Which of these letters deals with topic X?

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4.3.4. Reading comprehension difficulties

Prior to starting to implement any program intending to develop the learners' reading ability, one ought to overcome the difficulties and get round the problems that would block the students' comprehension and stand against serving the purpose of the program. Among such hindrances, we consider what follows.

Reading speed

Many EFL learners are often too slow readers. This problem needs to be addressed, because slow reading may discourage the students and/or prompt them to adopt learning strategies that would seriously obstruct the development of their reading fluency. For instance, while exerting himself or herself to read a passage, a slow learner reader may tend to often stop at unfamiliar words and reflect upon their meaning, which prevents him or her from finishing reading the material in the time allotted by the teacher, and may consequently fail to grasp even its main idea.

It is my experience that due to their inability to read fluently, slow EFL learner readers usually find themselves obliged to break sentences into nonsensical chunks, which causes the sentences to lose their structural unity, and thus may become seriously difficult for them to comprehend. Moreover, what may add to the problem is that while striving to read through a long passage, many slow readers get bored and stop reading it somewhere before finishing the act of reading.

Improving reading speed can be achieved through particular classroom procedures under the teacher's guidance and other ones performed by the learner on his or her own. Instances of these are examined below.

In class, the teacher may devote some time at the end of lesson during which he or she performs a model reading a few times. After each reading by the teacher, individual students are asked to imitate such a model.

On their own outside the classroom, the learners can carry on practicing loud reading of materials of a certain length and of a favorite type selected previously by the teacher or by the students themselves, and time up their reading speed. The timing-up operation can be done using a chronometer with which the student measures the time spent on reading the material trying to better it each time. The procedure may also be performed through

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employing the aforementioned piece of equipment and, as Grellet (1981: 16) suggests, a conversion table in which are registered in one column the reading time in minutes and seconds and in another one the number of words read per minute. Relying on the table, Grellet states, "Will make it easier for [the student reader] to try and read a little faster every time."

One way that can equally contribute to improving reading speed is assigning the students selections in prose and verse to learn by heart and recite them fluently in class. Aside from helping the learners read fast or faster, such a task may also assist them in ameliorating their spoken EFL.

Another technique through which reading speed can progress is competitive reading activities. An example of these may be entitled *Who manages to be the fastest reader?* The students may be given selections to prepare at home. In class, individual learners are asked to read out a particular selection, and the winner or the fastest reader is the one who finishes the reading in a minimum of time. Priority of performance and more practice should be given to slow readers without making the good readers notice it, so that they may not feel frustrated or think that their effort is neglected.

As the main purpose of the above-cited activities is to train the students in reading fast or faster, there may be no concentration on comprehension as well as correction of pronunciation errors. The wrong ways words are voiced and the incorrect manner stress and intonation patterns are articulated can be tolerated.

Since testing usually enhances learning, perhaps one optimum way that may really encourage and prompt EFL secondary school students to work harder on improving the quality of their reading in terms of fluency and accuracy is testing them on loud reading. As put forward in the previous section (4.2), this may be considered as a type of speaking activity, in that reading aloud can be termed non-improvised speaking.

Unfamiliar lexis

We earlier suggested ways that could help overcome possible comprehension difficulties due to unfamiliar vocabulary. Besides the fact that one may rely on what was proposed therein to work out similar difficulties in reading materials, one can have recourse to and draw the learners' attention to rely on glossaries, so as to overcome comprehension problems due to unfamiliar lexis.

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A glossary is a list of explanations of words and expressions that are deemed beyond the learner's linguistic competence printed after a reading material. These words and expressions are usually marked with an asterisk or superscript numbers or any other reference marks for ease of reference.

According to Widdowson (1978: 82), there are two types of glossary. These, in his own words, are *priming glossaries* and *prompting glossaries.* He refers to the former type as an oral pre-reading activity during which the teacher explains new lexical items. But, a prompting glossary is a set of printed definitions that appear either after the reading material or as footnotes at the bottom of a page or alongside the passage itself in the margins.

Accounting for the effectiveness of both types of glossary, the claim could be advanced that a prompting glossary is more beneficial than a priming glossary, which may prompt reading teachers to resort to it more often. Indeed, for the part of the teacher, a prompting glossary spares him or her time explaining new vocabulary items. Such time may be devoted to extending a particular activity of the lesson or doing a supplementary one. As to the learner, he or she can refer to a prompting glossary whenever he or she wishes to, which would help him or her memorize and learn the new lexis. In the case of a priming glossary, however, the student might not recall the meanings of all the lexical items the teacher has orally glossed.

Prompting glossaries appearing in the margins of a reading material can be more helpful to the learner than those printed as footnotes, and especially than those occurring after the passage. A plain point of this assertion is that marginal explanations are easy to refer to, and they do not interrupt the flow of the reading act. Consequently, they do not exhaust the reader's concentration as those explanations printed after a passage may so do, especially if the passage is more than one page long, by keeping referring to the glossary every time the reader comes upon a word or an expression whose meaning needs to be looked up.

In a printed glossary, however, the learner may find certain word explanations that seem strange to him or her or different from those with which he or she is familiar. Therefore, he or she ought to be made aware of and acquainted with the types of meaning, so as to avoid comprehension difficulties. These are the subject of the next section.

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Types of meaning

There are four principal types of meaning: denotative, connotative, contextual, and pragmatic. These are considered below.

Denotative meaning

This is the type of meaning secondary school students are mostly familiar with. It is the basic or literal explanation of words given in a dictionary, and is "integral to the essential functioning of language in a way that other types of meaning are not" (Leech 1981, cited in Hi Ji Sheng 2000).

Connotative meaning

This involves the additional affective, social, cultural, or moral value a term evokes, that is not related to its literal signification. Certain objects have similar connotations in different cultures, but a number of others have distinct connotations in different cultures. For example, in almost all cultures, *a turtle* is associated with slowness. *A donkey*, however, in English has a positive connotation; it is associated with patience, but in Arabic, it has a negative connotation; it is associated with stupidity.

Contextual meaning

As its name indicates, contextual meaning is not communicated through a word or an expression on its own, but by the situational context in which an utter semantic unit – as a phrase, clause, or sentence – operates. Maclin (1994: 120) puts it clearly stating, "Context means the setting of a word. The setting (the whole clause, sentence, or paragraph) tells you the specific meaning a word has if more than one meaning is possible." By way of illustration, the word *fast* used as different syntactic categories has distinct values. These are shown below in the following examples.

a. *fast* used as an adjective means:

- moving or done quickly: *Rolls-Royce is a very fast, expensive car. / His hobby is driving fast cars.*
- showing a time later than the correct one: *Adjust your watch; it's five minutes fast.*
- done without waiting or delay: *The trade unionists wanted a fast response from the government to their demands.*

b. *fast* used as an adverb means:

- quickly: *He had an accident, because he was driving fast in a building-up area.*

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. firmly; tightly: *The car cannot move on at all; it's stuck fast in the mud.*

c. *fast* used as a noun means:

. period during which one eats no or very little food, especially for religious reasons: *He broke his fast, because he fell seriously ill in the middle of the day.*

d. *fast* used as a verb means:

. to eat no or very little food for a period of time, especially for religious reasons: *It is obligatory for adult Muslims to fast during the whole month of Ramadan.*

Pragmatic meaning

This type of meaning derives from the social and cultural conventions of language, and is communicated through the speaker's or the writer's emotions, attitudes, or intentions.

The pragmatic use of language implies the ways, the situations when, and the reasons why particular words and phrases are used. Let us consider the meanings of *forget it* according to *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2002).

a. It is emotionally and rather impolitely used to indicate that someone is annoyed, because they think that a person's comment or suggestion is completely unreasonable: *If you're just going to stand there and criticize, forget it.*

b. It is used politely to tell someone they should not worry about something, because it is not important: '*How much do I owe you?' ~ 'Oh, forget it; it's nothing.'*

The pragmatic use of language equally reflects a significant characteristic feature of language. This consists in the fact that particular utterances must not be understood according to the meanings of the individual words composing an utterance. The utterance is rather given a conventional signification that can be learned from various sources or conjectured from the setting in which it is used.

Instances of linguistic elements manifesting the aforementioned feature of language, and that are common in reading materials, particularly authentic ones, are metaphors, idioms, and phrasal verbs.

An idiom is a vocabulary item composed of more than one word having a specific meaning different from that of its individual words. For instance, *to burn the midnight oil* is an idiom that means to keep doing a particular activity until very late at night.

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A metaphor is a lexical item consisting of a single word or more. Common metaphors are those that communicate an indirect comparison between two elements sharing a certain characteristic in a specific context. Here is an example: *He is a lion*. This means he is very courageous, or he is as brave as a lion.

Addressing the students, Nuttall (1996: 68) suggests a three-step procedure they can rely on to be able to make out metaphorical messages: (a) identifying the two terms of the comparison; (b) recognizing the characteristics of the two compared elements; and (c) verifying that your interpretation is relevant to the context.

In a similar frame of reference, speakers of all languages use many familiar lexical items metaphorically at times, even without really intending to employ them that way. Following are examples:

English: Hurry up! *Time is flying* = Hurry up! Time is passing very quickly.
French : Dépêchez-vous ! *Le temps vole* = dépêchez-vous ! Le temps passe très vite.

In a word, foreign-language learners need to be made aware of the nature of metaphors and idiomatic expressions, and trained in guessing their meanings from contexts, so that they will not be bogged down with comprehension difficulties when they come upon instances of them in their readings. By the same token, it is equally imperative that they be familiarized with the types of meaning, in that this would help them – as listeners and readers – a great deal with comprehension and assist them considerably in using language accurately and appropriately in both its oral and written forms.

Cohesive devices

As the same lexical items have different meanings when used as different parts of speech as well as when employed in various contexts, certain linking devices, too express different relationships between clauses and sentences and communicate particular language functions when utilized in diverse settings. This fact may result in confusion or misinterpretation on the part of the learner reader in case he or she is not conscious of it. Let us take the conjunction *and* as an example.

And is often used to mark additional information, but is also used to convey other types of relationship and express specific functions, as well. Instances of these follow:

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a. Intention or purpose of the speaker: *Please, come along and see how the machine functions.*
b. Effect or result/consequence: *He hasn't paid the least amount of his debts, and now nobody will lend him any more money.*
c. Promise (in an implicit conditional sentence): *Finish the work today, and I will pay you double.*
d. Emphasis (through connecting repeated items): *I tried and tried to convince her of my point of view, but she was still self-opinionated.*

Reference words

There are two principal types of reference: anaphoric references and cataphoric references. Anaphoric references are manifest in pro-forms, such as *him, this, there, do, etc.* that refer to a previously-mentioned element in a sentence. Here are examples:

- *Paul and Ann decided to fly to Spain for **their** honeymoon. **They** had booked a double-bed room in a five-star hotel **there** a week before **their** flight. The husband phoned the receptionist, and told **him they** wanted **it** to look onto the sea. **The latter** accepted **their** request, but informed **the former** that **that** was a bit more expensive.*
- *Life has changed a lot; today we don't have the same means of entertainment as our grandparents **did**.*

Cataphoric references involve such devices that refer to an element in a sentence that is going to be cited later. Here is an example:

*Having been ill-treated by **her** stepmother and her children, Rita decided to go and live with her uncle's family.*

For the purpose of sparing reader learners serious comprehension difficulties, they need to be familiarized with the functions of cohesive devices and anaphoric and cataphoric references before tackling practical reading activities. This can be best effected – as put forward above – through a theoretical course along with practical exercises.

4.3.5. Helping learner readers

Many ELT theorists underline the crucial importance of reading in foreign-language learning. As Bright and McGregor (1970: 52) put it, "The student who wants to learn English will have to read himself into knowledge of it unless he can move into an English environment." Nuttall (1996: 128) gives utterance to the same opinion stating that one best way to improve one's knowledge of a foreign language is to read extensively in it.

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From the above standpoints proceeds the implication that – as reading is a language skill – bettering one's reading proficiency can be achieved by reading. Frank Smith (1985), cited in Nuttall (ibid.) puts it concisely through the slogan, "We learn to read by reading." A great many students, however, do not usually read even in their mother tongue. From this perspective, one could raise these inquiries:

a**.** How can we create the habit of reading in EFL learners?

b**.** What measures could be taken, so as to help these learners be effective readers?

4.3.5.1. An extensive reading program

One handy measure that can create and reinforce the habit of reading in learners is resorting to an extensive reading program. This implies doing great amounts of private reading for enjoyment, away from the requirements of any type of ordinary classroom evaluation. The teacher has only to encourage students to do such reading, and make sure everybody does it with the intention of – as Richards and Schmidt (2002: 193 – 194) explain, developing good reading habits and encouraging a liking for it.

Books to be read

Books should be selected according to the learners' interests and their language level of proficiency, so that they will read them with motivation. The best way of being au fait with the type of books the students would like to read may be through a questionnaire, and on the basis of what the questionnaire reveals, books are to be provided in sufficient quantities. Such a questionnaire may read as shown in Appendix C 9.

Characteristics of the program

Teachers and students need to be aware of the characteristics of an extensive reading approach, so that such characteristics can meet its goals. Two principal peculiarities marking the approach are quantity and enjoyment. Learners ought to be persuaded and helped to read as much as they can for pleasure and global comprehension. Some other properties pertaining to extensive reading materials as cited by Nuttall (1996: 131) are summed up below.

Shortness: The book or any other form of reading material must be short, so that the student can finish it quickly and avoid being bored and/or discouraged.

