

# **31st IATEFL-Hungary Conference Selections**

**Edited by**

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## **Conference Selections**

Editors

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# Introduction

This compilation, based on presentations delivered at the 31st IATEFL-Hungary conference in Veszprém, 8–9 October 2021, contains one peer-reviewed and four non-peer-reviewed papers. The contributions cover a variety of themes in English language teaching, including language policy, teachers' professional development, students' well-being as well as the use of social media platforms. The overall aim of the papers is to bridge the gap between theory, research, and classroom practice.

Aicha Rahal examined the perceptions of Tunisian teachers, researchers, and students regarding the changing linguistic landscape in Tunisia. Through qualitative investigations, she identified the need for a new language education policy which reflects the pragmatic needs and instrumental motivation of teachers, researchers, and students. In her conclusion, she calls for cooperation between policy makers, local agents, and stakeholders in the formation of a new language policy.

In their paper, Andrea Huszákné Vendégh and Tamara Schüzler described the activities they included in their conference workshop. The activities are based on positive psychology and include five examples that can enhance student well-being in the language classroom.

Teacher well-being is discussed in Uwe Pohl's reflective paper. After exploring models of teacher development and key transformative forces in his professional life, he invites colleagues to embark on a similar contemplative journey to discover their own strengths, formative experiences, transformational moments, and important communities in their careers.

For those who wish to revitalise their teaching practice with the help of social media platforms, Boglárka Spissich's paper outlines what university students training to be EFL

teachers think about using Instagram and TikTok in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Her study also provides practical advice on how to use various platforms.

In her paper, Wijdene Ayed provides insights into the Tunisian ELT context by discussing the perceptions of six lecturers working in higher education. Her in-depth interviews revealed that the educational system needs to be improved and that educators are willing to be part of this change.

The editors would like to thank the following reviewers for their contribution to the compilation: Krisztina Károly, Claudia Molnár, Uwe Pohl, and Nóra Tartsayné Németh.

This and all the previous conference compilations are available at [www.tesol-hungary.org](http://www.tesol-hungary.org).

Éva Illés, Zsuzsanna Soproni, Árpád Farkas, and Anna Szegedy-Maszák

# Peer-Reviewed Paper

# Towards a Multilingual Language Education

## Policy in Tunisian Higher Education:

## Perspectives From Local Agents

Aicha Rahal

The language situation in Tunisian higher education is marked by a shift from language dualism, the use of Arabic and French as a medium of instruction, to a multilingual situation where there are three languages of instruction. The reason for this is that recently English has also become a language of teaching in three higher education institutions. This change raises a number of questions revolving around the perceptions of Tunisians of this multilingual language situation and its effects. Previous studies conducted on language policies in the Tunisian context focused on the perceptions of teachers and students of the languages present in Tunisia (Aouina, 2013; Bejaoui, 2018; Rahal, 2021), and the English Medium of Instruction (EMI) policy (Badwan, 2019; Rahal, 2023). However, there has been no study so far on the perceptions of Tunisian teachers and students regarding the shift from a bilingual language education policy to a multilingual language education one. This lack of research gave me the motive to conduct the present study, which aims to explore the shift from a bilingual situation to a multilingual one in Tunisia through investigating the role of teachers and students in shaping language policies. It also intends to present the effects of a multilingual language situation in the Tunisian higher education context. The research questions that guided the study were as follows: What are the perceptions of Tunisian teachers and students of a multilingual language situation? In their views, what will the effects of this multilingual situation be for education and research?



## **Literature Review**

This section starts with the definition of the key terms used throughout the study. This is followed by a description of the multilingual linguistic situation in Tunisia and the language policy background. Finally, previous studies conducted on language policies in Tunisia are presented.

### **The Definition of Key Terms**

#### ***Language Policy***

Language policy (LP) is defined as

official planning, carried out by those in political authority, and has clear similarities with all other forms of public policy. As such, LP represents the exercise of political power, and like any other policy, may be successful or not in achieving its aims. (Ager, 2001, pp. 5–6)

For the purpose of this study, the above definition is adopted because it describes LP as the process of planning and making decisions by policy makers to achieve certain goals.

#### ***Language Education Policy***

Language education policy (LEP) refers to the legislation pertaining to languages of instruction and the languages of literacy used in education. It has been defined as “the official and unofficial policies that are created across multiple layers and institutional contexts (from national organizations to classrooms) that impact language use and education in schools” (Johnson, 2013, p. 77). LEP thus refers to the regulation governing the status of languages used in education. In this study, the focus is on the change from a bilingual language education policy, the use of Arabic and French as a medium of instruction, to a multilingual

language education policy in Tunisia, which is demonstrated in the use of three languages in Tunisian higher education, namely Arabic, French, and English.

### ***English as a Medium of Instruction***

EMI is defined by Dearden (2014) as the “use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (p. 2). According to Dearden’s (2014) definition, EMI refers to the use of English to teach content subjects, including mathematics, science, chemistry, engineering, and history. Similarly to Dearden’s classification (2014), EMI is defined in the present study as the teaching and learning of content courses through the medium of English.

### ***Agency***

Agency is defined as “the capability of persons to make choices and act on these choices” (Martin, 2004, p. 136). This definition refers to the role of individuals in making change and creating language policies that meet local demands and needs. Agency highlights the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own choices. In accordance with Martin’s (2004) definition, agency is used in this study to refer to the role of all stakeholders—teachers, students, researchers, and policy makers—in sharing responsibilities to make decisions and implement them.

## **Theoretical Framework of the Study: Postmodern Approach to Language Policy**

### ***Postmodernism***

In their definition of postmodernism, Usher and Edwards (1994) referred “more to a state of mind, a critical posture and style, a different way of seeing and working, than to a fixed position, however oppositional, or to an unchanging set of critical techniques” (p. 17). Young

(1990) also provided the definition of postmodernism “as European culture’s awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world” (p. 19). From these definitions, it appears that postmodernism is a critical theory that rejects unity and questions established norms, concepts, and modes of thought. Bressler (2007) listed the main features of postmodernism as follows:

- A scepticism or rejection of grand metanarratives to explain reality;
- The concept of the self as ever-changing;
- No objective reality, but many subjective interpretations;
- Truth as subjective and perspectival, dependent on cultural, social and personal influences;
- No “one correct” concept of ultimate reality;
- No metatheory to explain texts or reality;
- No “one correct” interpretation of a text. (p. 101)

The principles of postmodernism listed above are based on criticism and subjectivism. They challenge unity and stress diversity. This theory claims that realities are subject to change and takes a micro rather than a macro approach when looking at the world (Bressler, 2007). I chose this theory for the purposes of this study because it emphasises the right of the individual to make decisions. It also sees the interaction between people as a dialogue in which there is mutual influence rather than simple transmission of knowledge.

### ***Postmodern Approaches to Language Policy***

The postmodern approach to LP has recently emerged (Corson, 2009) as a strategy of deconstruction. It has emphasised the role of agency in implementing language policies. According to Pennycook (2001), the postmodern approach “suggests a number of significant concerns for language policy and planning” (p. 64), for instance, the rethinking of key

concepts such as language. In the framework of the postmodern approach to LP, Zhao and Baldauf (2012) identified a number of different possible actors in Language Policy and Planning (LPP) decision-making:

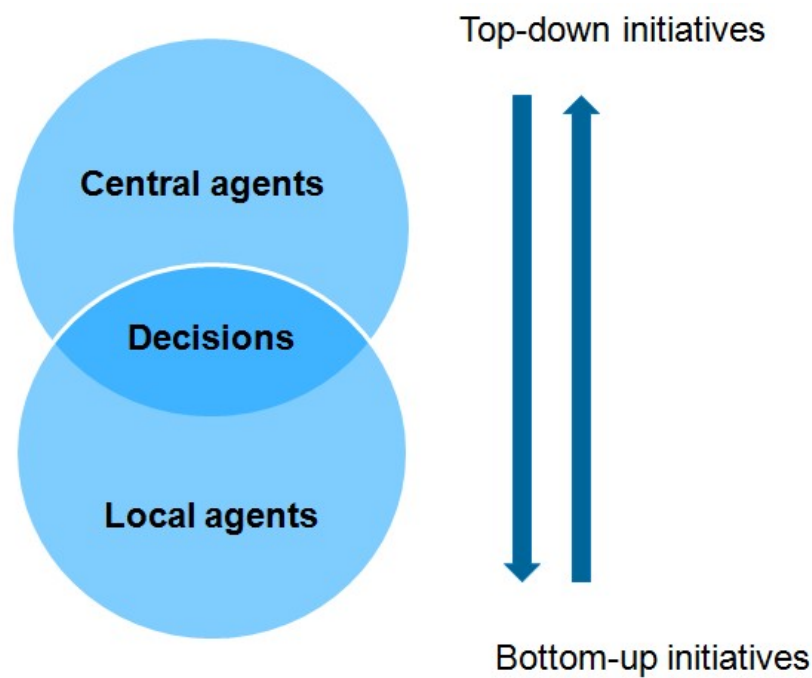
- People with power: Such as those who hold public office or judicial positions and have the power to shape LPP decisions;
- People with expertise: Those who can influence LPP decision-making by deploying expert knowledge;
- People with influence: Those who are influential in society because of standing or esteem; and
- People with interest: Those who get involved in LPP decision-making at the grassroots level because of their interest in language issues. (pp. 5–10)

The list above shows the various agents that should be involved in the creation and implementation of language policies, who include central agents such as policy makers and experts as well as local agents, people with interest, namely teachers, researchers, and students. This approach acknowledges the influence of diverse individuals to affect change. For the purpose of this study, I adopted the postmodern approach to investigate the perceptions of people with interest at the microlevel since postmodernism calls for the involvement of all actors in policy-led initiatives.

Figure 1 shows the postmodern approach to LEP in this study. In the figure, a compromise between top-down and bottom-up initiatives is created. Decisions are made by both central and local agents.