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Easiness: As noted above, reading materials must be within the language proficiency level of the learners in terms of lexis and syntax, so that they will not be bogged down with linguistic difficulty, which would prompt them to stop reading or resort very often to dictionaries. Dictionaries may rarely, but not frequently be used, so that the normal flow of the reading act will not obstructed. Nuttall (1996: 231) recommends using abridged editions of books and holds, "The time to read long books, or those that deserve to be read with care, is after you have become a fluent reader; if you start with them, you will never reach that stage." Ono et al. (2004: 13) advocate the students' choosing books that can be read quickly and easily, in that such reading materials will add to their confidence and assist them in becoming more comfortable with the process of reading in the foreign language.

Variety: There must be a variety of reading materials on a wide range of topics according to the diverse needs of the learners in terms of content, language, intellectual maturity, and the different reasons for reading.

Goals of the program

Before starting an extensive reading program, the teacher ought to set its goals without making the students notice or consider that particular goals represent any type of classroom assessment.

The overall goal of an extensive reading program is to help the students become effective and efficient readers. Such a goal can be attained through bearing in mind to reach the following specific goals:

- Having a real liking for reading and acquiring good reading habits, which would make students become regular independent readers;
- Being capable of general understanding;
- Improving reading speed;
- Developing the students' semantic repertoire through expanding vocabulary and learning new grammatical structures;
- Being able to read correctly, namely in terms of connected speech, pronunciation, stress and intonation. This can be effected in particular if the student – as Nuttall (ibid.) suggests – makes use of audiotape recordings of particular reading materials by listening

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to them in parallel with reading silently and possibly playing them again after having finished reading;

. Improving spelling

Success requirements

The success of an extensive reading program depends thoroughly on the ways the reading is done. Listed below are a number of procedures that can match the nature of the approach, and can lead or contribute to the accomplishment of its goals.

. Reading with motivation and for specific purposes in mind: With regard to motivation, the student must have a real desire for reading. This can be created in him or her by the type of contents of reading materials he or she likes, the ultimate goal(s) he or she intends to fulfil, and by constant teacher encouragement. Stressing the importance of motivation in effective reading, Hedge (1985: 38) argues, "Motivation deserves a good deal of attention as a factor in successful reading development."

. Choosing what to read: The student may restrict reading only to what is relevant to his or her reading purposes and/or what suits his or her interests. He or she can then have a look at the contents page if the book is composed of parts or chapters to select what to read before starting to so do;

. Choosing when and where to read: It is important that the learner choose the time and place that can help him or her with concentrating on the act of reading. For instance, he or she should not read in a noisy place or when he or she is tired or feels sleepy.

. Ignoring unfamiliar words, particularly those that do not impede comprehension or lead to misinterpretation: As referred to earlier, dictionaries must not be often used, but may be resorted to rarely, and only when it is really necessary, so as not to interrupt the flow of reading and waste time needlessly;

. Changing the reading mode: The reader should read aloud or silently depending on particular requirements, circumstances, or purposes. For instance, loud reading is more appropriate to particular kinds of reading material, such as poetry and drama, than silent reading is. This is so firstly by reason of the fact that this genre of text is more enjoyable when read aloud, and secondly it is characterized by a special rhythm, tone, intonation and stress that can be well articulated only vocally, and solely through this way can this genre of reading material inspire the reader and listener.

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Another reason why the reading mode may be changed is that reading silently or loudly for a long time may reduce the student's span of attention. So, shifting to either mode is one possible way of keeping the learner reader mentally alert as long as possible.

The role of the teacher as a model reader

Private as it is and free as it is termed, an extensive reading program never implies giving full rein to the learners to perform it completely on their own without teacher intervention before it starts, while it is underway, and after it is over. The teacher's role in implementing the program successfully is really vital.

One major factor that encourages the students to read as much as desired and contributes to the success of an extensive reading program is the teacher's practical participation with the students in such a program. An aspect of his or her active involvement is that while the teacher assigns quantitative reading to the learners aiming at their becoming effective readers, he or she must himself or herself read a lot and show it to them in various direct and indirect ways. Nuttall (1996: 229) places emphasis on the importance of this factor: "Readers are made by readers", which means that learner readers are made by teacher readers. She makes it plain assuming:

> Students follow the example of the people they respect, and above all that of their teacher. If the teacher is seen to read with concentration, to enjoy reading and to make use of books, newspapers and so on, the students are more likely to take notice of her when she urges them to do the same.

Paralleling Nuttall's above argument, Bright and McGregor (1970: 69) hold, "A teacher who does not read can hardly inspire others to do so." Day and Bamford (1998: 136), in turn, do not mince words regarding such a teacher stating, "[he or she] may be undermining" himself or herself.

One simple direct way of the teacher's showing the students that he or she reads a lot is reading some interesting books in the library and asking the students having read the same books questions on their contents. On the other hand, as the teacher cannot read all the books available in the library or even certain books entirely, he or she can limit his or her reading to one chapter or several pages, or to reading the introduction, the preface, or the blurb. This can give him or her an idea about what the book deals with, which would

allow him or her to put some questions to the students or have them do certain activities related to the contents of the reading material.

One instance of an indirect way that would demonstrate the teacher's avidity for reading is – as Day and Bamford (1998) suggest – coming to class early, the teacher reads a newspaper before and while the students arrive. He would at times read out or discuss a piece of news with the students.

As for the practical procedures that would foster the students' interest in reading, one could suggest what the teacher may do:

- Showing the learners a book he or she has read, and rereading out some part of it stopping deliberately at suspenseful points, and asking them to guess what may take place next.
- Putting some comprehension questions to individual students on their reading to make sure whether they really read or have been reading a particular book, and equally to check their global understanding.
- Asking the students, especially weak ones about the various difficulties they have experienced during their reading, and discussing them trying to find suitable remedies. Being au fait with the difficulties encountered by students may be best done through a written questionnaire, so that the learners can communicate such difficulties freely, and so that the teacher will have enough time to ponder upon them and prepare possible solutions.
- Encouraging cooperative reading: The teacher chooses pairs of students or groups of three to do the reading together. Among these students there should be a weak reader to be helped by a good one. The latter reads loudly to the former who follows along reading the same material silently, and then both students change turns, so that the weak reader can be given more opportunity for practice. Such an activity can help weak learners develop their reading fluency and assist good readers in faster and further reading.

Paraphrased and supplemented with a little comment below are other procedures proposed by Nuttall (1996: 141) the teacher may equally have recourse to for the same aforementioned purpose.

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- Having a student who has read a book talk for some minutes about it without mention of the end of the story so that his or her colleagues can speculate about it.
- Encouraging the learners to do activities relevant to their reading, such as written or oral summaries, pictures for display, taping a dramatized version of the story, and so on.
- Providing audiotape recordings of some graded readers. The teacher may play part of a recording for several minutes at the end of each lesson, and the students listen to it while reading silently. These audiotapes may be lent to the students, so that they will perform the same activity.

Nuttall recommends – that the teacher may implement these procedures in a friendly and informal atmosphere by, for instance, having the students sit around him or her in the school library, or at their classroom desks arranged in a circle, so that they feel at ease, and will, therefore, become more enthusiastic about working.

Benefits of an extensive reading program

The benefits of an extensive reading program could be claimed to consist in the achievement of the aforementioned goals. In the same context, Grabe (1991) briefly sums up the advantages of extensive reading in the development of particular language areas and the creation of certain psychological factors that can help effective learning. He writes, "Longer concentrated periods of silent reading build vocabulary and structural awareness, develop automaticity, enhance background knowledge, improve comprehension skills, and promote confidence and motivation."

Verifying to what extent the goals of the extensive reading program have been fulfilled and knowing about the diverse difficulties encountered by the students during their readings may be best done through the use of a checklist. And on the basis of what the checklist reveals, the teacher can take remedial measures essaying to attain the desired goals, or at least to get satisfactory results.

Summing up what has been examined above on extensive reading, one may refer to the saying that goes, "Nothing succeeds like success." Put clearly in this context, it could be argued that a satisfactorily-successful extensive reading program can pave the way a great deal for the success of teaching the regular reading course. So, the question that

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needs to be raised is: what teaching techniques or approaches can contribute to achieving the success of the regular reading course? This is the concern of the next section.

4.3.5.2. Teaching the regular reading course

One way of ridding the learners of the boring traditional technique of exploiting a text followed by comprehension questions and contributing to their becoming effective readers is varying the reading activities. This can be best performed and can lead to good learning results through adopting a skill-integration-task approach that makes use of reading materials as a basis for merging all the four language skills. Roughly the same idea is cited in Raims (1983: 68) who points to the crucial role integrating language skills plays in communicative ability stating, "If we want our language-learning classes to come as close as possible to real-life communicative situations, then we have to organize activities that let the students use all the language skills." In the very framework, Grellet (1981: 8) recommends the connection of reading comprehension with the other communicative skills stressing, "Reading comprehension should not be separated from the other skills. […]. It is, therefore, important to link the different skills through the reading activities chosen."

Considered below are instances of activities manifesting the link between reading comprehension and the other three language skills, supplemented by an account of how they can contribute to the improvement of reading ability and language learning as a whole.

Activities implementing an integrated approach

Prediction

It is often a pre-reading activity that can assure the connection between reading and speaking. It can equally be a while-reading or a post-reading activity.

As a pre-reading activity, prediction usually concerns the gist of reading materials. Provided with the title of a text, selected key words, or illustrations hinting at or depicting its content, or all these elements presented simultaneously when the need arises, and if time allows, the students – in pairs, in small groups, or individually – are asked to make conjectures about what the text they are going to read deals with.

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Prediction as a while-reading activity requires the learners having read part of the text, for instance, to try to guess what the subsequent events or the following appropriate arguments might be on the basis of the content of what they have read.

Prediction as a post-reading activity may be simpler and can prompt more learner participation than prediction as a pre-reading and post-reading activity, particularly in case of a narrative, in that the students give full rein to their imagination relying on their wit and life experience to fancy, for instance, a suitable end of a story if it is not explicitly mentioned, or suggest a convenient ending different from that already cited by the author.

Should the students find it difficult to make right or acceptable guesses or to initiate any other similar type of activity relevant to the content of the reading material, the teacher may guide them to so do with questions moving gradually – on the one hand – from general questions to specific ones depending on the type of text and its content, and on the other hand, moving from what seems somewhat difficult to what sounds less so, and then to what may be reckoned simple and straightforward.

One remarkable benefit of predicting activities is that they pave the way for a better understanding of the text, and make the learners impatient to read it to see to what extent their speculations are relevant to its content. In this respect, Urquhart and Weir (1998: 185) cite a threefold advantage of prediction:

> …establishing a macrostructure for a text is an aid to more detailed comprehension. One might also hypothesize that the activation of relevant schemata should facilitate the reader's interaction with a text […]. Finally, this activity has the potential to clarify for the reader what the purpose for reading the particular text might be.

Class discussion

This can establish an appropriate connection between reading and speaking. Whatever the genre (poetry, drama, etc.) or type of text is, this activity can be performed during the three phases of a reading lesson. In the pre-reading stage, a class discussion can be a form of predicting activity. As considered above, this consists in making speculations about the gist of a reading material relying on particular clues, such as its title, specific key words, or illustrations. As a while-reading or post-reading activity, a class debate may reside in engaging the students into arguing about certain topics dealt with in the text,

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trying to work out a problematic point, suggesting solutions to a controversial issue other than those proposed by the writer, commenting on the author's points of view concerning a particular subject matter, and so forth.

Another instance of class discussion as a post-reading activity is having the learners choose a title to the text. The teacher may write several suggested titles on the board, and have the students discuss the suitability of each of them before finally agreeing on the one that best suits the text. In the same frame of reference, Nuttall (1996: 167) addresses the teacher proposing to give four or five alternative titles rather than allowing a free choice[making] "sure one is broad, another narrow, a third wrong in emphasis, and so on." She adds explaining, "This is an excellent way of summing up the accumulated understanding of the text."

Summarizing

This connects reading and writing. It requires that the students need to be trained enough through particular sound procedures in using this type of exercise, in the view that – as Nuttall (1996: 206) observes – it necessitates detailed comprehension of the reading material including the ability to differentiate between the main ideas and supporting details, identifying the relationship between the various parts of the argument, and so forth. According to the author, summarizing equally calls for clearly-communicated and accurate expressions. All this, she deduces, may make it actually demanding on the part of the learners to write a full summary on their own. Therefore, she alternatively suggests guided summarizing exercises, such as a gapped summary for the students to complete, or an inaccurate one for them to correct.

Summarizing a text can, of course, equally be an oral activity. An oral summary can thus maintain the link between reading, speaking, and listening. After having read the text, pairs or small groups of students are allowed some time to reflect and decide upon the summary. Then individual learners of each pair or group sum up the text while all the others listen to their performance, and may later comment upon it before the whole class eventually consents on a final convenient version.

In a word, whether the summarizing exercise is oral or written, guided or not, it is really beneficial to the comprehension of the text, inasmuch as it prompts the students to

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read the text more carefully, very probably more than once, which will help them understand it better.

Cloze procedure

This is a technique used to measure the relative readability of a text by having the learners fill in the blanks left by deleting every nth word, for example, every fifth word (Davies 1995: 169). That is the commonly-used form of cloze procedure.

There are several forms of cloze that can provide supplementary clues for the students, which would make the cloze exercises quite at the reach of all of them. These are true-false cloze, multiple-choice cloze, fill-in-the-blanks cloze, letter-blanks cloze, and first-letter cloze (Jacobs 1988: 46 – 47).

. True-false cloze

This exercise consists in providing blanks in the text or part of it in which answers are provided. Jacobs explains that the best way to do the activity is to read the entire text twice. After the second reading, the student decides whether the answer is true or false. If it is true, he or she writes *T* in front of the answer; if it is false, he or she writes *F* in front of it, and writes the correct answer in the blank in front the wrong one.

. Multiple-choice cloze

The students are given three alternative answers. They have to decide – after having read the whole text twice – which alternative (a, b, or c) is the correct answer by circling one of these letters or putting a cross on it.

It is advisable that the wrong options correspond to possible misinterpretations on the part of the learners. Before finally deciding on the best answers, it is actually advantageous to engage the students in a speaking activity that resides in accounting for their choice of a particular alternative as the correct answer, as well as for the reasons why they consider the other options wrong. This would prompt them to read the text carefully, which can help them avoid choosing any alternative haphazardly without reading it, as many disinterested and underachieving learners may be tempted to do.

. Fill-in-the-blanks cloze

As recommended by Jacobs, this form of cloze also necessitates that the learners read the text twice. They, then, have to complete a gapped part of it with words provided to them in a list.

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. Letter-blanks cloze

In this type of cloze, the learners equally have to complete part of a reading selection by filling in gaps, but the words with which they have to so do are not provided in a list as in the previous case. The clue that can help them recognize such words, however, lies in supplying them with dots or dashes forming the length of each space whose number equals the number of letters of each term.

. First-letter cloze

As the name of this kind of cloze indicates, it consists in giving the students the first letter of the word with which they have to fill each blank. Jacobs makes it clear that the gaps can be of regular length, or dotted or dashed ones according to the number of letters composing each item.

Student-student-interaction

This activity combines the four language skills. It consists in dividing the class into two groups: group A and group B. After having read the text or part of it, group A are asked to write down questions on it, and group B – on the basis of the content of what they have read – are asked to imagine what the questions of group A might be, and write down answers. Once both groups have finished writing within a particular time allotted by the teacher, they engage into the question-answer activity. If group B have not written down an answer to a question asked by group A, they must, of course, try to answer it. The two groups may be asked to change turns (group B write questions, and group A write answers) to work on the next part of the text if time allows, and if only one part of the reading material has been exploited.

Jigsaw reading activity

According to Richards and Schmidt (2002: 278), a jigsaw activity in language teaching is "a type of information gap activity in which groups of learners have different information that is needed to put together the solution to a task. In jigsaw listening or reading activities, different groups in the class may process separate, but related parts of a text, and then later combine their information to reconstruct the whole through class discussion or group interaction."

Putting it plainly, a jigsaw activity requires careful reading of material that can be two or more parts of the same text, or two or more different texts dealing with the same

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topic, and oral exchange of information between pairs or groups of students (student or group A provides student or group B with details, and vice versa) to answer particular questions or puzzle out a problem solving task related to the content of the reading material.

Journal writing

Journal writing is usually a composition exercise that suits the principle of the free-writing approach. In the section under consideration, however, journal writing – as a while or post-reading activity joining reading and writing – relates only to the reading material; it requires learners to write from and about their readings.

From their readings, students can copy anything that attracts their attention. Instances of what they can write down may include certain ideas they like, proverbs, saying, moral lessons, idioms, new vocabulary items, particular syntactic structures, and so on. Such an activity has a number of benefits:

a**.** It is an easy task that all the students can do;

b**.** It gives the students a sense that their reading is active, in that copying some material from the text makes them feel that they are doing something profitable with it, even with no or little understanding of its content;

c**.** It can assist them in remembering ideas from the text that may be used for a later class debate;

d**.** It may help them to learn new lexical items and new grammatical structures that they will subsequently utilize in their compositions.

Perhaps more important than what the students copy from what they have read is what they write about it. This involves their evaluation of the text as a form of communication between the writer and the reader, which demands extensive training in how to perform it as desired. Students may record such an evaluation in their journal-writing notebooks, particularly during their private extensive readings, or do it as a post-reading classroom activity.

The evaluating points depend on the type of text and its content. These may, for instance, involve the learner reader's reaction to the reading material; his or her comments on the writer's style in treating a particular topic or relating a certain story; and his or her purposes or intentions; and to what extent he or she has fulfilled them. If, for example, the

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text is argumentative, the possible questions the student may pose to himself or herself and answer in writing in his or her journal-writing notebook can be ones like:

. *Is the writer objective or subjective in dealing with …….?*

. *Do I agree or disagree with the writer that …….? Why?*

. *To what extent are the writer's arguments persuasive?*

Conclusion

In order for the foreign-language learners' reading ability to develop remarkably, it is recommended to implement the necessity of:

. Teaching particular key reading-related aspects theoretically and reinforcing such teaching with plenty of practical exercises, so that the learners can get acquainted with them in view of their importance in assisting them in becoming effective readers;

. Developing in learners effective reading strategies, and on the other hand, sensitizing them to certain ineffective reading methods and their detrimental impact on their reading skills;

. Setting up an extensive reading program under the teacher's supervision without any intention of ordinary classroom evaluation, but with the object of aiding learners in acquiring good reading habits and having a real constant desire for reading;

. Adopting a skill-integration-task approach to teaching reading comprehension, so as to keep working so often on some or all of the language skills in every reading lesson;

. Having the students self-assess their understanding of what they have read and evaluate the reading material as a medium of communication between the writer and the reader for the sake of a better comprehension, as well as for improving their reading skills.

To put it in a nutshell, it could be affirmed that if these recommendations are implemented successfully, foreign-language learners can become not only mere good readers, but also autonomous and critical readers, which would contribute to their proficiency in the other communicative skills.

4.4. Writing

Methodologists, teachers, and learners all affirm that writing, even in the mother tongue, is a difficult language skill to acquire, generally because of the conventions of the skill that are typified by linguistic accuracy and rhetorical organization. Writing can be taught in a variety of methods, and each can be successful if the teacher applies the one that suits the students' academic level, their level of proficiency in the language, and the instructional materials at hand.

As was stated earlier in the section devoted to listening, it is equally a common pedagogical shortcoming that secondary school students are often engaged in writing without being instructed in particular writing-related aspects before learning to write. Such an issue and other factors have made it seriously difficult for a high percentage of learners to be able to communicate through the written medium.

In this section, we will mainly examine the reasons behind the mentioned problem, and offer suggestions about how writing can be taught and developed.

4.4.1. General aspects

Writing as a medium of communication

A respectable amount of the communication taking place between people in their everyday life is carried out through writing. This is because, on the one hand, it is not always possible – for specific reasons – to communicate orally, and on the other hand, certain types of communication – for other particular justifications – can be performed solely via the written medium.

A striking example in this context is that literary works are expressed and communicated to the reader in written form. For a cultural reason, a person seeking employment cannot normally apply for particular types of job orally, but through writing a letter of application to an employer. A further simple instance proving our need for written communication lies in the fact that many people often – for various reasons, one of which may be material – resort to writing text messages, e-mailing or leaving each other notes instead of communicating through the phone or other means.

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In particular circumstances, writing may be the only channel that can facilitate communication between people living in different parts of the same country. This fact, as Brookes and Grundy (2003: 2) report, is peculiar to Chinese people whose various regional dialects share a familiar written form, but are commonly incomprehensible in spoken form.

However, not all the people are as able to communicate in writing as they are via speech. This leads us to investigate below a number of differences between speech and writing as two distinct media of communication, which would make us draw an inference about both media that will be stated later.

Differences between speech and writing

There certainly are many differences between speech and writing as two forms of human communication. Relying on Raimes (1983), we state below a number of these differences.

- Speech is universal. Everybody can speak, but not everybody can write. For example, illiterate people can communicate orally, but they cannot do so in writing. Yet, it is worthy of note, in this context, that not all languages have a written form.
- Speakers use their voices, intonation, tone, pauses, body movements, and facial expressions to communicate ideas, whereas writers rely on the scripted words on a page or screen, and use punctuation marks for the same purpose.
- Speakers often use simple sentences overlinked by *and* and *but*, and probably including *er* and *eh* repeated many times. But, writers usually employ long complex sentences connected with pro-forms, such as *who, which, so, there*, and other linkers, such as *nevertheless, moreover, etc.*
- Speaking can be spontaneous and unplanned. Most writing, however, is planned. It takes time, that is why we can go back to what we have written, and make various changes if need be.
- Speech is usually characterized by informality and redundancy. When we speak to someone and want them to understand better, we often use expressions like *this means, by this I'd like to say, etc.* Writing, however, is normally marked by formality and compactness.

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- A speaker talks to a listener who is present while the speech is taking place, and who usually makes prompt responses, but a writer addresses a reader who is not around, and may not be known to him or her, and whose reaction either takes place at a later time or will not occur at all.

All these differences lead us to make an obvious deduction that may be reckoned as the principal difference between writing and speech, especially in the field of language learning: writing either in one's mother tongue or in a foreign language is learned only through formal teaching, whereas spoken language can be acquired outside the academic realm.

4.4.2. The learners' writing proficiency

There are various reasons behind the students' low writing proficiency, some of which are interrelated. One of these reasons is that their semantic repertoire is so poor that they find it so seriously difficult to express themselves comprehensibly in writing. One remarkable aspect of such a difficulty is that when given a topic to write on, many students write practically nothing, even when the writing activity is graded.

The aforementioned reason is in reality a fact representing a feature of their low level in EFL in general. The factors that are in close relation with their weakness in the writing skill are considered below.

As examined in the previous chapter, Communicative Language Teaching gives priority to oral proficiency over written communication. This has created a negative attitude among many teachers towards writing. Such an attitude is generally manifest in ranking writing a secondary position in EFL classes. The burden of marking the students' written work is another factor that was equally referred to in the previous chapter. Indeed, marking the compositions of at least four classes of thirty students or so each weekly or even fortnightly takes a lot of doing if it is not impossible.

Further, in all likelihood the fact that the majority of secondary classes have a few English periods per week adds to the problem. This is too insufficient time for students to practice the four language skills, especially writing whose teaching necessitates more time than the other skills, and is rarely practiced if ever outside the classroom.

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Another factor at play is that a high percentage of Tunisian students are unfamiliar with certain written language resources, which foreign-language learners need to be skilled at using them before being practically engaged in writing. These are punctuation, capitalization, and cohesive devices. Moreover, they are not acquainted with certain aspects related to the writing skill, such as purpose and audience. The results of the questionnaire stated below – apart from what I have personally noticed – can confirm this assertion:

The same number of baccalaureate students (266) who had been assigned a questionnaire on reading techniques considered in the previous part of this chapter were also administered a similar form of questionnaire on specific writing-related aspects (see Appendix C 10). They were queried whether they know what *purpose*, *audience*, and *topic sentence* stand for. They were also asked to jot down a brief explanation for each item.

The questionnaire seemed so simple that one expected a great many yes-answers, in the sense that the questioned learners were baccalaureate students who had been learning English as a foreign language for seven years then. The results of such a questionnaire were, however, not at the level of that expectation. These are as outlined below:

. 44 students (16.54%) ticked yes for *purpose*, among whom 25 simply provided the Arabic equivalent for the word, but no one stated clearly what it stands for in relation to writing.

. 4 (1.50%) only ticked *yes* for *audience* without explaining what the term means.

. 53 students (19.92%) ticked yes for *topic* sentence, among whom 7 offered an acceptable definition of *topic sentence* roughly explaining it is the sentence that states the main idea of a paragraph.

All the above factors and the results of the questionnaire could make one deduce that there is no actual place for theoretical teaching of writing in EFL classes before moving to writing practice. Even practice, on the one hand, is not enough at all for students to the extent of helping them to communicate effectively in writing, because of the above-stated reason. On the other hand, it cannot really lead to the desired goal unless

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there is emphasis on some previous and if need be simultaneous particular theoretical teaching. It could, therefore, be maintained that writing is not taught in the way it would bring off the expected outcome, and hence seems not to be given the importance it is worth as a medium of communication. For this reason, addressing mainly EFL teachers in whose writing classes there is hardly any theoretical teaching and insufficient practice of writing, the following crucial queries could be raised:

a**.** What do EFL learners need to learn before learning and while they are learning to write? b**.** What practical measures can be taken to improve the students' writing skills?

4.4.3. Before learning to write

As pointed to above, prior to starting to learn to write, it is necessary for learners to be theoretically knowledgeable about and provided with adequate practice on the use of particular written language resources, namely punctuation and cohesive devices, because of their significant role in helping the writer communicate messages to the reader quite comprehensibly. Theoretical knowledge and practical exercises should equally cover specific aspects related to the writing skill, such as the types of topic to write on, the purpose of writing, and the audience to whom the piece of writing is addressed. All these are considered below with suggestions about how they may be taught in EFL classes.

Cohesive devices

A skill that students need to acquire before they actually start practicing writing is the use of different cohesive devices. These include expressions, such as *moreover, however, nevertheless, in fact, therefore, consequently, similarly, first, afterwards, finally, to sum up, in a word,* and so on.

These language resources are used in discourse to connect clauses, sentences, and paragraphs in such a way as to make it "perceived as an organized whole" O'Grady et al. (1996: 707). In so doing, they generally have three main functions:

a. They are usually used to show various relationships between ideas in sentences and paragraphs. Here are examples:

- *However* shows a relationship of contrast in a sentence like *My brother often said he would help our parents. However, he never showed it in practice.*

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. *Afterwards* in a sentence as *He fixed the shelves in the bedroom. Afterwards, he painted them grey* illustrates a time relationship.

b. They are employed for transitions between paragraphs. This role involves specific linkers such as, *in brief*, *summing up*, etc. For instance, *in conclusion* demonstrates a transition between the developmental paragraph and the concluding one.

c. Certain connectors are also utilized to avoid repetition in sentences. This can be done by means of specific grammatical devices, namely relative pronouns that avoid repetition by combining separate sentences.