**Figure 1**

*Postmodern Approach to Language Education Policy*



The intersection of the two circles shows an exchange and share of decisions between all the stakeholders. The figure depicts the roles of individuals and groups in the processes of language policies and includes the opinions of all stakeholders (the microlocal level). There is, therefore, a shift from the authoritative top-down processes to the implementation of decisions at the microlevel. This study calls for a connection between the macrolevel (local agents, including teachers and students) and the microlevel policies (the role of policy-makers). In other words, the present paper applies the postmodern approach to voice the perceptions of local stakeholders and find the interface between top-down interests and bottom-up needs.

### **Multilingualism in Tunisia**

The Tunisian linguistic situation has been marked by diversity and multiplicity (Daoud, 2011, p. 9). It is considered a multilingual society par excellence in the sense that different languages coexist (Bahloul, 2001). The first language of the country was Libyc, which was

spoken by the indigenous people, the Berbers. The linguistic situation changed with the spread of Islam in North Africa, and Islam brought Arabic with it. In the 16th century, Tunisia was invaded by Turkey, with the occupation lasting until the 19th century. The Turkish language, therefore, dominated the linguistic scene during this period. Tunisia also witnessed many invasions from different European countries in the 19th century, including Italy, France, and Malta. In 1881, Tunisia was colonised by France, and the French language is now considered as the second language of the country. In higher education, there are three languages used as the medium of instruction, namely Arabic, French, and English. There are other foreign languages taught as optional modules including German, Spanish, and Italian.

### **Language Policies in Tunisia**

In Tunisia, language policies are presented in terms of three voices: the promotion of the Arabic language (known as Arabisation), the preservation of French as the language of modernisation, and the promotion of English as the language of technology and academic research (Rahal, 2021, p. 174). Attempts, such as the British–Tunisian cooperation in higher education, work to implement a new LP that encourages the promotion of English.

The policy of Arabisation gained new impetus in the 1990s. Ben Ali, one of the presidents of Tunisia, took important decisions regarding the Arabic language and introduced an educational reform in 1992. In this reform, Ben Ali emphasised the importance of Arabic and asked for the use of Arabic in teaching scientific subjects. As a result, the use of the Arabic language was extended from teaching humanities to the teaching of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and other subjects (Ben Ali, as cited in Aouina, 2013). In 1999, Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali decided to implement Arabisation in the field of administration. After the Tunisian revolution in 2011, Ennahda, a political party, emphasised the need for promoting Arabic and mainly Standard Arabic. In the same period, President Marzouki highlighted the importance of the Arabic language and called for its promotion.

French has been the language of education longer than Arabic. It was introduced as a foreign language in the third grade of primary school after Independence in 1956. In 1981, French became a second language in secondary and higher education to teach scientific subjects, such as biology, technology, physics, chemistry, and mathematics (Daoud, 2001, p. 26). In higher education, French is currently the dominant language of instruction.

The development of the position of English went through different stages in the 1990s. New, locally-produced textbooks were introduced in 1993 to implement the communicative approach. Then, English was taught as a compulsory subject for all students at secondary and higher levels. The present situation in Tunisian higher education is characterised by the use of three languages, namely Arabic, French, and English. In higher education, Arabic is used as the medium of instruction for teaching Arabic language and literature and Islamic studies. French is the dominant language of instruction in all fields (e.g., science, economy). English, however, has also become the medium of instruction in three Tunisian higher education institutions, namely the Tunis Business School, the Mediterranean School of Business, and the School of Medicine of Sousse (*Mapping UK-Tunisia Higher Education Cooperation*, 2014, p. 13). Additionally, English is considered the language of academic research in Tunisia because most of the conferences and publications are in English. It is also the key to cope with globalisation across the world.

At present, there are three languages of instruction in Tunisian higher education, namely Arabic, French, and English. Although LP documents specify the status of Arabic and French as the official languages of instruction, they fail to clarify the status of English despite the fact that English has become a medium of instruction in three higher education institutions (Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education, 2017, p. 12). Thus, the status of English is not stated clearly and explicitly in LP documents.

### **Previous Studies on Tunisians' Attitudes Towards Language Policies**

Only few studies can be found in the literature about the language situation and policy background in Tunisia. Aouina (2013) carried out research on the role of globalisation and the different attitudes to the languages present in Tunisia. The participants of the study were 100 teachers and 200 students. The teachers were from different geographical areas, and the student sample was taken from different schools and cities as well. The study adopted a mixed methods approach using different data collection tools such as two questionnaires, students' essays, and interviews with senior inspectors. After collecting the perceptions of both teachers and students, the researcher made a comparison between them. The results showed that teachers have more positive attitudes towards French than English, while the students seem to have more positive perceptions of English. The results indicate that the younger generation is aware of the global spread of English, and they are in favour of the promotion of the status of English in language policies.

In a similar vein, Bejaoui (2018) conducted a study on the attitudes of students and professionals (architects and doctors) towards English and its use in the Tunisian context. The sample included 205 participants from two Tunisian universities. Data were collected through a questionnaire. The findings demonstrated that Tunisian students preferred and saw English as the most used foreign language. They were also supportive of the use of English as the medium of instruction. Aouina's (2013) and Bejaoui's (2018) studies share the same results. They showed that Tunisian students are aware of the importance of English, and they also drew attention to the need for promoting the status of English in higher education.

Rahal (2021) examined LP documents and explored the views of policy makers regarding the status of Arabic, French, and English. The research concluded that there is a new voice calling for the promotion of the status of English and the need for a change in language policies.

Another study conducted by Rahal (2023) investigated the perceptions of Tunisian university students and teachers towards EMI policy. Based on the results, a positive attitude towards the



use of English as the language of instruction and an awareness of the importance of English were detected.

Similarly, Badwan (2019) carried out a study on the potential use of EMI in higher education in Tunisia. The major aims of this research were to explore the attitudes of Tunisian students and teachers towards the use of English as a language of instruction and investigate the readiness of EMI policy among university students, teachers, and educational stakeholders. Data were collected from 391 Tunisian university students and teachers by using a questionnaire. The results showed positive attitudes towards English. English was favourably associated with research, employment, mobility, advances in technology, global communication, and entertainment. The study highlighted the need for a dialogue between all stakeholders to promote the status of English.

Although there is a positive attitude towards English and its promotion in Tunisia, some researchers (e.g., Badwan, 2019) argue that there is no clear strategy to promote the status of English. It seems that there is a mismatch between what Tunisian teachers and students' needs and the regulations. It also appears that there are no clear regulations to encourage the promotion of English in higher education.

The present study aims to investigate the perceptions of Tunisian university teachers and students regarding the promotion of the status of English in higher education. It also intends to explore their perceptions of the shift from a bilingual LP to a multilingual language one. In order to achieve these aims, the methodology outlined below was followed.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

As presented in Table 1, the total number of the participants was 50, and their age ranged from 21 to 45 years old. There were 19 teachers, 10 researchers, and 21 students from

different fields including biology, mathematics, chemistry, physics, information technology, economy, and finance.

**Table 1**

*The Participants of the Study*

<b>Informants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>L1</b>
50	23 males 27 females	21–45	19 teachers 10 researchers 21 students	Arabic

As indicated in the table above, the participants were native speakers of Arabic. Teachers and researchers studied English as a foreign language for 13 years; 10 students had been studying English as a compulsory subject in their programmes for 9 years and the rest for 10 years.

When asked about their knowledge of English, the students admitted that they can understand English, but they cannot speak it. Teachers and researchers stated that they can understand and speak English (they can use English for professional purposes, e.g., reading professional literature, presenting in English, etc.)

**Data Collection**

In order to investigate Tunisian university lecturers' and students' attitudes towards the promotion of the status of English in the Tunisian higher education context, four open-ended questions were asked to collect detailed data on the participants' perceptions:

1. What do you think of developing the status of English in Tunisian higher education?
2. In your view, how can the status of English in Tunisian higher education be promoted?
3. What do you think of using English as the language of teaching at Tunisian universities?
4. In your opinion, what are the expected results of using English to teach courses at Tunisian universities?

These questions are part of a questionnaire on Tunisian teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the status of English and its promotion in higher education. They seek to investigate the views of the participants regarding the use of EMI and the expected impact of the use of English as a language of instruction. It is important to note that the questionnaire was written in English; it was then translated into Arabic, the native language of the respondents. It is worth mentioning that the participants' responses were in three languages: Arabic, French, and English.

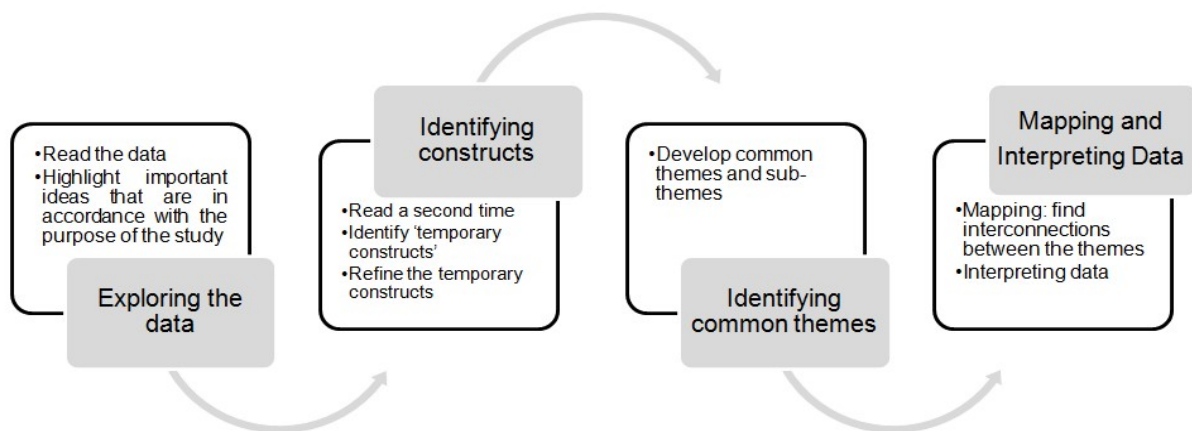
## **Data Analysis**

### ***The Constant Comparative Method***

To analyse the data obtained from the open-ended questions, the Constant Comparative Method (Creswell, 1998; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Szokolszky, 2004; Thomas, 2009) was used. As presented in Figure 2, this method comprises four stages:

**Figure 2**

*Constant Comparative Method (Thomas, 2009, p. 198)*



The first stage of the Constant Comparative Method is exploring the data and highlighting important information. The second stage aims to identify the constructs and includes rereading the data and finding temporary constructs. In the third stage, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs are compared with all of the other elements (i.e., phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) of the data with the purpose of developing “themes that capture or summarize the contents of the data” (Thomas, 2009, p. 198). The last stage of this method is devoted to the identification of interconnections between themes and the interpretation of data.

The analysis started with reading and rereading the obtained data. Colour-coding was used to highlight ideas relevant to the aims of the research. Then the ideas were categorised into themes and subthemes. The Constant Comparative Method allowed me to identify themes from the data set and to interpret the data. The results are reported in the following section.

## **Results and Discussion**

On the basis of the results, I found four broadly related themes, but in this paper, I focus on two of them, namely the expected results of promoting the status of English and the ways of promoting its status in Tunisian higher education.

The results of the study demonstrate that the participants have a positive attitude towards the promotion of the status of English in Tunisian higher education. Higher education teachers and students are for the implementation of a multilingual LP which supports the promotion of English. The respondents provided the following reasons for the improvement of the status of English:

### **Prospects**

- Improving the proficiency level of the students in English
- Employment: job opportunities
- Career development
- Developing academic research
- Improving the quality of education in Tunisia
- Better recognition of Tunisian degrees and better rankings of Tunisian universities at the international level

The need to improve the proficiency level of the students in English was one of the most heavily coded themes in the analysis of the responses as shown in the following quote, for example: “I am for the use of the English language at Tunisian universities as an official subject to improve the levels of students’ [English]” (Participant 18, my translation).

Most of the participants agreed that the promotion of the position of English could lead to the development of English language competence in students, including their English communication skills, as suggested by the following quote: “People would understand and be able to communicate more effectively with this language and be more open on other cultures such as the British, American, and Canadian” (Participant 23, English original).

An interesting but surprising outcome of this study is the absence of any reference to the development of teachers' proficiency in English. This finding is less well aligned with previous research, namely that of Rahal (2023), who found a positive attitude towards the use of EMI in Tunisian higher education as a way to develop the lecturers' English proficiency. In addition, Badwan (2019) highlighted the lack of teachers who are proficient in teaching scientific subjects in English in Tunisian higher education.

The following quote presents another positive argument for the promotion of the status of English, where the participant compared the result of developing the position of English to "paradises of Phoenix". This metaphor compares English to the Phoenix bird, which symbolises hope, birth, and immortality. Like the Phoenix bird, English is a symbol of hope for Tunisian students helping them to find study opportunities and a gateway that allows them to see the world. English is seen as a tool to help students continue their studies abroad because most of the entrance exams in foreign universities (e.g., European universities) are in English.

I think if Tunisia takes this decision into consideration, we will be walking towards never ending paradises of Phoenix. Even before entering to universities abroad, they ask you to pass an entry exam which includes surely English, Maths in English, and Cultural questions in English. I hope Tunisia will opt for this decision not only for us but for the next unborn generations. (Participant 35, English original)

Another category heavily evident in most of the responses was job opportunities. According to the participants, introducing a new LP that supports multilingualism could contribute to helping Tunisian graduates' finding job opportunities both at home and abroad: "That will help people not only with the language itself but also with finding the job. Developing our levels in English can help us to find job opportunities abroad" (Participant 48, English

original). It appears that developing the position of English in Tunisian higher education provides students with a high level of education and makes them competitive in the international market. In return, this can lead to the recognition of Tunisian universities at the international level, which is another notable benefit of improving the status of English. The responses of both teachers and students thus appeared to indicate that the English language has a clear instrumental value for graduates in their intended careers. This also shows that there is, in fact, an increase in awareness about the demand for English in job markets.

Findings drawn from the responses showed that developing academic research was another theme particularly prominent among the informants' comments, especially those of teachers and researchers. It also seems that the policy of promoting the status of English can provide researchers with language and academic development. The following quote is an illustrative excerpt from one of the students' responses: "the use of the English language as a language of instruction can contribute to the development of scientific research because it is the necessary language for publications, conferences" (Participant 33, my translation). On the basis of this response, it appears clear that proficiency in English is considered to be a prerequisite for good academic and career prospects. Implementing English as the language of instruction is also seen as a way of internationalising higher education that prepares students for participation in the global academic community.

Overall, English is positively associated with research, employment, mobility, advances in technology, and global communication. These findings concur with other research (e.g., Badwan, 2019) which listed the goals behind encouraging the development of English and its use as a language of instruction including developing academic research, employability, mobility, advances in technology, and global communication.

## **Promoting the Status of English**

Higher education teachers and students felt similarly positive about the impact of using English to teach content subjects. They suggested a number of ways for promoting the status of English as listed below:

- Organising trainings for both teachers and students
- The organisation of English clubs
- Increasing the teaching hours of English
- Using English as a language of instruction
- Encouraging exchange programmes with the UK, the USA, etc.

The data reveal that the most apparent measures should be taken by local agents including teachers, students, and researchers, who are instrumental in encouraging the organisation of trainings and university clubs, for example. Organising clubs as a way to help students acquire competence in English is illustrated in the following quote: “In my opinion, we can improve the status of English by organizing effective clubs and encouraging students to use this language, besides using English to teach some subjects, mainly scientific subjects” (Participant 4, English original). The participant believes that clubs, one of the most recurring themes, are a good way of practising English and helping students develop their proficiency. The participant also points to using English as a language of instruction, especially for the teaching of scientific subjects in order to develop students’ English language proficiency. In the following quote, there are various measures proposed to promote the status of English. These include increasing the teaching hours of English and raising students’ awareness of the importance of reading books and articles in English.



It is important to place the English language in a privileged position. We must start by increasing the time devoted to English sessions, orienting good students towards this language, organising English entrance tests and encouraging students to participate in these sessions, organising competitions, encouraging students to read articles and scientific books in English. (Participant 12, my translation)

Interestingly, the participant sheds light on an important point, which is the suggestion that students who wish to study in English at universities would be required to take entrance exams in English.

The results demonstrate that local agents should play a role in raising the status of English at the local level. The participants also pointed to the role of central agents, mainly the Ministry of Higher Education, which, according to respondents, should revise the number of English teaching hours in higher education and implement English as a medium of instruction.

Overwhelmingly, the respondents recognised the use of English as a medium of instruction as a way of helping the students communicate with people from diverse linguacultural backgrounds, encouraging interaction with the international community of researchers and educators, and increasing international mobility. In addition, the government should encourage more cooperation with English speaking countries.

In the light of the principles of postmodernism, it appears that local and central agents can complement each other. They can create a LP that benefits local, central as well as international needs and interests. It is, therefore, important to open a dialogue between all stakeholders, share views, and arrive at decisions together. In fact, this has been the aim of this research, that is, to make the voices of the different stakeholders heard to facilitate the implementation of a multilingual policy.

It is hoped that the results of the present study may contribute to raising the awareness of central agents about the needs and interests of local stakeholders and find a compromise between political and linguistic needs. Shedding light on the needs of teachers, researchers, and students may help policy makers to focus on their concerns and reach the grassroots level. This research is also expected to supply important implications for rethinking the needs of students as well as the instructional LP in higher education.

## **Conclusion**

The present study has focused on the role of agency in developing a multilingual policy in Tunisian higher education from a postmodern perspective. It attempted to rethink the needs of students and instructional LP at universities and expound their views on how to promote the status of English and integrate it as the language of instruction in higher education. The study suggests considering all stakeholders' views when creating a language education policy including students and teachers alongside policy makers and university leaders.

The results of this research demonstrate that the participants, the local agents, have a positive attitude towards a move from a bilingual LEP to a multilingual LEP. The analysis of the results indicates the need for a widespread shift which reflects a changing paradigm in language planning and policy from a bilingual to a multilingual LEP.

The application of a postmodernist perspective shows that LP needs to be developed in consultation with policy makers ("top down") and have the commitment of those working most closely with the students ("bottom up"; Baldauf, 1997, p. 4). Thus, the study highlights the role of local agents in developing language policies and underlines the need for more studies in this domain. Further research should focus on the challenges that may hinder the implementation of this multilingual language-in-education policy from the perspectives of all

stakeholders (Bradford, 2016; Dearden, 2014) and find a compromise between local needs and central decisions.

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## Non-Peer-Reviewed Papers

# Enhancing Student Well-Being in the EFL

## Classroom: A Workshop for Teachers

Andrea Huszákné Vendégh and Tamara Schüzler

During the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in issues of mental health and student (as well as teacher) well-being increased dramatically. However, even before the outbreak of the pandemic, the teaching profession had witnessed the emergence of ideas related to positive psychology in pedagogy, including in English language teaching (ELT). It seems to be widely accepted that teachers, especially foreign language teachers, have a crucial role in promoting mental health and well-being among their students. Based on our experience of working as secondary school teachers, we hypothesise three issues in connection with fostering mental health and well-being in the language classroom: (1) many teachers are already doing it instinctively, and (2) they would like to be more aware of their practices, and (3) there are teachers who think that they could or should care more about their students' mental health but lack the resources and means to do so. Therefore, it seems important to find out what kind of classroom activities, exercises, and tasks can serve two different purposes at the same time: language development and maintaining students' mental health. We designed and presented a workshop for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at the 2021 IATEFL-Hungary Conference, and in this paper, we give a brief overview of a positive psychology theory applicable in language teaching and learning, and then we describe five classroom activities and explain how they can contribute to students' well-being.



## Theoretical Background

Positive psychology is often referred to as the psychology of happiness and well-being as it focuses on mental health rather than mental illness. Earlier theories of psychology mostly dealt with the deviations from normality and, therefore, viewed mental health as the absence of mental illness, whereas positive psychology aims to find ways which help people maintain and develop their mental health by improving certain psychological skills, such as empathy, and other personal features like self-knowledge, self-awareness, and self-confidence (Seligman & Csíkszentmihályi, 2000).