Also concerned with the same function are other specific pronouns, as well as adverbs and phrases denoting place, time, etc., which can avoid repetition through back reference. Below are examples illustrating both ways of avoiding repetition.

A: *Shall we have something to eat?*
B: *Yes, but not here. I don't like cafés* ***that/which*** *don't have tables. I'm not one of those people* ***who*** *can eat standing up.*
A: *There's another restaurant over there.*
B: *It looks expensive, one of those places* ***that/which*** *charge very high prices. The only customers* ***who*** *can afford to eat* ***there*** *are business executives* ***who*** *get their expenses paid. Anyway, I can't see a menu. I'm not going into a restaurant* ***that/which*** *doesn't display a menu.*

Eastwood (1992: 261)

Back in 1950 Bourton was a sleepy little village, but things have changed a lot since ***then****.*

Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2002)

Frederick [Douglass's] father was an unknown white man, and ***his*** *mother, Harriet Baily, was a slave. [Frederick] learned to read and write in Baltimore* ***where he*** *was sent to work as a house servant. When* ***his*** *master died, the young man was sent back to the country to be a field hand. After one unsuccessful attempt, he escaped to New York.* ***There****, he began his famous career as an orator, passionate advocate of freedom, and journalist.*

Sanford (1979: 214)

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The examination of these cohesive devices aims at demonstrating how important they are to the communication of written ideas in a sound coherent way. Without proper use of connecting words, a piece of writing is likely to be awkwardly composed. This can be manifest in certain deficiencies, such as lack or absence of clear relationships between sentences; repetition of ideas, words, or phrases; and unclear transitions between paragraphs.

These deficiencies are among the aspects of the students' poor writing ability. Therefore, EFL learners need to be familiarized with the use of cohesive devices before beginning to train them in practical writing.

The teacher may start working on cohesive devices by giving the students a number of unconnected sentences, and ask them what elements could be inserted before requiring them to actually link them using suitable devices.

Training the learners in using linkers can be proceeded with working on one-paragraph compositions, and later on multi-paragraph pieces of writing. The consolidating exercises that can be given to the students at this stage may be as follows:

- Connecting a paragraph using linking devices from a list given by the teacher. The list may include one or two extra items;
- Connecting a one-paragraph or a multi-paragraph composition with indication of the places of linking words by leaving blanks inside it, but without providing the connectors in a list;
- Giving the students an improperly connected composition, and asking them to use suitable linking devices;
- Assigning the students exercises on interchangeable cohesive devices.

After a few exercises on the use of cohesive devices, the teacher may ask the students to write down the advantages of these devices and discuss them later, so that they become really conscious and convinced of their significant role in helping them to compose coherent pieces of writing. The teacher can then give the students a list of connectors with illustrative examples, but he or she should recommend them not to overuse these devices, so that the reader's attention will not be taken away from the ideas they have presented (Sanford 1979: 211). The learners' attention should, therefore, be

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drawn to the fact that particular linkers can be replaced by certain suitable punctuation marks. The students may be given examples in this respect, and asked later to give other instances of their own.

Punctuation and capitalization

Another skill EFL learners need to acquire before learning to write is the correct use of punctuation, by reason of its crucial role in helping to communicate written message. However, punctuation is one among the written language resources that are not given their actual share of teaching in Tunisian EFL classes. That is why, even after many years of learning English and many more years of learning French, many students still show serious unfamiliarity with the correct use of punctuation, and capitalization, too. A fact attesting to this phenomenon is that they write compositions with hardly any punctuation marks or accurate use of punctuation, and still write their own names in lower-case letters. Some students, even when they copy notes from the board, they make punctuation and capitalization mistakes.

Nuttall (1996: 53) asserts that punctuation is an area that is neglected in the language classroom, and on the other hand refers to its role in conveying meanings more clearly: "Punctuation reflects meaning; students who know that commas and semi-colons function differently, and that quotation marks have uses other than indicating speech, have more clues to help them make sense." She, then, addresses the teacher recommending, "You should look for opportunities to check that students have noticed and understood usages that may help."

Nonetheless, the necessity of adequate teaching of punctuation and the importance of its correct use in written communication seem to be underestimated by many EFL teachers and the many learners for possibly unjustifiable viewpoints. As Byrne (1988: 16) puts it, "Learners are inclined to treat punctuation as something that can be done mechanically and as an 'extra' rather than as an essential part of the writing system." As far as EFL Tunisian learners are concerned, such a claim is grounded because their attitude towards punctuation reflects their unawareness of its value as a fundamental ingredient of the writing system and a reliable cue for understanding written messages, which reveals that they have not sufficiently been instructed in the real significance of these written language resources, either theoretically or practically. Indeed, it is my teaching experience that there

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is hardly any class period devoted entirely to teaching punctuation in the preparatory and secondary stages, and there is no recommendation in the teacher's guidebook for emphasizing its teaching. It may be assumed that dealing with capitalization and punctuation during writing activities in class and correcting punctuation mistakes in the students' written work can be sufficient for learners to master the correct use of such graphological resources.

Regarding capitalization, the above assumption expressed by Byrne can be justifiable to some extent, in the sense that the situations where it is necessary to capitalize might be easy for learners to memorize and master, as well. In point of punctuation, however, the assumption can be said to bear no relation with reality should we take into account the number of punctuation marks used in so many various situations, which necessitates at least a few class periods of adequate teaching and occasional practice through exercises, because students are likely to forget employing them correctly.

The importance of punctuation lies particularly in helping the writer to express ideas clearly or more so, and assisting the reader in understanding written messages. When someone speaks, they may use paralinguistic and non-linguistic cues to make specific utterances more comprehensible. Such cues, however, are not available for communicating through the written medium. Particular punctuation marks can replace certain paralinguistic cues, thus contributing to facilitating the writer's and reader's task as stated above. In fact, for the part of the reader, the correct use of punctuation spares him or her the psychological and physical strain that may be imposed on him or her and the extra time he or she may spend on struggling for comprehension in case of a hardly punctuated or mispunctuated text. That is why, as Byrne (1988: 16) states, the reader usually expects sentence boundaries to be marked (with a capital letter at the beginning, and a full stop or any other end punctuation mark at the close), and equally clear-cut paragraphs, normally made so through indenting the first sentence of each one, and leaving a blank line between one paragraph and another.

Therefore, language teachers should devote enough time to theoretical and practical teaching of punctuation and capitalization. It is advisable that textbooks include punctuation and capitalization guides on the first or last pages, so that students can refer to them when need be. Using such guides or ones the teacher himself or herself can prepare,

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he or she should adequately deal with the use of capitals and punctuation marks, and devise enough consolidating exercises, which may follow a gradual aspect of development. They may cover simple, complex, compound-complex sentences, and whole paragraphs.

Another type of exercise may consist in giving the students short mispunctuated passages, and ask them to rewrite them with accurate punctuation. It would be better if the students are required to account for their corrections orally or in writing, because some of them may do the exercise haphazardly just to show the teacher that they have done it.

One way that can assist learners in employing punctuation and capitalization accurately is the use of a spellchecker. Students may be encouraged to type their writing assignments on a computer, and make use of the spellchecker, in that it helps them correct their punctuation and spelling errors while they are typing, or after they have finished so doing.

Spelling

A writing-related language area that can assist learners in being satisfactorily fluent and accurate in written communication is spelling. However, like punctuation and capitalization, it is not an actual part of the EFL courses. We shall now examine the reasons for not teaching spelling as an independent school subject, why, and how it should be taught relying on Mezrigui (2009: 14 – 15).

Working on spelling as a separate school subject often involves the use of dictation. As a classroom activity, dictation seems to be viewed rather badly on more scores than one, primarily is that it is often considered as a testing exercise rather than a learning activity, in the sense that it examines the students' on one of their learning abilities, and especially as it requires obligatory correction either just after it is over or during a later class. This represents a burden to the students, who usually dislike tests, and also to the teacher, because he or she has always to correct it. Dictation is equally reckoned to be boring, as there is often only one way to do it: the teacher dictates many separate words or a short passage, and the students write them down.

Another potential reason for not teaching English spelling as an independent school subject is that it is assumed to be indirectly practiced during reading and writing activities. Students may be thought to be able to learn spelling through simple exposure

to reading texts, and also via teacher correction of the spelling errors they make in written work. This is why in English tests, one of the writing tasks consists in correcting errors, some of which are of spelling type. Besides, students are penalized for the spelling errors they make in all the written tests they take.

Therefore, it is undeniably illogical to test students on a language area which they have not been theoretically and practically taught. So, one simple justification for the necessity of teaching spelling is that since students are tested on it, and are penalized for the orthographical errors they make in written tests, this language area should be taught overtly in class.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for the necessity of teaching English spelling, relying on a personal teaching experience, is the fact that many learners are very weak at it. Even the student whom I interviewed about the factors that helped her acquire an excellent standard in English has had serious difficulties in spelling, and she herself admitted it.

It is generally maintained that English spelling is very difficult for the non-native learner and the native learner as well, especially because there is a big mismatch between the writing system and pronunciation. By way of illustration, the phoneme /ʃ/ is represented by different letters such as */sh/* in *shirt*, */ch/* as in *champagne*, */c/* as in *ocean*, */ss/* as in *pressure*, and */t/* as in *patience*. Instances of such a mismatch are shown in the table below.

Aspects of mismatch	**Examples**
a. Some letters do not represent any segment in a particular word.	through, sign, give, palm
b. A group of two or more letters can be used to represent a single segment.	think /θ/; chip /tʃ/; ship /ʃ/; bread /e/
c. A single letter can represent a cluster of two or more segments.	saxophone /ks/, exile /ks/ or /gz/
d. The same letter can represent different segments in different words.	hot /ɒ/, bone /əʊ/, one /wʌ/
e. The same segment can be represented by different letters in different words.	/uː/ in rule, loop, soup, chew, sue, to, two shoe, sleuth

Table 12: Discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation
(Dobrovolsky & O'Grady 1996: 614)

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The discrepancy between the writing system and the pronunciation makes many non-native learners believe that English is too difficult a foreign language for them to learn, which may present a psychological obstacle to learning it unless the teacher overcomes the cause of such a belief.

Additionally, what makes teaching English spelling indispensable in the process of learning English as a foreign language is its significant role in contributing to the success of such a process. Here are some of the advantages of teaching spelling:

a. Learning correct spelling helps the learner to use the language accurately in terms of the writing skill, and also at the level of pronunciation, because when the teacher dictates a material, he or she pronounces the words correctly, thus giving the learner an opportunity to so do, too;

b. Knowing the correct spelling and pronunciation of words assists the learner a great deal in improving their reading speed;

c. Knowledge of correct spelling can aid the learners in listening comprehension. It can, for instance, help them to hear the correct words that may be misheard, or guess their meanings if they are unfamiliar to them, or recall them if they have forgotten them.

John Field (1997: 44) illustrates the last point through a personal teaching situation:

> Knowledge of spelling might even enable the learner to access meaning without looking the word up. The word may be a cognate of a word in L1, but simply pronounced very differently. To give an example, in a recent lesson which I filmed, the word *consul* occurred. Not a single member of the class recognized it or understood its meaning, even in the (relatively clear) context in which it occurred. However, when they saw it written on the board, all those who had Latin native language (and a few more) immediately recognized it as a word with whose meaning they were already familiar in L1.

One advantage of a dictation exercise, if properly handled, is that it can offer a perfect opportunity for integrating the four language skills. The teacher dictates a passage while the students listen and write down. After the dictation is over, students check their work through reading, and then they can discuss it in pairs. Manzi (1992: 39) refers to such an advantage stating:

> If the learner wants to spell correctly in English, s/he has to abandon the thought of correlating the sound system. What s/he must

> concentrate on is vocabulary building (mostly through reading) and improved listening ability. What better way is there than dictation for combining the use of the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing?

Another benefit of a dictation exercise is that it can help the teacher with class management, in the sense that it can assist him or her in quietening a noisy class. The teacher, however, should not show the students, either directly or indirectly, that the exercise is simply meant to make them quiet, so that they will not consider it to be a punishment, and will not do it reluctantly.

Accordingly, the query that is to be raised is: what can be done in order to address the issue of non-native EFL learners' difficulties with spelling?

Before setting a program of work on spelling, the teacher should know about the sources of spelling errors the students make, so that the remedial program can be targeted to attain the desired goal.

Two common sources of the spelling errors non-native learners of English make are the discrepancies between spelling and pronunciation – as indicated above – and their ignorance of spelling rules, which makes them spell words according to the way they are pronounced. Another source is language transfer (or interference). In other terms, non-native learners make certain spelling errors due to the influence of their mother tongue or another foreign language. For instance, a Tunisian or a French learner of English, because of the impact of French, may misspell words, such as *responsibility*, and *pronunciation* respectively as **responsability* and **prononciation*, that is in the same or roughly the same way as their French cognates are spelled.