It is important to note that “positive psychology with its concentration on well-being does not ignore human difficulties but it faces them from the point of view of human strength rather than weakness” (Oxford, 2016a, p. 11). It is not about asking people to pretend to be happy despite their circumstances and, for instance, deny pain, but it offers ways and resources to live a happy life. It is not some “magic potion” to be taken that makes all hardships disappear. This is where education and teachers can make a difference: Teachers can help students discover their inner resources and enable them to apply them in practice.

There is a growing body of literature (e.g., MacIntyre, 2016; Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014; Oxford, 2016a, 2016b) regarding how the findings of research into positive psychology can contribute to second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language learning and teaching.

It is now becoming clear how and what aspects of positive psychology can be incorporated into language teaching, where, naturally, the primary focus is on developing linguistic skills.

Oxford (2016a) created a framework, called the EMPATHICS vision, to be applied in language learning and teaching which includes the basic dimensions and key terms of positive psychology:

- E: emotions (the concepts of the emotional brain, positive and negative emotions, emotional intelligence) and empathy
- M: meaning and motivation (the concepts of making meaning in one's life and self-actualisation, theories of motivation)
- P: perseverance (being able to make an achievement despite difficulties, strongly related to confidence) including resilience (psychological fitness), hope (not wishful thinking but “desire accompanied by /reasonable/ expectation”, see also Clarke, 2003, as cited in Oxford, 2016a, p. 30) and optimism (the concept of coping strategies and optimism as an explanatory style)
- A: agency (the concept of functional self-determination) and autonomy (self-regulation)
- T: time (temporal appraisal theory, the meaning of time perspective)
- H: hardiness (dealing with stress, commitment, control, and challenge) and habits of mind (e.g., thinking flexibly, striving for accuracy, and persisting)
- I: intelligences (the theory of multiple intelligences and the triarchic theory of intelligence)
- C: character strengths (the concept of universal or core virtues)
- S: self-factors (self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, and self-verification)

(Oxford, 2016a, p. 10)

Oxford (2016a) proposed several hypotheses based on these dimensions (for an overview, see Table 1). According to these hypotheses, people (language learners in our case) with high well-being possess the qualities or abilities connected to the above dimensions; for example, they can identify their emotions, are capable of empathy, etc. However, she warned that there is no causality between well-being, and relevant qualities and abilities.

**Table 1***The 'EMPATHICS' Vision (Oxford, 2016a)*

	Hypotheses: Language learners with high well-being...
E	... recognise their emotions, manage them effectively, and show empathy for others.
M	... seek and create meaning, which helps them be motivated.
P	... persevere in their learning (that is, they are resilient and maintain hope and optimism).
A	... embody agency and autonomy.
T	... appraise themselves temporally in a positive way and have a time perspective that fits their needs for learning.
H	... develop hardy attitudes and hardy action patterns and have useful habits of mind.
I	... recognise their own intelligences and take advantage of those intelligences for learning and living.
C	... have a range of character strengths that help them in their learning and their lives.
S	... possess self-efficacy, positive self-concepts, and high self-esteem, and they use self-verification positively.

Oxford (2016a) stressed that the factors in EMPATHICS are interconnected as they “are part of a complex dynamic system” (p. 10). They are not to be seen as independent features of a person. On the contrary, there are fairly strong connections between them, which also means that when an activity is aimed at developing one, it will probably have an effect on the others as well.

It is crucial to emphasise that both mental health as a field of study and positive psychology are concerned with the *prevention* of mental illness and with the *enhancement* of the well-being of mentally *healthy* people and not with the diagnosis or treatment of mental disease. Teachers, whose work involves close personal contact with their students, can have a major role in this. Language teachers in particular are, indeed, in a unique position in Hungary's highly centralised educational system because the subject matter they teach is language, the main means of communication. This implies that they are probably the least constrained by curricula and other regulations, and that they have more freedom in selecting the topics of their lessons compared to teachers of other subjects. Interaction is both the aim and the means of language teaching and learning, and it is, therefore, the main activity taking place in language classrooms, which seems to make them an ideal place for mental health development.

### **Activities**

Oxford's 'EMPATHICS' vision subsumes notions of human character and qualities central to positive psychology that have relevance to foreign language teaching and learning too. The idea behind the workshop was to reveal how these notions can be integrated into actual classroom activities, where English is used as a means of communication. We assumed that some conference participants already employed such activities, in which case the aim was to make them realise the link between their practice and theory. At the same time, this selection of specially aimed ready-to-use activities might be a practical addition to the participants' day-to-day practice. We believe that hands-on experience is the key to understanding, so trying out activities was one of the most important parts of the workshop session.

### *Activity 1 – Five Senses*

AIM: Reflecting on the experience of online schooling and the transition back to the offline classroom

WORK MODE: Individual, then two groups of 2–8

LEVEL: Elementary and above

LANGUAGE FOCUS: General vocabulary, the verbs “see,” “hear,” “smell,” “taste,” and “touch”

SKILLS in focus: Speaking, listening

MATERIALS: Slips of paper, white or blackboard (and marker or chalk) or flipchart and marker, a dice

TIMING: 10–30 minutes

STEPS: This is a variation of the popular game “Charades”

1. Students create the words or phrases to be guessed. They individually answer the question: “What did you miss about school during online teaching?” Students are asked to focus on the five senses while searching their memory. If necessary, the main question can be broken down into more specific ones: “What did you miss seeing? What did you miss hearing? etc.” (It is anticipated that the items they come up with will somehow relate to the school building, their classroom, or being physically together with their classmates.) On five small slips of paper, the students write down something that can be **seen**, something that can be **heard**, something that can be **smelt**, something that can be **touched / felt**, and something that can be **tasted**. Students put the slips in a hat or bowl.
2. Students form two teams.
3. The two teams take it in turns to draw a slip from the bowl and either describe, mime, or draw the word as in the original game. Students roll the dice to see what

they will have to do: If it is 1 or 4, describe; 2 or 5, mime; 3 or 6, draw. Their team has 1 minute to guess the word or phrase.

Oxford (2016a) drew on the results of Costa and Kallick (2008) when discussing habits of the mind. According to Costa and Kallick's findings, useful habits of the mind are mental activities that successful and intelligent people regularly perform, for example, listening with understanding and empathy, thinking flexibly, and responding with wonderment and awe (for the full list of 16 such habits of mind, see Oxford, 2016a, p. 51, referring to Costa & Kallick, 2008). One of these habits is "gathering data through all the senses" (Oxford, 2016a, p. 51), which Oxford applied to the language learner by hypothesising that "language learners who have high well-being, learn languages and cultures through all the senses, thus taking advantage of multiple regions of the brain" (Oxford, 2016a, p. 51). Although she states that there is no causality between well-being and any of these useful habits of mind, there still seems to be a connection. Oxford linked the "habits of mind" to learning strategies and related "gathering data through all the senses" with the cognitive learning strategies (Oxford, 2016a, pp. 52–53). This suggests that becoming more aware of all the senses might have a beneficial effect on the learning process and on one's well-being at the same time.

With Activity 1, teachers focus students' attention on all five senses, making them more aware of the wide range of information they receive from the world. Naturally, linguistic information is mainly verbal, so the senses of vision and hearing might play a more dominant role in language learning. However, the EFL teacher might improve students' mental skills by pointing out that they are also surrounded by information about the chemical properties of objects through the senses of smell and taste, and their physical properties through the sense of touch and by encouraging students to focus on this information. Another feature of the activity is that students are asked to remember a difficult time in their lives and think about what they missed, which might evoke certain emotions. According to the EMPATHICS

model, being able to recognise one's own emotions is characteristic of people with high well-being (Oxford, 2016a), so if the situation allows, students might be invited to talk about their emotions, too. Nevertheless, if the activity is only done as described, students are already asked to connect with their memories and emotions, which can be beneficial even without having to talk about them.

Activity 1 creates a link between then and now, and there and here: at home during the lockdown and back at school. This might help students find the way back to the here and now and bring their experiences and emotions to the conscious level. Please note that the activity can be altered to fit other transitive situations when it seems to be important to anchor learners in the here and now, too. For example, after a school break, the question can be “What did you miss about school during the holidays?”

### ***Activity 2 – Rapid Relaxation***

AIM: To release stress; it can be used as a filler or cooling down activity at the end of a lesson

WORK MODE: Individual

LEVEL: Elementary and above

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Imperatives, vocabulary related to body parts and bodily movements

SKILLS in focus: Listening

MATERIALS: None

TIMING: 5 minutes

STEPS: Students follow the instructions read out by the teacher (Figure 1). The teacher should explain that the exercise is most effective when participants manage to focus on the instructions and their bodies as much as they can. They might want to close their eyes, but it is not necessary. It is also a good idea for the teacher to demonstrate the movements following the instructions, thus helping students who might not be familiar with the vocabulary.

## Figure 1

### *Instructions of Activity 2 - Rapid Relaxation*

1. *Stand casually.*
  2. *Clench your fists tight.*
  3. *Holding the fists tight, bend your arms as if you were holding two heavy bags (imagine the bags).*
  4. *Keeping the position of the arms, squeeze your upper arms against your body.*
  5. *Keeping the fists and arms flex, focus on your legs. Flex your calves and thighs, finally your bottom. Tiptoe as if you were trying to peek out a high window. Hold it for a few seconds.*
  6. *Now breathe out, open your fist, and let go of the grip.*
- Repeat 3 times.*

This is a simple relaxation exercise adapted from Bagdy (2010, pp. 128–129), who drew on the results of neurophysiology. The idea is that when you are stressed, it is difficult to sooth your mind on command. However, as your body and mind are interconnected, you can become relaxed, paradoxically, by flexing your muscles. Flexing your muscles is done consciously and when you do it too hard, it feels unnatural to the nervous system, which will react by sending an automatic message to relax in self-defence. This state of consequential



laxing of the muscles will be less tense and flex than the original state, and the effect is not merely physical, but mental as well.

Even though introducing this simple relaxation exercise to students is to their benefit, there are some issues to be borne in mind. Firstly, taking part should always be voluntary. It is not advised to force anyone into the activity against their own will, especially if they experience discomfort. Similarly, the teacher

should feel at ease doing and leading the activity. Secondly, it is understood that learning more complex relaxation techniques, especially when used as part of psychotherapy, requires a trained professional as instructor. However, Bagdy, mostly in her popular

works (e.g., Bagdy, 2010), suggests that these simple relaxation exercises, like the one our activity is adapted from, might be practised by anyone, anywhere without any supervision or special care. This is why applying it as a classroom activity seems viable. By teaching students about what they can do to cope with stress, teachers might help them develop hardy attitudes and become more resilient and perseverant—some of the key features of the EMPATHICS model.

**Figure 2**

*At Lake Balaton*



### ***Activity 3 – At Lake Balaton***

AIM: To do choral repetition, to have a warmer, breaker, or cooler in class

WORK MODE: Individual

LEVEL: Any (especially if the teacher fosters learners' understanding of the movements instructed by modelling them)

LANGUAGE FOCUS: A lead-in to pronunciation practice by choral repetition

MATERIALS: A4 sheets of paper, pens, envelopes

TIMING: 10 minutes

STEPS: The activity starts with the teacher's standing up and guiding students through an imaginary journey on the beach at Lake Balaton. The teacher gives the cues in Figure 3.

### Figure 3

#### *Instructions of Activity 3 – At Lake Balaton*

*Imagine you are at Lake Balaton.*

*It is very hot here.* [starts fanning themselves with both hands as if it was indeed very hot in there so that hands and arms become active]

*It is so hot you walk into the lake.* [imitates walking and thus makes students stand up; stay in one place]

*As you are standing in the lake, you can feel gentle waves.* [moves arms and hands as if they were touching the water in front of them]

*You see your peers and join them to enjoy the echo you can hear. You shout the words you hear to check if the Tihany echo is real.* [Here, the teacher might want to add only that there is an echo sound because of the vicinity of the water—some students might not know what the Tihany echo is. Teacher starts saying the words to be pronounced by students and expects students to echo the words.]

*After a while, you get bored with the echo, so you start playing with your peers.* [starts doing finger flicks, imitating as if they wanted to sprinkle water on others gently]

*After you've got bored with the game, you walk out of the lake to do some sunbathing.*  
[imitates walking in one place again; asks students to sit down]

This sequence can serve various purposes by making the students use and become more aware of their bodies, which might be neglected in the classroom during a long period of

concentrated brainwork. Imagining being at the beach may make students more active physically by standing up and moving in one place (for more on physical energisers, see Revell, 2018). It may also help students to “release the beast”: While echoing, they can speak as loudly as they want. Also, they can breathe more freely as they are not sitting hunched over their desks anymore but are standing straight. Another stimulation technique included in this sequence is doing finger flicks while sprinkling water onto each other, which is said to be especially useful in stimulating the nervous system (for more information, see Christiansen, 2014). Finally, the tedious exercise of pronunciation drilling can be made into a more complex and creative task that students can get more immersed in.

#### ***Activity 4 – Scrutiny***

AIM: Focusing on the present moment as it is, finding out what is really happening around us

WORK MODE: Pairwork

LEVEL: Intermediate, upper-intermediate

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Past modals for deduction/past continuous

MATERIALS: None

TIMING: 10–12 minutes

STEPS: This is an activity which involves mindful listening and mindful watching.

1. Participants form pairs.
2. From each pair, one person will be a listener, and the other one will be an onlooker.
3. The listener closes their eyes and tries to listen very carefully to the noises of their surroundings while the onlooker covers their ears and watches people in their environment. The question they need to bear in mind is, “How are people feeling now? What mood(s) are they in?” They scrutinise the environment for 1 minute.
4. After a minute, the teacher signals that students can uncover their eyes and ears (by saying and showing).

5. After doing this, the listener and the onlooker talk to each other: They make assumptions about the questions asked above using either past modals for deduction or the past continuous. (The teacher can provide a model before they start the activity, e.g., “I think people were enjoying themselves because I could hear a lot of people laughing”.)

The aim of this activity is to focus on the present moment as it is and find out what really is happening around the participants of the activity. It is rooted in the concept of mindfulness, which is a form of meditation that originates in Buddhism (Kirmayer, 2015), and was introduced in the western world in the late 20th century by therapists using it as a stress reduction technique (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Since then, mindfulness was introduced not only in the traditional practicum of psychology treating the ill, but in positive psychology as well. This is the reason why it has received much criticism as it was labelled McMindfulness by some, suggesting that it is just a capitalist form of spirituality (Purser, 2019) and the whitewashed appropriation of Eastern tradition (Dauphinis, 2021). However, in recent years, mindfulness has been researched and academics have argued that as a meditative technique it should be used even in school settings in order to enhance students’ 21st century skills: creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking (e.g., see Davenport & Pagnini, 2016; for a meta-analysis, Waters et al., 2014).

Without providing an analysis of the various religious definitions of the term, let us settle on a secular one provided by Kabat-Zinn (1994): “Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges from paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (p. 4). For the language classroom, this can mean any exercise that involves the close observation of surroundings or present state of the individual, without evaluating it. For rookie teachers, this is why the activity we called *Scrutiny* might be a good introduction to the concept. Besides lending itself to being an introduction to mindfulness as we said above, this

type of task can also help students work more towards empathy, dimension “E” in the EMPATHICS vision. By using different channels to observe the present moments, students might have different input about the same course of events. Upon sharing their experience, it may become easier for students to understand why shifting perspectives can be useful, for example, in a debate.

### ***Activity 5 – Growing a Tree***

AIM: To reflect on our resources, watch our present state, and bring our plans into the forefront

WORK MODE: Individual (involves drawing, but students can be assured that they do not have to show their drawings to anyone if they do not want to).

LEVEL: Preintermediate or higher

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Question formation, vocabulary

MATERIALS: A4 sheets of paper, markers

TIMING: 15–30 minutes

STEPS:

1. Everyone works individually.
2. The teacher can provide a model on the board, but it should not be too specific; it is especially useful if the teacher does not want to directly preteach words such as “trunk” or “branches” (if they need preteaching at all).
3. Everyone starts to draw a tree following the instructions in Figure 4 given by the teacher:

### **Figure 4**

Instructions of Activity 5 – Growing a Tree

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Now, we are going to draw a tree. Make sure you have enough space—and an A4 sheet should be big enough.</li></ol> |
|--|

2. Start with the **roots**. The **roots** should be things you get your drives and energy from. What are these resources? They can be quite complex. Try to put everything there, all your drives. There may be connections between them as well. Feel free to draw them.
3. Now focus on the **leaves**. They should be your goals. What do you want to achieve? What is in your leaves? What can you write on the big branches?
4. Now look at the **trunk**. This is where you are now. What can you draw there? What do you have right now at hand that can help you? Don't worry if the trunk is not very thick now, but make sure you have something in the trunk.
5. Remember: No tree is ugly. All trees are unique and noncomparable to others.

Growing your tree is all about you; this is why it can be a solitary exercise accompanied by some relaxing music or even some background noise (such as relaxing nature sounds that can easily be found on YouTube or Spotify and played on someone's phone in the classroom).

The aim of the activity is to give students an opportunity to think about their resources, their goals, and their present state (and thus practise some nonjudgemental observation of themselves—mindfulness of the self). The order in which students draw their trees is important as it follows the exact sequence of past–future–present organisation.

As it can be seen from the illustration (Figure 5), our motives, aims, and present state might be really private, hence the blurry image of one of the authors' tree. The end of the drawing cycle is the point where the teacher needs to make a decision: In some groups, the teacher might want to encourage students to share their thoughts (not the drawing) with a partner, but this has to be carefully preplanned and cannot be forced on students. If they also have a follow-up speaking activity in pairs, students naturally have more language input, but reflecting on the three aspects of their lives in English can already serve as a vocabulary revision exercise which is fairly personalised. Also, students may realise not just what they want to achieve, but by doing what Gregersen et al. (2014) called *savouring* (which, in Gregersen and her colleagues' terminology, is the activity of noticing positive things in one's life and reflecting on how the individual feels about them), they may also realise what character strengths they already possess by reflecting on their present state (see also Seligman et al., 2005). This activity can be related to several concepts under EMPATHICS: Close observation of self may help students realise their Emotions, while seeking Motivation may help them Persevere in their learning later on, to name but a few. When participants grow their own tree, what might be considered most useful in terms of career guidance is drawing the foliage: contemplating the various goals they have in life and trying to connect them to their present state. The following task also involves thinking about the future; however, it has a different take on goals as it is a letter to participants' future selves.

**Figure 5**

*An Example of the Tree Grown*



***Activity 6 – A Letter to Your Future Self***

AIM: To reflect on students' dreams, to prepare for reflection in the future

WORK MODE: Individual

LEVEL: Preintermediate or higher (the higher the language level of your students, the less scaffolding the teacher needs to provide for the letter)

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Language of informal letters

MATERIALS: A4 sheets of paper, pens, envelopes

TIMING: 15–45 minutes

STEPS:

1. Participants are asked to write a letter about themselves, to themselves—a year into the future.

Central question: What do you want to remind your future self of?

2. Participants are asked to put the letter in an envelope, address it to themselves, and close it.
3. They are free to take their letters with themselves OR give the closed envelopes to the teacher, who will send them to the students in a year. This way of self-reflection has been around in training and education for quite a while. In training sessions offered by Hősök Tere Projekt, it often plays a central role (see Hősök Tere, n.d.), and it even appears at professional events held for teachers (Stredansky, 2019). In schools, form tutors often ask students to indulge in such activities and are happy to present the conserved end-products at school reunions. So, what does it hold for the language classroom?