A remedial program on the improvement of spelling may be initiated by dealing with the different orthographic rules with some focus on exceptions. Alongside this, the teacher can resort to the following procedures many of which, supplemented with some clarification of our own, have been taken from El-Hibir and Altaha (1993: 41 – 42).

a**.** Preparing a list of the common errors the learners often make, so as to deal with them with more focus;

b**.** Drawing the students' attention to the incompatibility of pronunciation with the written form of words to demonstrate the phonemic inconsistency in the English spelling. In

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this context, to help the learners achieve a degree of orthographic systematization, they should occasionally be asked to sort out problematic words according to different spelling criteria. For example, the teacher can prepare a list of words containing the sound /ʃ/, classified into the /sh/, /ss/, /t/ and /c/ categories, then read them out, and ask the students to sort them out in writing according to the category to which they belong;

c. Working on other problematic words such as homophones, i.e. words pronounced similarly, but spelt differently like *knew / new; right / write/ rite; you / ewe, yew, etc.* and also homographs, i.e. words having similar spelling, but different meaning and/or pronunciation as *record* (verb), *record* (noun) / *separate* (verb), *separate* (adjective), and so on;

d. Regularly checking the students' spelling of words borrowed from other languages and other ones whose written forms look so strange that they can be easily forgotten such as: *ewe, yacht, xenophobia, Xhosa, xylophone, onomatopoeia, spinach, etc;*

e. Dealing with the spelling errors which are due to interference. As far as Tunisian students are concerned, and in an attempt to overcome the orthographic errors caused by the influence of the French language, the teacher can concentrate on giving them exercises, such as asking them to provide the French cognates of the following English words: *independence, responsible, example, exercise, measure, etc.*

f. Having students practice loud reading with emphasis on the correct pronunciation of words and relating them to their orthographic representation;

g. Recommending the learners to use a monolingual dictionary, because of its role in helping them improve their spelling. For this reason, the students should be made familiar with the phonemic symbols, so that when they look up a new word, they can learn its meaning, spelling, and pronunciation;

h. Getting the learners to focus on a specific variety of English (British or American English), as a spelling model for them to use, so as to avoid confusion;

i. Giving the students dictation exercises as reinforcing activities concentrating on the common errors and problematic words.

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With reference to the final point above, the question at issue is: what can the teacher do, so as to make the dictation exercise interesting rather than boring, and effective in improving the learners' standard in spelling.

In order to serve such a purpose, the dictation activity should not be a series of separate words or thematically unconnected paragraphs, but it would rather be in the form of successive topically-related passages composing a short story full of suspense, or dealing with an absorbing topic, so as to arouse the students' interest. In case of a short story, it is advisable to divide it into parts, each of which is to be dictated during one period. It is preferable that each part end with an element of suspense, so that the students can be asked to make speculations about what may take place in the next episode of the story, through either speaking or writing, thus engaging them in a language-skill-integration activity.

As the main objective of the dictation is related to spelling along with pronunciation, the teacher should, of course, start with working on the orthographic activity after the dictation is over before involving the learners into the language-skill-integration exercise.

I practiced the aforementioned type of activity with freshmen for more than a semester, and it proved to be interesting and motivating as a learning activity, and effective as a technique to improve the students' level in spelling, especially if it is practiced copiously for so long. I also noticed that it could enhance the learners' autonomous and cooperative learning, because a few students suggested bringing texts or writing short stories to exploit for dictation exercises and language-skill-integration activities in class. Others had selected what they personally called 'strangely-spelled words' for dictating to their fellow students in the classroom.

In brief, it could be asserted that not teaching spelling as a separate subject in EFL classes is seriously detrimental to the non-native learner's ability to use the language accurately in its written form. This implies that teaching this language area as an independent skill may be deemed a necessity, by reason of its role in contributing to the student's command of written English.

The same number of teachers (112) who had been assigned questionnaires on particular EFL teaching issues were queried on whether English spelling should be given an actual share of theoretical and practical teaching in EFL classes. The results of the

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query as shown in the table below offer a further proof of the necessity of teaching English spelling.

Answers	**Number of answers and percentage**
Yes	99 = 88.39%
No	5 = 04.46%
I cannot decide	8 = 07.14%

Table 13: Teachers' opinions on whether spelling should be taught

Purpose and audience

One wonders how learners can communicate effectively in writing while they are not familiar with certain aspects related to this language skill, such as audience and purpose. These are the simplest writing-related aspects the students need to know in the process of learning to write. Someone composing a piece of writing without being aware of why they write it, and to whom they address it, is like someone who is raving. Leki (1991: 26) expresses roughly the same opinion in the same framework asserting, "Writing in any language is done for a purpose, usually to communicate with a reader. Any other reason for putting pen to paper is physically writing, but it is not really writing."

As there are many types of writing and many different purposes for writing, awareness of the audience of and reason for the piece of writing is of vital importance, in the sense that these always determine the content, and sometimes require an appropriate style of composing. For instance, it is obvious that writing a love letter to a boyfriend or a girlfriend is totally different from writing a letter of application to an employer in terms of the content of the letter and how this content should be composed. In this respect, on top of simply knowing the readers or supposing who they might be, the writer – as Parrott (1993: 211) puts it, "Needs to assess their knowledge of the topic, their assumptions about the topic, and their attitudes towards it and interest in it," so as to convey the messages in such a way as to actually achieve the purpose of discourse. This leads us to note that the teacher is usually the sole reader of the students' classroom compositions. The teacher, therefore, ought to recommend the learners to always consider him or her as a real reader,

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because this would make them more careful about what they write and how they so do it. Leki (1991: 9), in this context, argues:

> If students know that what they are writing will actually be read by real people other than the teacher, people who care about the message not the medium, then writing often becomes much easier, because knowing who the audience is and what the audience already knows helps writers to decide what to say and how to say it.

Raising the students' awareness of the topic of composition, purpose, and audience before engaging them in practical writing may involve the following exercises:

- Assigning the students different topics and having them identify the type of each one (descriptive, narrative, argumentative, expository, etc.), the purpose, and the presumed audience to whom it is addressed.
- Presenting the students with paragraphs to determine the topic, the purpose, and the audience. Only this task can be done at this stage, without any discussion on how the ideas are organized and the various methods of developing the topic sentence. This can be tackled at a later practical stage.

4.4.4. Essentials

These include choosing topics, pre-writing activities, and assessing students' written work.

4.4.4.1. Choosing topics

Leki (1991: 9) argues, "If it is already difficult to function in a foreign language, it is much more difficult for students to write if they are required to write about something they have no interest in." Therefore, the topics chosen for writing should suit the students' affective interests or be related to their social or professional needs, or derive from their cultural background. Such topics can enhance their willingness to write and help develop their semantic repertoire, in the sense that they make them search for meaning in the target language, thus assisting their creativity in writing. Examples of such topics relate to various personal and official letters. Teenage students often need to write love letters, letters of invitation, congratulation letters, and many of them finding themselves in a pressing need for employment, even before going to university, need to write letters of

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application. Accordingly, seeing that letter writing requires special form, content, and writing style (depending on the type of letter and the audience), it should be taught to secondary school students, as well as to freshmen. What prompts us to make this recommendation is the fact that letter writing is not taught either to certain secondary level students or to freshmen and sophomores in many higher education institutions.

Another type of topics that is motivating and fun, and which requires the learners to rely on their imagination, and also aids their creative writing involves riddles, jokes and poems. The teacher can initiate this type of topics by writing the instructions of the riddle, the very first sentence(s) of the joke, or the first verse(s) of the poem, and the students try to complete them. As put forward above, in order for the students to be able to do this, particular such topics as riddles and jokes should derive from their own culture or should be familiar to them.

Regarding the wording of the topic, it must not be stated in too difficult language. It should be compatible with the students' level, especially in examinations when teachers are normally not allowed to explain to the students what they are expected to do. Let us consider the topic, *However justifiable war may be, it should not be justified.* Stated as such, this topic seems to be difficult even for advanced learners to understand. What makes it so is the syntactic structure of its text.

I assigned it to freshmen, but they did not fathom out what it exactly means. I assigned the same content of the topic to fourth secondary students, but stated in this way: *There is no good reason for war.* The students easily understood the topic, because it was clear enough in terms of syntactic structure and vocabulary.

4.4.4.2. Pre-writing activities

After choosing a suitable topic to write on, the teacher may have the students brainstorm as many ideas as possible on it. By reason of the learners' poor semantic repertoire, and because most of us are generally at a loss for words, particularly at the beginning of the writing activity, the teacher can initiate the brainstorming activity by eliciting from the learners single words, phrases, and fragments relevant to the topic before eliciting complete sentences, and the students write these down in rough.

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After having performed the brainstorming activity for several periods as described above, the teacher may have the students do it in groups without much of his or her intervention. He or she may recommend them to so do whenever they are assigned a topic to write on.

Within the same setting, Reid and Lindstrom (1985: 54) address the learner as regards brainstorming as a pre-writing activity suggesting: "Without stopping, write every thought about your topic that comes to your mind. Write for at least five minutes. Do not stop to correct errors or consider more appropriate vocabulary. Do not worry about writing complete sentences; just write, as fast as you can, all your thoughts."

Once the brainstorming has been completed, one may suggest the students, in groups, do what follows:

- Making meaningful sentences out of single words, phrases, and fragments;
- Crossing out irrelevant ideas and adding other relevant ones;
- Combining sentences and connecting them with appropriate devices;
- Deciding on the position of sentences in the composition; that is which sentence should be the topic sentence, which one should be the concluding one, and which ones should act as supporting details, etc.

After all this has been finished, the students engage in writing on the topic they are assigned.

4.4.4.3. Assessment

Peer editing

Writing is a process of systematic activities. Evaluating the learners' written work, which is traditionally one of the teacher's duties, is an important stage in such a process.

One way of improving the students' writing skills and decreasing the marking load for the teacher is peer editing. Students need to be trained extensively in such an activity before being engaged in it, so that they can perform it successfully. Here is one technique of peer editing:

The teacher makes several photocopies of a student's composition. He or she divides the class into a certain number of groups. Each group is given a copy of the composition

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and assigned to correct a particular area of language. After doing this task, each group presents its work that has to be discussed by the whole class. Then, the students agree on a final version of the composition and write it down in their notebooks with the initial copy stuck beside it, so that they can refer to both the corrected piece of writing and the original copy, which can help them avoid certain deficiencies in the future. During the next periods, each group should correct an area of language different from the previous one, so that all the students experience correcting all language areas.

One disadvantage of this technique is that not all the students' compositions can be peer-edited because of shortage of time. One way of carrying this out is that all the learners can exchange their pieces of writing for evaluation. The students ought to rely on an editing guide, which the teacher can give them after having discussed it in class. Dixon (1986: 4) quotes Belanger and Rodgers (1983) and Hogan (1984) who suggest a number of questions students might ask of both their own compositions and those of their peers. From these questions, we have selected below those that may be most helpful to secondary school students and suitable to their academic level.

1. Value

a. Is this piece of writing worth revising?
b. Is it interesting for me? For others?

2. Purpose

a. What is the writer's purpose?
b. Which sentence best tells me what the writer's purpose is?
c. Does the writer follow his or her purpose through the whole composition?
d. Which sentences, if any, do not support the writer's purpose?

3. Audience

a. Who is the audience the writer addresses?
b. Has the author written all the ideas/information the audience needs?
c. In what part(s) of the composition might the audience need more ideas/information?

4. Organization

a. Has the writer organized the writing in such a way that the arguments can be followed clearly?

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b. Does the writing move smoothly from one point to another?

5. Style

a. Has the author chosen the right words?

b. Are all the sentences of the same length and type, or has the author varied them?

6. Language and Mechanics

a. Are the sentences grammatically correct?

b. Are the spelling and punctuation correct?

Advantages of peer editing

Peer editing helps the learners improve their writing skill. As noted earlier, it is my teaching experience that students are more sensitive to their peers' criticism than to the teacher's. They generally dislike being criticized by their classmates, but they usually see no harm in being judged by the teacher. Jarvis (2002) adheres to the very argument stating, "In my experience, adults are much more affected by the criticism of their classmates than young students." Therefore, knowing that their compositions will be edited by classmates of theirs would stimulate them to often be more careful about what they write to avoid negative peer comments as possible as they can.

Another advantage cited by Dixon (1986: 4) is that peer editing assists the students in learning to "become critical readers, not only of others' work, but also of their own. As they help fellow students to deal with their writing problems, they become more aware of their own difficulties and resources available to them to improve their writing."

Additionally, peer editing makes the learners feel self-assured in taking a responsibility that is traditionally considered as being the teacher's, and not their own. This would represent a psychological stimulus that may prompt them to do the editing seriously and entice them to be more confident in their own abilities.

Teacher marking

As it is impossible for the teacher to mark every piece of writing a large or even a medium-sized class of students produces, he or she can take four to seven papers every week from different students for marking. By so doing, the teacher can manage to correct at least one composition for each student every two or three months. The learners will not, therefore, feel that their effort is paid no attention by the teacher.

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There are many beneficial correction procedures. The teacher should follow any procedure he or she considers suitable to dealing with the recurrent errors the students make, and reckon it as useful for improvement.

One of these procedures may consist in circling or underlining the common errors without correcting them. In class, the teacher gives the students handouts containing the signaled errors, and the students try to correct them in pairs or in groups before the whole class corrects them under the teacher's guidance.

Another correction procedure suggested by Byrne (1988: 126) resides in putting a cross in the margin for each error. The students try to identify the errors and correct them. If they fail to so do, they can consult the teacher.

It is, therefore, recommended not to adopt the traditional correction method. Many teachers tend to correct all the errors the learners have made by crossing all that is erroneous and writing the correction over or below it, or in the margin, and using graphic signs, some of which are not intelligible to all the students. They usually do so without any beneficial feedback either written on the composition paper or addressed orally to the student. Such a method presents serious disadvantages for both the teacher and the learner. It is time-consuming, and it is psychologically intimidating for the student to see his or her composition paper smeared with red ink (Byrne 1988: 124). On account of this fact, the learner cannot benefit from this correction procedure, in the sense that he or she is very likely not to go back to his or her piece of writing and ponder over the errors he or she has made, very probably even when the teacher recommends it.