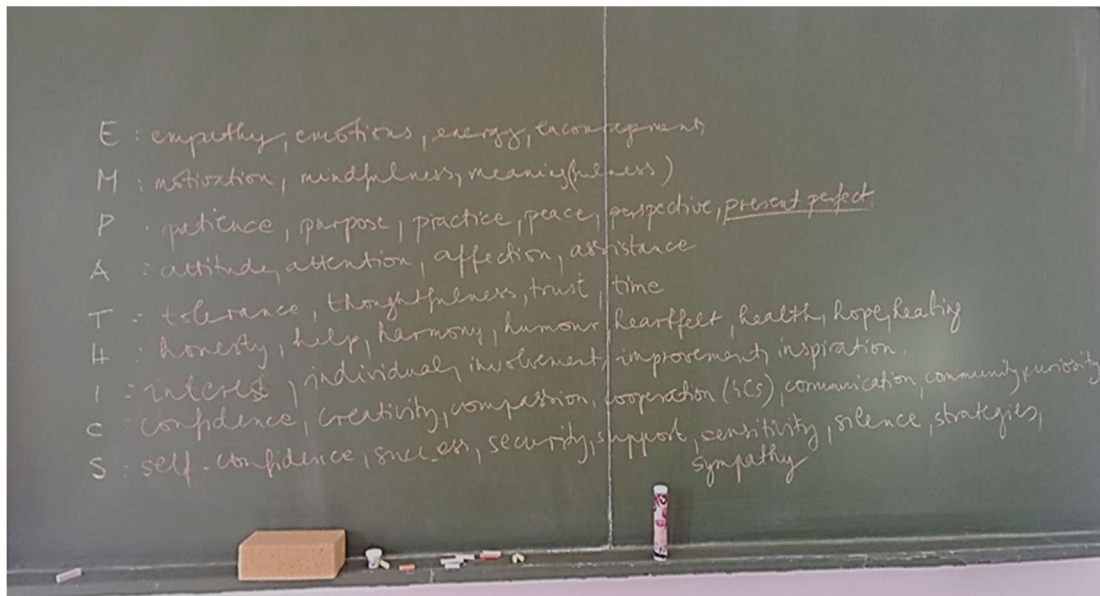
In our experience, writing a letter to one's future self can be a more motivating form of language production than writing an informal letter to an imaginary friend first seen in the coursebook; however, the activity itself should not serve practice purposes as the letters should in some way be preserved and not shown to others. In the end, some students may want to save their letters themselves, and, due to the sensitivity of the subject, this should be allowed. However, if there is a relaxed atmosphere built on mutual trust, teachers may want to offer their students to keep the letters for a semester or a year. Then, it can be a good



opportunity to reflect on their past progress and become anchored again in their present state, hence giving way to enhancing self-awareness.

## Figure 6

*Results of a Short Brainstorming Session on the Initials in EMPATHICS Held as Part of a Workshop With Teachers at the IATEFL-Hungary Conference, 9th October 2021*



## Conclusion

Every classroom is different, and even within the same classroom, a Monday morning can hit harder than the third class on a Wednesday when two Maths classes have been cancelled already. Therefore, we would like to encourage our colleagues to experiment with these activities and tailor them to their students' and their own needs. Having different perspectives in the classroom can lead to much better results than one might have originally expected, as it can be seen in the picture (Figure 6) that we took of the board in our workshop after asking our participants what they thought EMPATHICS might stand for. Most of the activities described in this article do not require special preparation; with the prominent notion of learning by bringing your own devices, all of them can be carried out. We believe that in order to embrace Positive Language Education, the first step is just to be present and available

to students in the activity that is built up while respecting their momentary responses and the extent to which students can become involved in the activity. Also, the voluntary participation of students is central to the described activities. It has to be noted that the end-products of some tasks may remain hidden from the teacher by the end of an activity, which we do not regard as a flaw: This may happen when doing any kind of exercise in the EFL classroom as students may decide not to take part in an activity or keep the results to themselves. All in all, we hope that the activities presented above are thought-provoking enough for EFL teachers to embark on a professional journey to embrace certain concepts in Rebecca Oxford's vision, from empathy towards learners' needs to improving self-esteem in their professional practice.

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# Teacher Development? It's a Kind of Magic!

Uwe Pohl

I have been working in teacher education for many years now. All along, the question of how teachers develop has been a keen personal and professional interest of mine. It continues to fascinate me and though there are now a number of ways in which the process of teacher development has been conceptualised, to me, it still feels like magic.

But what kind of magic? The best analogy I can think of is that of how trees grow. No one can develop teachers, just as we cannot make trees grow. Their growth can only be helped or hindered. But for all our knowledge of biology or chemistry, just how trees grow exactly is still a bit of a mystery (Wohlleben, 2016).



Similarly, it seems that teacher development is above all an organic process of “continual intellectual, experiential and attitudinal growth” (Bailey et al., 2001, p. 4). In other words, it tends to unfold gradually, is fairly open-ended, and growth in any of the three domains is likely to stimulate development in another.

## What Models of Teacher Development Tell Us

There are a number of ways in which the process of teacher development has been conceptualised. Some stress the importance of experience to gain expertise (Maley, 2020). Others envisage a sequence of stages from novice to expert (Berliner, 2001), suggest life cycles of teachers (Huberman, 1989), or see newcomers progress from the “periphery” to become part of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Considered individually, all these conceptualisations are useful in highlighting different facets of the cognitive, social, and occupational complexity of teacher learning. But to capture

general patterns as well as the highly individualised ways in which such learning can play out, I feel it is worth considering teacher development from a personal perspective. This is why, in this article, I would like to share insights from my own growth as a teacher/trainer as well as what I have learned about professional development from colleagues and teacher trainees.

### **Signature Strengths**

Staying with our tree analogy, let us start by looking more closely at the trunk of a tree, that is, the core or personality traits of a teacher. Positive psychology has taken a strong interest in the relationship between what is called *signature* or *character strengths* and the work people do. In a 3-year-project, Seligman and Peterson at the University of Pennsylvania identified 24 character strengths that make up what is best about our personality, the core capacities of human beings (Peterson et al., 2010). Each character strength falls under one of six broad virtue categories—wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence—and the categories seem to be universal across cultures and nations.

The researchers suggest that a close person-work fit is crucial for how happy we are in our job and how good at what we are doing. Upon reflection, I realised that kindness, which belongs to the category of humanity, is one of my signature strengths. The way the authors define the term very much resonates with student feedback I have received repeatedly and from different groups of students, as these examples show:

Your “how are you”, your “you look tired, are you sure you’re okay?”, your “good morning” to each of us... I always wanted Thursdays to come because I really wanted to learn and see all my classmates.

Uwe, you did an outstanding job in keeping the same friendly, warm and live atmosphere in our classes, what could be felt even through the screens of our computers.

I loved the friendly and pleasant atmosphere which were created during the lessons and the playful teaching. I have never gone with 'stomach cramps' to the lesson, even if we were writing a test.

I would suggest, though, that the concept of signature strengths can be extended beyond character traits, virtues, and values to include personal qualities that denote a particular ability or gift. These kinds of strengths can also show up in professional habits and competences. For example, I consider my amateur table tennis skills, ability to sing and play music, enjoyment of role-playing, and habitual visualising as signature strengths.



All of them have become core elements of the methodology with which I teach English and train teachers. In table tennis, for example, one learns to respond on the hoof and to think tactically. This combination is also called for in teaching: to (re)act confidently in the unfolding, unpredictable lesson encounter and to be able to think beyond one class when planning lessons or identifying areas for self-improvement.

Similarly, my love of doodling and drawing has turned into the conscious classroom application of simple hand-drawn icons, mind-maps, or other. Such *graphic facilitation techniques* (Bryson, 2022) include graphic organisers, infographics, diagrams, and sketchnotes, and support learners in understanding and memorising language points. Finally, I



also consider a certain affinity to play-acting as a strength which allows me to act out different roles or personalities for a teaching or demonstration purpose.

I am not sure how many teachers are aware of how their teaching style might have been influenced by qualities like these. In fact, some might think their professional self has to be separate from their private selves, and, therefore, they do not make their true strengths work for them and, as it were, leave them in the cloakroom or on the shelf in the morning.

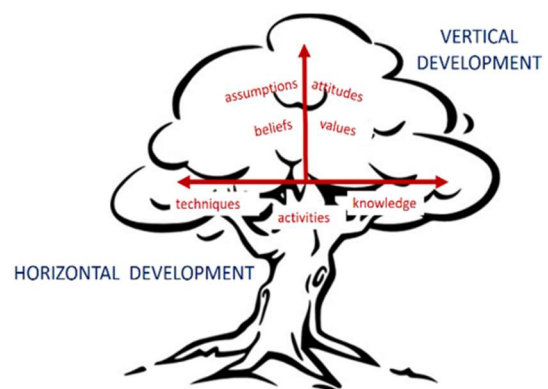
It is even rarer for trainee teachers to draw on nonprofessional competences in order to find their own authentic teacher self and teaching style. For this reason, I am always delighted when I come across trainees who have already discovered the benefits of weaving such



competences into their teaching practice, as shown in this blackboard image. As the trainee who authored this boardwork put it herself: “Sometimes I use my drawing skills in class, too. I like creating logical diagrams, simple drawings and, sometimes, I draw quickly simple objects, for example, when I teach new words.”

## Formative Experiences

Underhill (1996, pp. 127–128) made a useful distinction between *horizontal* and *vertical* development. At the beginning of our teaching career, we tend to start with a range of (intuitive) techniques that reflect how we have been taught English or were trained. With practice and training, we gradually acquire skills and knowledge, for example, ELT-related concepts,

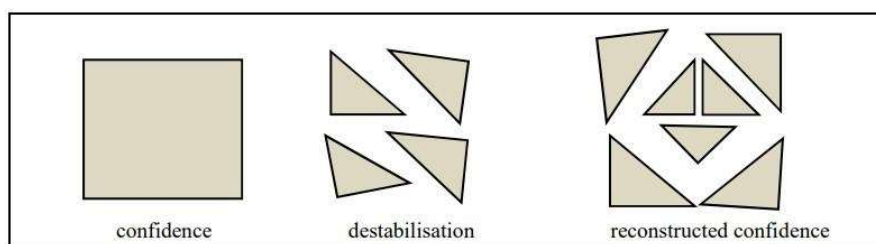


activities, and techniques. These also include untested beliefs or truisms, that is, ideas about learners, learning or teaching, such as you should repeat your instructions in the learners' mother tongue to make sure everybody understands or you should only use English in the classroom. In this way, we acquire an essential repertoire of how-tos. But *vertical* development happens when there is a shift in the underlying values and assumptions of the process of learning, for example, by questioning truisms, critically reflecting on our routine ways of teaching, or perceiving our learners differently.