The correction of learner compositions either by the teacher or by fellow students should be carried out in an effective, constructive way. Students need to be trained beforehand in such a matter. The teacher or the student corrector ought to try to find the positive points as well as the negative ones. Too much criticism or restricting evaluation to finding only deficiencies is very likely to discourage the learner and make him or her lose confidence in his or her abilities.

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4.4.5. Developing the students' writing ability

The process of developing the students' writing ability may include several training exercises that ought to be gradual and systematic. Instances of these exercises based on several writing techniques and approaches to teaching writing can be the following:

- Rearranging jumbled sentences into a meaningful coherent paragraph. In these sentences, an irrelevant one can be included. The students do not have to simply put the sentences into the correct order. In pairs or in groups, they also have to discuss why a certain sentence is the topic sentence, why a specific sentence is irrelevant, and why another should be displaced;
- Presenting the students with short paragraphs lacking topic sentences, concluding sentences, or a few supporting ideas, and asking them to produce what is missing;
- Making use of reading materials as a fundamental ground for developing the writing ability, which implies the adoption of a models approach to teaching writing.

Referring to the benefit of this procedure, Keith Johnson (1981: 2) states:

> Why is so much reading practice given in a book on writing? Simply because if you wish to organize your own essays correctly, it is important to understand how other writers have organized their passages. Answering questions like 'How is this passage organized?' and 'In what other ways could the writer have organized it?' is a useful step towards improving your own writing.

Harmer (1998: 68) voices a similar act of faith in this regard: "Reading texts […] provide good models for English writing. When we teach the skill of writing, we will need to show students models of what we are encouraging them to do."

Working on reading passages should cover the focus on mechanics, cohesive devices, syntactic structures, and lexical usages; that is the overall organization of the reading material and the various ways of developing the topic sentence or the thesis statement. Such work can be carried out in the form of class discussions.

- **Copying**

This may be introduced as a writing technique related to the aforementioned approach. Students may be required to copy authentic texts or well-written materials composed by really proficient non-native writers. These can be selected by the teacher or

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chosen by individual learners on their own according to how interesting the topics the reading selections deal with are to them.

Although there is no creativity or personal production in what the students copy, it is advantageous that the learners may feel they are communicating their personal feelings or describing their private experiences through writing in case the material they copy treat similar emotional issues and personal experiences as their own, which can entice their willingness to write and contribute to improving their proficiency to express themselves on paper.

Another benefit of copying well-written materials, particularly if practiced for long, is that it can help the students learn new lexical items and master new grammatical structures, and use them later in their compositions, which can improve their writing skills. This leads us to note that for the copying activity to be actually beneficial, it must not be done seemingly for the sake of mere copying, but should be meant for meeting well-determined objectives related to the development of the learners' skills at specific language areas, such as spelling and syntactic structures.

Texts designated for copying should be selected according to the students' level of proficiency in English. Authentic materials that are too difficult for the learners ought to be paraphrased in such a way as to suit their standard.

. Paraphrasing

This is another useful exercise that can help the learners improve their writing skill. Relying on Rybowski (1986: 38), we list below what the teacher needs to take into account before having the students do this type of writing exercise:

. Explaining to the students what is meant by paraphrasing. Students should bear in mind that a paraphrase is a process of transforming an original text structurally and lexically in such a way as to change its form, but keep its content unchanged.

. Providing the students with an example of an original text followed by a paraphrase. The teacher may have the students discuss the paraphrase. During the discussion, the students can be led to notice the various syntactic transformations, for example from active to passive or vice-versa, the use of gerunds instead of full infinitives, etc. In vocabulary

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terms, they may be led to remark various lexical substitutions, such as the use of synonyms and antonyms, and so on.

. Selecting paraphrasable texts, because not all written materials can be paraphrased. In addition to this, the teacher should take the length of the text into account according to how familiar the students have become with this type of exercise. He or she can begin with one-paragraph texts and proceed with multi-paragraph materials.

Paraphrasing ought to be practiced sufficiently as it can help the learners with fluency and accuracy, and hence can contribute to developing their writing ability.

. Outlining

Working on this type of exercise may be initiated by giving the students a few samples of outlines and engaging them in discussing them. One of the principal points in the discussion may treat the way the ideas are presented in the outline. The next step such may involve a short piece of writing consisting in having the learners complete missing parts in one or two outlines they have been given. After sufficient work on samples of outlines, the students may be asked in pairs or in small groups to outline the topics they are assigned before writing individually on them coherently.

. Summarizing

This technique represents a good opportunity for students to practice writing provided that they are trained sufficiently in making use of it. One remarkable advantage of this writing technique is that it can help learners with relevance in writing. In fact, as students in a summary exercise are expected to write down only the most important information, and not all the details, they are supposed – when writing compositions – to write only the relevant ideas to the topic they write on.

. Adopting a free-writing approach

In the context of Tunisian EFL students, writing usually takes place almost solely in the classroom. As noted above, even in such an academic setting, this language skill is not sufficiently practiced. Outside class, students rarely write even in their mother tongue; a great deal of their real-life communication is carried out through speech. There, therefore, comes a crucial question: how could we create and develop the habit of writing in students, and hence improve their composing ability?

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Creating and developing the habit of writing in learners can be accomplished by using a free-writing approach, so that the students can practice writing comfortably, away from the tension and apprehension of error correction and testing.

The free-writing approach has two characteristic features. The first one is that it implies writing for fluency rather than accuracy. This is manifest in the fact that there is no actual peer editing or teacher marking of the learners' pieces of writing. This, however, does not mean that accuracy is deliberately neglected, but it is presumed that, as Raimes (1983: 7) puts it, "Once ideas are down on the page, grammatical accuracy, organization, and the rest will gradually follow." The second characteristic feature of the approach is that it emphasizes quantity rather than quality. The fact that the learners feel free to write, and that what they write will be accepted when read out to fellow students or judged to be acceptable when read by the teacher can encourage them to have a desire for regular writing, which can eventually lead to improvement.

Stressing the importance of quantitative writing to the improvement of this language skill, Hamayan (1989) asserts, "The more students write, the more likely they are to improve." In the same context, Zamel (1976: 70) refers to Erasmus (1960) and Brière (1966) who, she states, are among the proponents of an approach underlining the importance of quantity rather than quality in improving the learners' composing ability. Erasmus, Zamel reports, "Claims that the greater the frequency, the greater the improvement, and Brière […] seems to indicate that, when the emphasis is upon writing often rather than error correction, students write more and with fewer errors."

Compatible with the principle of the free-writing approach is journal writing. As noted in the previous section examining reading comprehension, the students need to be encouraged to write anything they like, such as personal opinions about a certain issue, personal experiences, important events, lyrics of favorite songs, poems, proverbs, sayings, biographies, and so on. Though minor error correction might take place, the teacher does not have to correct what the learners have composed in their journals, but ought to focus on encouraging them to regularly write, and check by one way or another that all of them do. In order to show interest in and attach significance to the students' compositions, the teacher may ask individual learners to read out to the class what they have written. The teacher should express some praising remarks about the students' work, so that they

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appreciate writing and keep on composing pieces of writing. As time does not allow all the learners to read out their pieces of writing in class, the whole class may be asked to exchange journals for reading outside the classroom. This may be really advantageous, in that it represents an opportunity for students to learn from one another in terms of thinking, exploring further ideas about familiar topics, and perhaps more important the ways such ideas are dealt with in writing by good learner writers. Furthermore, it may be fun that learners read about each other's way of thinking, personal experiences, etc., which can strengthen their desire to write further.

Conclusion

Teaching writing should be a process of interrelated theoretical and practical stages. These systematically include sensitizing the students to the importance of this language skill as a channel of communication, instructing them in the use of particular written language resources, such as mechanics and cohesive devices, and providing them with enough practice on them, and engaging them for sufficient time in the various stages the learner writer must go over before presenting a piece of writing for final evaluation by the teacher.

In this respect, it is worth noting that the learner's desired performance is undoubtedly related largely to the teacher's success. Among the essential requirements for being a successful teacher of writing are being knowledgeable about the various approaches to teaching writing, making use of a sound remedial program for improving the learners' writing ability, and keeping abreast of the evolution in language teaching and learning, in general. EFL teachers, therefore, need to be provided with adequate pre-service and compulsory periodic in-service training, and have every intention of self-development. They should equally be given some freedom, because many of them seem bound to be faithful to and content with the content of textbooks, a fact imposed on them by themselves or by a certain official authority.

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5. Conclusion and Recommendations

As analyzed and discussed above, relying on the research tools cited in Chapter Two, the findings of this research have revealed that what lies at the root the communication difficulties among Tunisian secondary EFL students broadly relates to two distinct issues. First, the lack of exposure to English inside and outside the classroom, and hence the insufficient practice of the language; second, the inadequacies of teaching methodology. Each of these issues is, in turn, the result of a number of diverse factors.

In point of fact, secondary students have only a few English classes per week (3.19 hours on average). This is too insufficient time for students to be exposed extensively to the language, especially if we take into account how much time each of the four communicative skills is allotted during one week or one term. What adds spice to the situation is that the great majority of students do not have any opportunities to be exposed to or practice the language outside the classroom. The problem is further compounded by the prevalent use of French as the first foreign language in the country. This has led English to be somewhat undervalued despite its being reckoned nowadays as the first language of international communication.

Another factor at play is that many learners seem to be unaware of their current and future needs for the language. This is why – as noted earlier – according to the results of a questionnaire, a high percentage of students state they would not choose to learn English if it were an optional subject, and thus seem reluctant to learn it. Briefly put, English is taught as a mere curricular discipline, it could be argued.

Getting round the issue is quite manageable. As an effective measure, students' attention should be drawn to the necessity of attaching great importance to English, in that it is prerequisite for some current and future needs of theirs, such as travel, entertainment, and jobs requiring an acceptable or a good standard in the language. It follows from this that students should be encouraged to show keen interest in learning and have every intention of doing their utmost to improve their proficiency level in the language. Students ought to also be amply exposed to English through a variety of ways inside and outside the classroom. From this perspective, a daily one-hour period can offer quite enough classroom exposure to the language. Perhaps more useful would be the creation of an

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English-speaking milieu at school and elsewhere where students would frequently be engaged in a variety of activities in which they would be encouraged and helped to practice the four communicative skills. Another workable, fruitful measure that would provide learners with a considerable amount of exposure to English input and prompts them to produce profuse language would be teaching them some school subjects in English.

In addition to what is conferred on above, a number of teaching methodology aspects and the peculiarity of certain communicative skills are other factors behind the problem. For starters, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been used for so long in the EFL classroom, in that it was thought – as its name indicates – that adopting it could help achieve communicative competence. One basic CLT principle is laying more emphasis on meaning and fluency than on form and accuracy. This principle has led many learners to use language inaccurately, and consequently have become unable to communicate messages appropriately in particular situations, whether orally or in writing because of wrong use of syntactic structures. They may also experience serious comprehension difficulties with authentic reading selections, in case they are unfamiliar with certain grammatical patterns. Moreover, there will come situations in the students' current and future life that require of them linguistically-accurate use of language, such as lecturing, writing a piece of academic work, etc. By implication, therefore, both meaning and form need to be focused on as two interdependent language components in the course of the foreign-language teaching process.

From the aforementioned principle springs the attitude of the approach towards the learners' errors. Error correction, according to CLT, may be ignored or infrequent, mainly given that – as Larsen-Freeman (1986) contends – errors are reckoned to be a normal result of the development of the learners' communicative skills. Additionally, error correction, especially when immediate, is inadvisable so that it will not obstruct the natural course of students' interactions or individual learners' talk. However, it could be maintained that paying little or no attention to errors may make many learners unwilling to seek out improvement of their linguistic knowledge, one essential ingredient of communicative competence (Canale and Swain, 1980). The attitude may equally cause the students to end up with the habit of making fossilized errors, which will be too difficult to eradicate. All

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this would be very likely to have a detrimental effect on the learners' ability to use language communicatively.

Another CLT principle that is also subject to strong criticism is that oral proficiency is prioritized over written proficiency. Doubtless, language is to be employed for both oral and written communication. Hence, it would be unjustifiable to place much more focus on oral learning activities than on written activities, because doing so will, in the perfect circumstances, help the learners with oral proficiency only. Therefore, in view of the fact that writing as a language skill is characterized by linguistic accuracy, it is axiomatic that the ability to use language communicatively through its oral and written media cannot be brought off without laying emphasis on both fluency and accuracy.

In addition to the above-considered shortcomings of Communicative Language Teaching, there are certain factors that, in all likelihood, hinder the successful implementation of the approach in Tunisian EFL classes. One of these is the lack of instructional materials, especially those necessary for carrying out communicative tasks. Another impediment to the success of the approach in teaching English as a foreign language is large classes. Teaching big groups of students presents a real challenge for the teacher in the communicative classroom. It is very difficult for him or her to give everybody a chance to take part in all the learning activities, and also to check and evaluate all their work, especially the written work done in class or given as homework assignments. It is equally problematic for students to move about in a crowded classroom during group-work activities and manage communication between all the groups because of shortage of time and room due to the large number of students. A further detrimental influence is the low level of proficiency of a high percentage of students in many classes, which cannot guarantee the learner-centeredness of learning activities, one of CLT principles. The success of such activities requires a respectable number of students in each class whose level of proficiency is good, or at least satisfactory.