Formative experiences are prime sites for triggering such fundamental shifts of development. For example, I have found that intensive professional training events, such as longer workshops or courses with a focus on group learning, have the potential to unlock some of the deeper layers of teacher cognition.

Many years ago, my own MEd training in the UK took me on a journey of (self-) discovery which changed the way I had viewed almost everything about teachers and teaching. Learning with and from my 30 or so international peers was an eye-opening as well as a humbling experience. Faced with great group diversity in social attitudes, ethnicity, educational culture, and professional identity, I initially experienced a profound loss of confidence in my capability and identity as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher.

I fully understood the extent of this learning process only decades later when cotraining mentors for Hungarian schools. On these courses, I witnessed a similar “constructive destabilisation” unfold in some of the experienced EFL teachers (see also Pohl & Révész, 2014, p. 127), a process which can be visualised like this:



One of the mentor trainees described her sense of initial destabilisation metaphorically: “I feel like a tribal healer who all of a sudden finds herself at the medical university”. Such experiences of professional deconstruction and reconstruction are clearly unsettling. But, as a result, a new, enriched teacher identity emerges, enabling exactly the kind of fundamental development shifts Underhill (1996) talked about.

### **Inspirational Professional Communities**

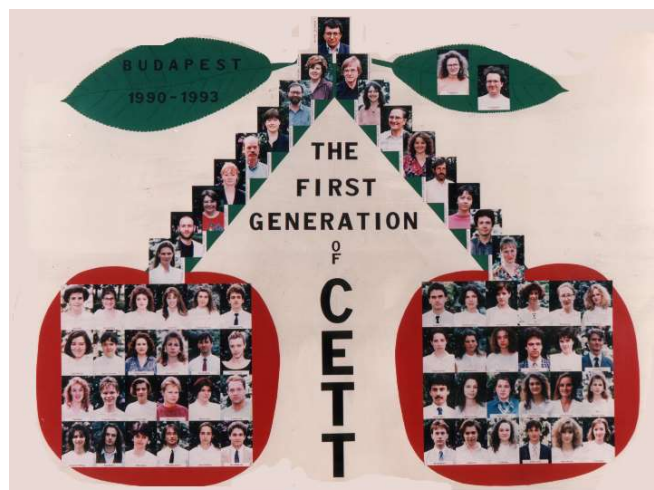
Some findings of research into what constitutes valuable intellectual, social, and material resources of professional communities will come as no surprise to most teachers. For example, a positive school culture with a good



atmosphere, a common vision among and a good relationship between colleagues all have a positive impact on the professional development of teachers (Grossman et al., 2001; Postholm, 2012). Like trees in a forest, the teachers of a school are interconnected and will thrive in an ecosystem where sharing materials, classroom challenges, and teaching ideas with their colleagues are an integral part of the institutional culture.

I have been lucky enough to experience the powerful influence of such professional communities first-hand and for many years. From 1990 and 2005, my colleagues and I at the Centre for English Teacher Training (CETT) in Budapest developed a “fast-track” single-major 3-year preservice teacher education programme. Over time, a kind of fellowship

emerged from our shared institutional history, similar professional passions, and sense of mission to train well-equipped English teachers in Hungary (Pohl et al., 2009). I am truly appreciative that the CETT spirit has also left its mark on the culture of my current workplace, the Department of English Language Pedagogy.

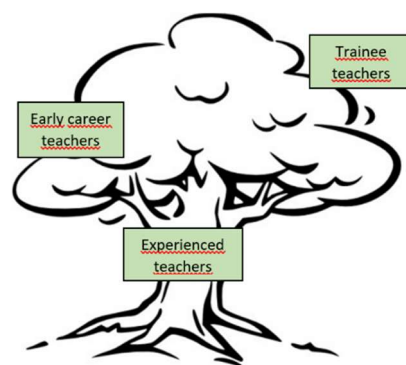


IATEFL-Hungary, too, has been central to my anchoring in the wider professional community. Our association has made me feel part of a bigger professional whole—one to which I give and from which I receive. For 30 years, this give-and-take has taken the form of attending and presenting at annual IATEFL conferences in Hungary and abroad, enjoying Creative Café events, and writing for the IATEFL-Hungary newsletter. All of this has been inspirational and contributed to what Szesztay called developing “different qualities of our collective memory” as a community of ELT professionals (Pohl et al., 2009, p. 2).

Receiving inspiration and feeling the support of a professional community is especially important for teachers at the beginning of their career. Sadly, ours is a profession of low salaries and low social prestige. As a result, fewer than half of graduate Hungarian teachers actually enter the profession and dropout rates are high, according to an education and training report (European Commission, 2020).

Not even an inspiring teacher association can compensate for this. But it can create a professional home for young teachers in which they feel valued and gain confidence. This can happen by encouraging them to tell their professional stories at IATEFL events or by encouraging collaborative presentations between less and more experienced teachers. As one of our youngest IATEFL-Hungary members put it: “It is immensely helpful to always have

someone to turn to or to lend a sympathetic ear, a community to fall back on”. But this is not a one-sided relationship. Teacher associations, like trees, are living systems—the leaves and roots have different but equally important functions (Wohlleben, 2016). For an association like IATEFL-Hungary to grow and flourish, this means that it needs the synergy between seasoned practitioners and young professionals.



### **Transformational Moments**

In March 2020, IATEFL-Hungary organised an event which was called Transformational Moments in Teaching. The aim was to introduce the association to an audience of teacher trainees, who will, we hope, become key influences in the next generation of ELT practitioners in Hungary. To this end, twelve speakers—trainee and early career teachers as well as more experienced practitioners and teacher educators—were invited to share a transformational event in their professional development. All the speakers shared truly significant, often unsettling moments of uncertainty, challenge, failure, and success culminating in personal and professional growth.

What the audience was touched the most by was the voices of teachers at the beginning of their career. Their accounts were especially powerful because they were fresh, emotionally raw, sincere, and light at the same time. Here are two examples taken from a written account of the event (Pohl, 2020).

#### **My first flights**

“I learnt my first strategy during my first lesson. I wanted it to go flawlessly, to be as professional and determined as my university, high school and primary school teachers, not to mention all the superheroes I

know. When the time came and we started the class, I felt as prepared as ever, so I stepped forward, took a deep breath and – completely froze. I muttered something, but calling it giving instructions would be a huge stretch. At that moment, I realised that I had to give up on my dream of a flawless lesson: For the rest of the occasion, I focused on the job and tried to be relaxed and patient, not only towards the students but also towards myself. That day, I learnt an extremely useful survival technique: patience.”

Csapó Péter

Quite good ... for a beginner

“I have now studied teacher training for the better part of these last five years, having done many hours of tutoring and private classes. From the age of six, I had the idea of becoming a teacher and never abandoned it for a minute. So now, at the very beginning of my career, being the motivated and obnoxiously highbrow person that I am, the worst kind of criticism I could get was ‘Quite good’ followed by a very short pause and then the additional ‘for a beginner’. I am sure this is something most of us have experienced but I am someone who takes criticism rather badly and especially when it concerns my competence as a teacher. And though it still does not feel right, I decided that I would embrace being a beginner. After all, it is the first step on the same road of professional development we are all taking.”

Novák Barbara

I think the stories resonated with everybody present because these young professionals showed levels of self-awareness, sensitivity, and insight that transcended age and experience.

Their experiences also demonstrate that, at times, professional growth can speed up; indeed, it can happen in the form of developmental leaps. The reason is that all powerful experiences, such as epiphanies, crises, and successes have the potential to inspire and transform us, even when we are least expecting it. But for such “magic” to happen, teachers-in-training and early career teachers need opportunities to reflect on their experiences and share their growth in expertise and insight as equals.

### **Unforeseen Challenges**

Many of the personal and professional challenges life throws at us come unexpected. The question is how taking on a challenge might translate into development. A good starting point for me has always been to focus on what is exciting or enjoyable about a professional challenge I am facing. Once there is a feeling of positive engagement that pulls me in, I can work consciously to gradually align the challenge at hand with my experience, knowledge, and skills.

A recent challenge that I share with many of my colleagues is the rather abrupt change to online teaching. Just a few years ago, we would have thought this was music of the future and an option to explore—or not. But the 2020 pandemic forced me to think about how to continue my usual practice as a teacher and trainer interested in student-oriented, interactive modes of learning in the relatively unfamiliar terrain of the virtual classroom. At the beginning, this seemed a daunting task as I had to develop horizontally (learn about and handle a range of suitable interactive platforms and apps) and vertically (rethink my understanding of group dynamics and lesson plan routines). It also helped me tremendously to clarify, articulate, and visualise my thinking by cowriting an article on the subject (Pohl & Szesztay, 2020). Over time, I developed a kind of stereo vision, which has allowed me to move in and out of the two learning environments with relative ease.

## Body Signals

Before I sum up my thoughts on teacher development in the form of a few recommendations, I would like to draw attention to one very important but often neglected point. Teachers, like trees, need nourishment, the right climate to develop—if it is not continuous, they will not thrive and develop but remain stunted or worse—get ill, sometimes seriously.



I have learned the hard way that this means first keeping an eye on signals our bodies send us—not being able to sleep well, feeling constantly tired, unhappy, listless. Second, it means learning to put yourself first—something most teachers I know are very bad at. For me, this has meant allowing myself to take time out, even if I was worried that I could not afford to or would inconvenience others in doing so. What is more, if we accept that teachers’ social and psychological well-being is strongly influenced by the health of the institution in which they work, such concern for oneself might even mean getting away from a toxic school climate or an autocratic school head.

## Some Personal Recommendations

Let me finish off by highlighting a few insights that I feel invite magic into our on-going professional development:

- Revisit your roots. What signature strengths do you have that you can draw on to enrich your repertoire of techniques and your own teaching style?
- Trust that teacher development can happen in many ways, at different speeds, and at any point in a teacher’s career.
- Give yourself licence to tinker and experiment in teaching, especially when you are at the beginning of your professional career.