Overall, on the basis of the above arguments, the claim could be advanced that the CLT principles representing shortcomings on the part of the approach and the constraints standing against its successful adoption in EFL classes have resulted in making it fall far short of the desired expectations, which could confirm the view that having used it in Tunisian EFL classes for a long time is among the contributing factors to the serious

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difficulties experienced by a great many secondary students in using the language communicatively. Accordingly, it would be unwise to be committed to making use of a single approach to teaching English as a foreign language to students of different characteristics, namely the social backgrounds they belong to, their various levels of proficiency, their attitudes towards the language, the learning styles they follow depending on particular considerations, such as their standards in the language and the instructional materials available for use in class; and finally their current and future language needs. Therefore, an optimum alternative approach to teaching the language would be an eclectic approach.

Within the same framework of the teaching methodology inadequacies, although the use of the mother tongue is said to have disappeared along with the Grammar-Translation Method, Arabic is still used in many Tunisian EFL classes. One possible motive for this actuality is that many learners' low level of proficiency in English has led teachers to use the students' first language in English classes as a teaching technique that may aid successful learning. Yet, the use of L1 in the foreign-language classroom is debatable, in that it may have certain benefits and drawbacks.

Generally, one benefit is that it is claimed to be of some help to both students and teacher in several learning and teaching situations (see 3.3). On the other alert, the use of the native language as a learning strategy and a teaching technique in EFL classes has serious drawbacks. Following are instances:

- Decreasing considerably the opportunities for students to be exposed to foreign-language input;
- The students' dealing with the target language new vocabulary and grammatical structures may very often be limited to thinking of their L1 equivalents or waiting for the teacher to provide them rather than concentrating on the overall comprehension or using other effective learning strategies. In this way, as noted earlier, the L1 use in the L2 classroom could be said to be misused, in the sense that it is not employed in meaningful communicative tasks, which might consequently lead to more serious learning difficulties;
- Perhaps more detrimental is that in the course of time the use of the students' mother tongue in EFL classes may eventually become overuse, which will very probably have a

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serious effect on the students' proficiency level in English, and also on the teachers', and on their teaching methodology, as well.

Accordingly, given the detrimental effects of using the first language on the EFL learning-teaching process, a teaching-English-through-English approach may highly be recommended.

A considerable part of this academic study has been devoted to discussing the problems and difficulties students experience with the four communicative skills, and it has been demonstrated that those complications are, on the one hand, in connection with the nature of some skills, and on the other hand – as noted above – the consequence of certain teaching methodology shortcomings.

Where listening as a language skill is concerned, it has been ascertained that the problems and difficulties learners experience with the skill stem from three areas:

. The phonological features of English;

. Specific peculiarities of listening selections;

. Lack of listening equipment and inappropriate acoustic environment.

Phonological interference may at times cause the foreign-language learner comprehension difficulties. Indeed, the fact that certain target-language phonemes do not exist in their mother tongue may make them at times mishear some words, because of their assimilating them imperceptibly to approximately-sounding phonemes of their L1. Phonological interference do not normally present a complication for Tunisian EFL students, for they are familiar with English phonemes, which do not match the ones of Arabic, via their learning of French, which they start some years before they begin learning English.

However, another type of interference that may cause them comprehension difficulties because of the influence of French is lexical interference. This consists in the existence of many false friends in English and French, which may lead the learner to misunderstanding or incomprehension. For this reason, providing students with a list of the common false cognates with equivalents in both languages, together with example contexts likely to cause them understanding difficulties can be a workable solution. Another list should include intra-English false friends (see examples in 4.1.2.2). Learners need to be

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instructed in the nature of this category of lexical items for the same purpose of sparing them comprehension difficulties with listening or reading passages.

Other phonological features of the English language are stress and intonation patterns, and reduced forms. In addition to showing the correct pronunciation of words, a more important role of stress is putting oral emphasis on the information-carrying lexical elements in utterances in an attempt – on the part of the speaker – to get particular meanings across clearly or more so, which can help the learner with understanding. Perhaps of a more crucial role in conveying messages is intonation. Such a role is manifest in voicing a variety of communicative purposes, and also of no less significance than this is helping to clarify each of several language functions expressed by the same utterance.

Where oral comprehension is concerned, reduced forms are probably more problematic for non-native-learners than stress and intonation when listening to speech delivered by native speakers, and especially – as noted earlier in Brown (1994) – for those students who have originally been exposed to the full forms of the language.

Accordingly, non-native teachers of English are highly recommended to be knowledgeable about these phonological features and familiarize students with them theoretically and also through plenty of practical ways, so as to spare them comprehension difficulties when they work on listening texts or interact with native speakers.

Difficulties connected with listening passages, according to the findings of the research, include the way listening materials are delivered by native speakers, lexical density, long listening texts, and listening topics. Briefly, the delivery of listening passages involves the speed rate and the accents in which they are delivered. A big number of students find it very hard to make out the messages of listening texts in which native speakers talk fast and in unfamiliar accents. Puzzling out the issue can be accomplished initially by familiarizing learners with the above-considered phonological features, and then with native accents at different speed rates through frequent exposure to materials articulated by native speakers.

In respect of the abundance of new lexical items, learners' attention should be drawn to the necessity of not concentrating on the meaning of all the unfamiliar vocabulary. Learners need to focus on global comprehension and trained in adopting a context-based approach to infer the signification of new terms from the context in which they are used.

A long listening passage need not be exploited thoroughly for listening comprehension solely. It can be divided into two or more parts, which can be exploited for various learning activities. For instance, one section can be devoted to shadow reading to practice pronunciation and other phonological features.

Regarding topics of listening selections, they should be carefully chosen. These ought to be motivating and usually in connection with the students' life needs or their affective interests, so as to guarantee their concentration and attention while listening, which will eventually contribute to the success of the lesson.

Other listening problems and difficulties, which many teachers and students complain about, spring from the scarcity and the low quality of listening equipment. In such a situation, every now and again some teachers resort to reading out listening selections or exploiting them as reading texts instead of having students listen to them recorded on tape or CD in native speaker's voice, which prevents them from exposure to native speaker's pronunciation. In a number of classrooms, the very undesirable way of presenting students with listening passages teachers sometimes resort to because of the aforementioned difficulties is also occasionally due to the absence of a suitable acoustic environment. This is due to internal noise usually made by large classes, because of lack of control on the part of the teacher, and also the result of external noise coming from nearby noisy places, such as a market place or a busy street.

Handling the situation is normally pretty simple. This can be done by providing enough sophisticated pieces of listening equipment, as well as an appropriate acoustic setting, which are among the necessaries that can contribute to developing students' listening skills. An English-language laboratory or at least a few specialized, equipped ELT classrooms in each school should be made available. On the other hand, the teacher ought to be able to surmount internal noise and external noise. This can be carried out through particular aspects of successful classroom management on the part of the instructor acting as a facilitator of learning.

For the part of speaking skills, the most apparent source of difficulties with oral fluency is that students do not live in an English-speaking environment. As alluded to above, speaking and listening to English among a sizeable percentage of students are confined to the classroom. Even in-class speaking activities are most often restricted to

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tasks assigned in the textbook, or to others proposed by the teacher, and which are also in connection with the topics of the other language skills that are proposed in the textbook, too.

All this has caused many students' vocabulary repertoire to be so low that they cannot express themselves appropriately. In order to deal with such a complication, they often have recourse to a number of communication strategies to make up for the lack of appropriate language. In this frame of reference, one way that can help learners develop their oral communicative skills gradually is to approve of their use of communication strategies. Yet, only those strategies that are conducive to learning, and can subsequently contribute to their becoming orally fluent may be allowed and implicitly encouraged.

Equally attributed to those difficulties are affective factors. One remarkable affective hindrance is apprehension of errors, which is itself the result of particular considerations. Many students prefer to keep silent in class and are reluctant to participate in speaking activities, because it embarrasses them to be corrected or overcorrected by the teacher, and especially by fellow students. Some other students – though their level of proficiency is satisfactory – show no intention of participating in oral activities, simply because they are not interested in a school subject, which – taking into account their area of specialization – is of minor importance.

As concerns reading as a language skill, the challenges learner readers meet proceed mainly from the total or quasi-absence of theoretical teaching of some reading-related aspects before engaging them into practical reading. Added to this are, of course, other sources of difficulty, among which are unfamiliar lexis, complex syntactic structures, and unfamiliarity with the types of meaning and the functions of cohesive devices,

One of the apparent reasons for not paying serious attention and devoting enough time to instructing learners theoretically in specific reading- and writing-related aspects might be the contention that learners can perform as expected without such an instruction or merely with some concise oral elucidation by the teacher when necessary before engaging learners in practical learning activities.

Nevertheless, relying on a personal teaching experience and on the results of a questionnaire that have demonstrated that even many fourth year secondary students are not familiar with particular reading- and writing-related aspects would make theoretical

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teaching of a number of aspects related to communicative skills strongly recommended, together with practical exercises on them, so that learners can get well acquainted with them, and can hence achieve the desired performance. Instances of those aspects that need to be taught as such are types of reading materials. The learners' familiarity with these can aid comprehension, especially if they are also trained to guess the possible questions that may be asked on each type with the aim of assisting them in acquiring one of the characteristics of a successful reader.

Reading techniques, types of meaning, and cohesive devices do, in turn, need special attention. One justification for the recommendation as regards reading techniques is that familiarity with these guides the learners through the purpose of reading act, the way they should read, and whether they need to concentrate on reading the entire material or part of it – all of which are among the hallmarks of an effective reader. Furthermore, for the purpose of avoiding being bogged down with possible comprehension difficulties, students need to be aware that some cohesive devices can convey several relationships between clauses and sentences, and communicate more than one language function when employed in different contexts. For the very purpose – apart from their literal signification – it is a must for learners to know that many lexical terms have distinct connotations in different cultures, a big number of words used as different grammatical categories have different meanings, and the meaning of a great many words and phrases originates from the sociocultural conventions of language and – on the other hand – depends on the speaker's or writer's emotions or intentions; and that many particular utterances, namely idioms and metaphors have special, conventional meanings that cannot be made out through the meaning of the individual words making up the utterance.

Complex structures, especially in authentic texts, and unfamiliar vocabulary are other potential hindrances to comprehending the messages of reading selections. Working out the former hindrance could be done through simplifying the reading material, but in such a way as not to spoil its authenticity. Perhaps an optimal answer – one could recommend – may be the explicit teaching of grammar. This can help learners with mastering this language area well, and thus complex structures do not normally pose so serious a challenge to comprehension. Another potential benefit of this method of teaching grammar, taking into account the possibility of the learners' becoming good at this

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language aspect, is that they may become able to use English accurately and appropriately in its oral and written forms.

Aside from training students in using a context-based approach – as proposed above – to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary, resorting to a prompting glossary (Widdowson 1978) could be an effortless and time-saving solution for learners.

Writing is generally claimed to be the hardest skill to develop even in the L1, mainly because it is typified by language accuracy. This implies that effective, formal instruction and a sizeable amount of practice are requisites for the ability to write fluently in any language.

One major reason for the serious difficulties experienced by EFL secondary learners with writing is that they do not practice the skill frequently either in class or elsewhere. Mathematically speaking, the fact that the vast majority of classes have three English periods a week – as alluded to above – signifies that each of the four language skills is devoted at most forty-five minutes weekly without taking into account the time devoted to some associated skills, which is too little time for practice. If the four language skills do not receive enough practice, writing is the least practiced. First, this is due to the nature of the skill. Second, the communicative Language Teaching principle giving priority to oral skills over writing skills has caused writing to be reckoned as being somewhat of a secondary importance.

Perhaps a more serious justification for the students' low level of proficiency in writing is that the teacher cannot correct all the students' written work regularly due to the fact that he or she usually teaches at least four classes, each having not less than twenty-five students on average. Although the teacher can resort to self-editing and peer editing, his or her evaluation of students' work is always viewed as more beneficial. Therefore, his or her inability to correct all the learners' compositions may create some sort of a negative attitude towards the skill on the part of students. They might be reluctant to learn and have no real intention of improving their writing proficiency. A case in point is that knowing previously that the teacher will not correct their work, some students do not do the written exercises assigned to them as homework.

A noticeable aspect of the difficulties Tunisian EFL learners experience with writing lies in the serious linguistic mistakes they make in their writing exercises. Such an issue –

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given the fact that writing is featured by linguistic accuracy – suggests a far-reaching implication for an effective teaching of grammar and spelling, and equally for the necessity of acquainting students well with particular written language resources, namely cohesive devices, capitalization and punctuation. Focus needs to also be placed on certain aspects connected with the writing skill, specifically the types of subject to write on, the purpose of writing, and the audience to whom the composition is addressed, and on the other hand, on training them for sufficient time in the different steps of the writing process they must go through prior to engaging them into practical writing activities, all with the object of making them able to produce fluent and linguistically-accurate compositions.

In addition to the above recommendations regarding a number of specific issues, and for the same purpose of overcoming the students' learning difficulties and achieving their communicative competence, here are general recommendations, which derive from looking through a multifaceted angle to the learner as a person influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social factors. From this perspective, the recommendations underlie affective influences, pedagogical and procedural courses of action relevant to EFL teaching, and teacher development as one springboard for effective teaching, and hence successful learning.

The recommendations in connection with affective factors may include:

- Convincing learners through various ways that English is not difficult to learn, and building their hopes about improving their proficiency level in the language;
- Showing them they are making progress. This can be done through praising and rewarding their successful performance, which creates or boosts self-confidence;
- Trying to positively change their attitude towards defects in learning performances, in general and rid them of apprehension of errors;
- Making the classroom an agreeable environment for learning. One feature of such an environment is to establish a teacher-student and student-student friendly relationship; and lending an ear to the learners' personal problems and helping them with possible solutions;
- Sensitizing students directly and indirectly – as suggested so far – to the fact that English is not a mere curricular subject, but rather a language of international communication, which they need for their current and future life. One simple implicit way to do this is

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allocating English, as a school subject, a high coefficient common to all levels and all areas of specialization.

The recommendations related to the EFL teaching as a whole can include:

- Using English most often as the language of instruction in the classroom as one way of exposing learners to more English input;
- Creating an English environment at school and/or outside school with the necessary facilities, where students are encouraged and helped to practice the four language skills. Among the facilities may be setting up an English library where they listen to native-speaker recorded materials on audiotape and watch them on videotape. There, they can also read books and/or borrow them to read elsewhere, following an extensive-reading program under the guidance of the teacher with the aim of developing their reading, speaking, and writing skills. In the same setting, facilitating access to the Internet for the purpose of interacting with native speakers is highly advisable;
- Focusing on teaching much more than testing. Apart from the pedagogical benefits of this procedure, it can implicitly show students that English is not a mere curricular subject;
- Encouraging pair- and group-work activities among mixed-ability participants not only in the classroom, but also somewhere else, such as in the school library, in an English club, or even in students' houses, in that they can enhance cooperative learning;
- Designing textbooks should not be monopolized by curricula designers. Students' and teachers' opinions ought to be consulted to suggest topics that suit the learners' affective interests and are compatible with their future professional life needs. Within the same framework, introducing topics in textbooks relevant to the target language culture is imperative, as one way of acquainting students with it, so as to spare them possible comprehension difficulties due to their unfamiliarity with L2 cultural matters;
- Creating national English T.V. stations specialized in educational programs;
- Allowing students from time to time to choose their own speaking and writing topics; and homework assignments relating to particular activities. This will help them with a better performance and trains them in being responsible for their own learning.

An eventual recommendation concerns teacher development training. As successful learning depends a great deal on effective teaching, extensive pre-service and obligatory

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occasional in-service teacher training under the guidance of ELT inspectors and teacher trainers; and perhaps more important, seeking out on one's own ample opportunities and diverse ways of developing one's teaching methodology, and keeping up with the new effective language teaching methods are all a vital necessity.

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Appendices

I. QUESTIONNAIRES

Appendix A: Questionnaires assigned to Tunisian EFL teachers

Please, read the following questions carefully and tick the options you think are right/true. Should you like to jot down any comments or explanatory notes to further account for your answers, please so do at the end of the questionnaire, and write the question number to which your comments or explanatory notes are related.

1. Generally speaking, how much are you satisfied with the level of proficiency in English of all the students you have taught?

a) Not at all ( ) ; b) Little ( ) ; c) Very ( )

2. To which extent do you think that the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in EFL classes has been successful in helping learners with communicative competence?

a) Not at all ( ) ; b) To some extent ( ) ; c) A great deal ( )

3. How much do you think that large classes affect the achievement of CLT learning objectives detrimentally?

a) Not at all ( ); b) Little ( ) ; c) Much ( ) ; d) Very much ( )

4. Do you hold the opinion that:

a. the eclectic method can be the best alternative to Communicative Language Teaching or to any other approach to teaching EFL in Tunisia?

a) Yes ( ) ; b) No ( ) ; c) I can't decide ( )

b. due to a number of reasons, one of which is the fact that a great many learners are weak at grammar, this language area ought to be taught to secondary school students explicitly as an independent subject, as a measure that can help them master it well?

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a) Yes ( ) ; b) No ( ) ; c) I can't decide ( )

c. three one-hour English periods per week can represent enough classroom exposure to English for EFL learners to the extent of helping them learn the language effectively?

a) Yes ( ) ; b) No ( ) ; c) I can't decide ( )

If your answer is no, how many periods a week would you suggest?

a) 4 ( ); b) 5 ( ); c) 6 ( ); d) More than 6 ( )

d. before engaging students into practical reading and writing, they should be amply theoretically taught particular reading-related features (e. g. skimming, scanning, extensive reading, intensive reading, types of meaning, etc.) and writing-related features (e.g. purpose, audience, mechanics, etc.), in the sense that theoretical teaching of these features can really help them be effective learner readers and writers?

a) Yes ( ); b) No ( ); c) I can't decide ( )

e. spelling should be given an actual share of theoretical and practical teaching in EFL classes, because it is reckoned to be difficult even for the native learner, especially in that it is phonemically inconsistent; and on the other hand, teaching it can help students to be fluent and accurate in written communication?

a) Yes ( ); b) No ( ); c) I can't decide ( )

f. one workable measure that can aid EFL learners' communicative competence is teaching them some school subjects in English?

a) Yes ( ); b) No ( ); c) I can't decide ( )

5. Are there enough CLT instructional materials in your school?

a) Yes ( ) No ( )

a. How much do you think that the lack of teaching materials affect your teaching performance while adopting CLT?

a) Not at all ( ); b) Little ( ); b) Much ( ); c) Very much ( )

6. In your opinion, how much Arabic may be used in EFL classes?

a) Not at all ( ); b) a small amount ( ); c) much ( )

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Appendix B: Questionnaires administered to Tunisian freshmen English majors

1. Jot down the reasons behind many students' inability to communicate in English effectively.

2. Can you develop your oral and written fluency without studying grammar in class?

a) Yes ( ); b) No ( ) ; c) I can't decide ( )

3. Do you agree that grammar should be taught explicitly as an independent subject in the preparatory and secondary stages?

a) Yes ( ); b) No ( ) ; c) I can't decide ( )

4. You attend grammar lessons regularly because:

a. it is an interesting subject.

Yes ( ) No ( )

b. you want to improve your standard in it.

Yes ( ) No ( )

c. it is difficult, and if you miss a lesson, you can't understand it on your own.

Yes ( ) No ( )

6. You can improve your standard in English without studying grammar in class.

Yes ( ) No ( ) I can't decide ( )

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Appendix C: Questionnaire assigned to secondary students

1. How often do you watch English T.V channels or English programs on other channels for the purpose of improving your English?

a. I do not watch at all ( ) ; b. rarely ; c. sometimes; ( ) ; d. often ( )

1.a. In case you watch, for what main purpose usually?

. to improve your English ( )

. just to enjoy the film or the program ( )

1.b. What do you mainly concentrate on while watching?

. on the English words and trying to understand their meaning ( )

. on the Arabic subtitles (if any) just to understand the meaning of what is expressed in English ( )

1.c. Jot down any explanation if you wish to.

2. Do you think that three one-hour English periods per week can represent enough classroom exposure to English for EFL learners to the extent of helping them learn the language effectively?

a) Yes ( ) ; b) No ( ) ; c) I can't decide ( )

. If your answer is no, how many periods a week would you suggest?

a) 4 ( ); b) 5 ( ); c) 6 ( ); d) More than 6 ( )

3. How much Arabic, do you think, may be used in EFL classes? Please, tick the appropriate box, and justify your opinion if you wish to.

a. Not at all ( ); b. some ( ); c. much ( ).

4. Which language skill do you consider the most difficult to learn and develop, listening, speaking, reading, or writing?

a. What problems and difficulties do you encounter during listening comprehension sessions?

b. What good effects, do you think, listening comprehension has on your EFL learning?

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5. Which 3 topics of the following would you like listening passages to deal with?

weather; description of place; camel racing; holidaying; a football match; detective stories; camping; traveling abroad; going shopping; accidents.

6. What factors are behind many students' low level of proficiency in oral communication? Jot them down.

7. If English were an optional subject, would you choose to learn it?

8. Do you know what the expressions in the table below, which are related to reading, mean? Tick *yes* or *no*. If you tick *yes*, explain briefly what each expression stands for.

Expressions	Yes	No
Skimming		
Scanning		
Intensive reading		
Extensive reading		

9. Choose three types of book content out of the following by putting 1, 2, and 3 according to order of preference:

adventure stories ( ); crime and detection ( ); fiction ( ); science-fiction ( ); fairy tales ( ); thrillers ( ); biographies ( ); drama ( ); animal stories ( ); other: mention.....( )

10. Do you know what the expressions in the table below, which are related to writing, mean? Tick *yes* or *no*. If you tick yes, explain briefly what each expression stands for.

Words / expressions	Yes	NO
Purpose		
Audience		
Topic sentence		

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Appendix D: Transcribe the following auxiliaries and prepositions as shown in the table below.

Auxiliaries & prepositions	Weak forms	Strong forms
Do Does Was Were Have Has Can Would From For At To Of		

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II. INTERVIEWS

A. Questions asked to a student

Interviewee: Hadeer Maâmouri, a second secondary student from Abul Quacim Shebby Secondary School, Ghardimaou, Tunisia

1. Let me start with a simple question: Do you like English?
Is it your favorite school subject, or one among your favourite subjects?
Could you tell me why?

2. Your level of proficiency in English is excellent. What factors/conditions have helped you achieve such level?

3. If English were an optional subject, would you choose to learn it?

4. Did/Do your parents help you with English? If so, how? Did/Do you have any private courses in English, for example?

5. What areas of the English language do you have difficulties with? Grammar, spelling, etc. If you have any, how – do you think – you can work out such difficulties?

6. Do you agree that spelling should be taught as an independent school subject? Why?

7. Do you agree that grammar should be taught explicitly?

8. What pieces of advice would you give your classmates, so that they can improve their level in English?

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B. Questions asked to ELT inspectors and native and non-native EFL teachers

1. Do you agree with the use of the students' native language in EFL classes?

2. How much Arabic may be used in teaching English? Why? Or in what teaching or learning situations may Arabic be used? Why?

3. How important do you think that exposing EFL students to English listening and speaking situations outside school is to their learning of the language?

4. Are your students aware of the benefits of exposure to English listening and speaking situations?

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C. Questions asked to lay people working in tourist areas

1. How many foreign languages can you speak? What are they?

2. How long had you been learning these languages at school?

3. What has actually helped you communicate in this/these language(s)?

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Abstract

This study explores the whys and wherefores of the communication difficulties experienced by Tunisian secondary school learners of English as a foreign language, and aims at offering ways out of the issue.

It has been demonstrated that the issue proceeds broadly from the woeful dearth of exposure to and practice of the language and certain inadequacies of the teaching methodology.

English seems to be learned as a mere curricular discipline, in that students have only a few weekly sessions confined solely to a classroom setting.

The inadequacies of the teaching methodology are manifest in a number of aspects. The use of the mother tongue in EFL classes has proved to generate more harm than good. In the very framework, it has also been revealed that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has not been at the level of the expected outcome. Two CLT principal principles, focus on meaning to the detriment of form, and prioritizing oral fluency over written proficiency, as well as certain constraints, mainly the severe lack of instructional materials and large classes have intervened with its successful implementation in EFL classes. An added factor related to teaching methodology is the quasi-absence of theoretical teaching as a prerequisite for the success of specific learning activities.

Accordingly, exposing learners profusely to English in various ways inside and outside the classroom, adopting an only-English eclectic approach to teaching the language, and combining theoretical instruction with practical teaching can considerably contribute to surmounting the students' learning difficulties, and hence to the achievement of their communicative competence.

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Résumé

Cette étude traite des écueils de communication que rencontrent les apprenants de l'anglais langue étrangère dans l'enseignement secondaire en Tunisie, et à partir de ces constats, propose quelques recommandations susceptibles de les aider à surmonter ces obstacles.

Il s'est avéré que ces difficultés de communication ont pour origine deux facteurs principaux: le manque d'exposition à l'anglais et l'inadéquation de certaines méthodes pédagogiques.

En effet, l'anglais semble être enseigné tout simplement comme une matière scolaire. Les apprenants ne sont exposés à cette langue qu'en milieu institutionnel, et ce pendant seulement quelques heures par semaine.

Il faut noter, par ailleurs, l'inadéquation de certaines méthodes pédagogiques: le recours à la langue maternelle dans l'enseignement de l'anglais en est un exemple. Ceci est une technique qui s'est révélée plus nuisible que bénéfique du fait qu'elle est souvent utilisée uniquement pour expliquer des termes lexicaux et des structures syntaxiques difficiles.

Quant à l'approche communicative, elle n'a pas permis d'atteindre les objectifs d'apprentissage escomptés en raison de certaines contraintes sérieuses qui ont entravé sa mise en application.

Le fait que cette approche mette l'accent sur le sens aux dépens de la forme et donne la priorité à l'expression orale au détriment de l'expression écrite d'une part, ainsi que les classes nombreuses et le manque ou l'indisponibilité de matériaux pédagogiques, d'autre part, sont d'autres éléments qui ne favorisent pas l'apprentissage.

Outre ces facteurs, on remarque également l'absence quasi-totale de cours théoriques sur les diverses compétences à acquérir avant que ne débute l'apprentissage de la langue étrangère.

Donc, afin d'aider les apprenants à progresser dans leur apprentissage et de contribuer à l'amélioration de leur compétence communicative, il serait utile de créer un environnement anglophone au lycée même et dans la mesure du possible, à l'extérieur de l'institution. Il serait également pertinent d'adopter des approches diversifiées et attacher davantage d'importance aux leçons théoriques en parallèle avec l'enseignement pratique.

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Key words	Mots clés
English as a foreign language Communication difficulties Teaching methodology Communicative approach Communicative competence	Anglais langue étrangère Difficultés de communication Méthodologie d'enseignement Approche communicative Compétence communicative