- Think of the professional challenges thrown in your way as opportunities and look for something in them that makes you want to face them.
- Seek out supportive professional communities. This can mean joining an association like IATEFL or reaching out to like-minded colleagues in your workplace.
- Move away from unhealthy professional situations to find the nourishment you need, even if this requires a change of school.

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Acknowledgement: It was Anikó Lendvai (née Sass), who, in 1993, created the beautiful image of the first generation of CETT graduates and their teachers.

# University Students' Opinions on Using Instagram and TikTok in EFL Teaching

Boglárka Spissich

Nowadays technology and the Internet cannot be separated from people's everyday life. Smartphones have thousands of applications for different purposes. It is especially the younger generations who use applications on a daily basis, mainly in their free time. This multitude of applications gives the opportunity to users to find something they are interested in, be it photography, languages, or the news. Despite the extent of choice, there are some applications which are used by most teenagers, two of which are Instagram and TikTok. Although research shows that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners are aware that these applications are beneficial for developing their English language skills, their primary aim for using social media is not language learning (Alshabeb & Almaqrn, 2018; Arif, 2019). Students' positive attitudes towards social media mean that these applications can be highly motivating for EFL learners.

When the beliefs of EFL teachers and EFL teacher trainees were examined concerning the use of social media in EFL teaching, however, the responses were not homogeneous. In a study conducted in Saudi Arabia (Allam & Elyas, 2016), EFL teachers were concerned about the amount of social media use in the classroom. The Saudi Arabian EFL teachers in the study believed that online activities distracted students from learning. Yang's (2020) research on EFL learners, however, concluded that EFL learners would want to use social media for language development; however, they also expressed their need for guidance in order to find the content that can aid them in achieving their goals.

Nevertheless, according to a study conducted by Allen (2019), preservice EFL teachers seemed to support the idea that applications are beneficial for developing learners' English language skills. Not only did they think Facebook groups work better than Moodle (Allen, 2019)—although the two were developed for different purposes—but they also stated that social media should be a key element in EFL teaching and learning (Basöz, 2016). While the studies mentioned above asked teacher trainees about their general opinion, Whyte (2014) designed a course to teach them how to use technology in the classroom and asked their opinion after completing the course. The results showed that preservice teachers were able to develop useful skills during the course. The present study combines the two features of the previous studies. Firstly, it aims to explore what university students training to be EFL teachers think about using social media, more precisely Instagram and TikTok, in teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Secondly, a semester-long course was designed on the topic where university students learnt how to use the above two most popular applications in the classroom.

## **Literature Review**

A number of recent studies have dealt with the use of social media applications both in- and out-of-class settings (Handayani, 2016; Panrod et al., 2020; Yang, 2020). In the following section, the literature on two applications, Instagram and TikTok, as possible teaching tools will be presented. Firstly, a discussion of how Instagram can be useful in teaching and learning EFL will be offered, which is going to be followed by a similar overview of previous research on TikTok. Due to the fact that these applications are quite recent and have been used for no more than 15 years at the time of writing (TikTok became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic), the amount of research on the topic is limited.

## **Instagram as a Teaching Tool**

Instagram is a social media platform with the function of sharing photo and video content. Besides posting authentic content, it is also possible to “apply filters, add captions, tag users, add locations, add hashtags, like content, add comments, browse and follow other accounts, check a feed generated by followed accounts, and explore (search for) hashtags/users” (Handayani, 2016, p. 321). At first sight, it is difficult to imagine how it would be possible to use this application as a teaching tool. Nevertheless, Instagram was shown to be useful in developing all four language skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. In Handayani’s (2016) study, a number of Instagram-induced speaking activities were listed. The author mentioned tasks in connection with learners’ own posts; for example, personal memory telling, but there are also options in which students can talk about their interests. These activities include presenting a famous person’s life with the help of their posts or doing role plays based on different videos they find on the application.

Handayani (2016), however, did not mention many reading activities. The tasks listed are all in connection with reading and promoting books. Learners can post a short review of a book they read in English, or they can even make a short advertisement for them, using the video function. The lack of reading activities in the article by Handayani (2016) using these social media sites is logical as there are only short texts on Instagram. Furthermore, posts on Instagram might be less suitable for reading materials as they can be written by anyone, and their grammar is not checked.

However, writing skills can be practised fairly efficiently on Instagram. Although students are not able to write full essays or other long assignments on this platform, they can practise shorter genres, such as messages or reviews. Two main activities were mentioned in the article by Handayani (2016), which are “Caption it!” and “Photo Inspiration” (p. 325). The first requires students to write a descriptive comment about the photo shared, while the latter

encourages them to ask questions about the post. These tasks were then tested with university students (Handayani, 2017), and the study resulted in finding positive emotions towards teaching and learning writing with the help of Instagram.

Finally, listening skills can be improved on Instagram as well (Handayani, 2016). Given that there are many English language videos that are open to the public, they can be used as EFL materials. The author suggests choosing a video of a native speaker and then answering the teacher's questions about it. All in all, although Instagram is an application mostly used for picture sharing by students, Handayani (2016) illustrated how it can be used to improve all the skills by keeping learners motivated and interested. The author emphasises the uniqueness of the application, as here it is possible to combine the practice of all skills while keeping students motivated (Handayani, 2016).

### **TikTok as Part of Audio-Visual Aids**

TikTok is the fourth most popular online platform after Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, with a total number of 2.6 billion downloads (Doyle, 2021). It is a video sharing platform that was first created in China, then launched internationally in September 2017 (Iqbal, 2021). In Europe, by the end of 2020, there were 98 million users. According to statistics, 60% of its users are 16–24 years old, which makes it the most popular social media application among teenagers. Its popularity can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, as being in quarantine made people use the application to get in touch with others. Although there were fewer downloads in 2021 than in the previous year, the number of users is still increasing.

Using audio-visual aids in EFL teaching was already a widely researched topic before the creation of TikTok. Audio-visual materials used in EFL teaching include short videos or films in English. Their use can promote listening comprehension, as the visuals help learners understand spoken language (Bajrami & Ismaili, 2016). Authentic videos can also improve

students' cultural awareness. Besides listening skills, these tools can also be motivational for students if the topic is of interest to them. The results of a study investigating undergraduate students' opinion on audio-visual aids in the EFL classroom (Mathew & Alidmat, 2013) showed that most participants found these tools effective. Moreover, participants believed it helped their motivation as it made the lesson more varied (Mathew & Alidmat, 2013).

Research shows that students find TikTok a useful tool for the improvement of listening skills (Panrod et al., 2020; Yang, 2020). Yang's study (2020), which included 187 secondary school students from China, concluded that most students who want to improve their English skills by using TikTok focus on their listening skills. Adnan et al. (2021) agreed that this application can be effective for listening comprehension development, as the tool incorporates five of Mayer's (2002) nine multimedia design principles. The first of these multimedia principles which TokTok incorporates states that "students learn better from words and pictures than from words alone" (Mayer, 2002, p. 27). The other four principles which TikTok adheres to add further specifications, including the closeness and simultaneity of the words and relevant pictures presented, as well as the usefulness of previous background knowledge. Moreover, one of the principles states that learners acquire more new vocabulary by listening to everyday language use, rather than formal English. Although with pictures, sounds, and captions the learners' information processing system might be overstimulated, TikTok users have the option to turn off subtitles, which, according to Mayer, may lead to more successful language learning.

Speaking was rated second in the list of skills TikTok can help to improve (Yang, 2020). In the following studies, practice took place by recording videos. In a study in China (Xiuwen & Razali, 2021), undergraduate students enrolled in a class where the aim was to enhance their speaking skills. The teacher decided, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to use TikTok as an online supplementary tool. Students had to record themselves presenting different topics with



the help of the application. Results show that this method helped students with their communication skills as well as made them more motivated to learn the language. Based on the results of this study (Xiuwen & Razali, 2021), a TikTok video was created to teach vocabulary to university students.

Moreover, EFL learners' speaking skills can be enhanced by learning new items of vocabulary and pronunciation from TikTok videos. The application has a "duet" function that lets users interact with each other's videos. Indonesian university students used this technique in class to improve their speaking skills in English (Pratiwi et al., 2021). According to the authors, the participants recorded themselves while trying to imitate speakers of English (it is not specified which English). Advantages of this method include students being able to listen to what they say and even redo the video if they are not pleased with the outcome. The study concluded that even after recording one duet, the participants saw some improvement in their pronunciation.

TikTok has been found to be an enjoyable way of learning English, and students believe they would benefit from using the application as a supplementary tool in English lessons (Yang, 2020). Although students have fun scrolling TikTok in their free time, they reported the need of a teacher to guide them on how to use the application effectively. Teachers' guidance, besides directing students to the right materials, also seems to have an important impact on students' ability of self-directed language learning. This positive attitude shows that EFL teachers could enhance their learners' development by keeping up with the latest trends. However, it is also true that filtering videos or creating content is a time-consuming process. Additionally, in order to get the most out of this and other modern tools, instructors need to spend time developing course materials and tasks based on the chosen videos. Finding videos that add value to the lessons and support the goals can be challenging; however, afterwards it is possible to build different cooperative activities around the chosen content. The author

recommends developing task-based activities using videos that can be a basis for discussions or project work (Yang, 2020).

In conclusion, studies show that using social media applications in EFL learning and teaching can be beneficial for learners. Their initial motivation to use social media in class helps them be more engaged in the topics presented; thus, their learning process is likely to be more successful. Sharing their experiences with others can result in practising English and improving their skills in their free time. The main goal of the teacher would be to encourage students to find something they enjoy and benefit from at the same time. These platforms could enhance learners' language development as most young learners use them every day, and they only need some guidance on how to make them advantageous for themselves. This is the reason why teachers, university students, and teacher trainees should know more about how to incorporate social media into EFL teaching. Talking about using social media in the classroom during their training and showing teacher trainees how to make use of these platforms would be useful for them in the future. Moreover, asking both learners' and teacher trainees' opinions about the topic provides interesting insights into the similarities and differences of how preservice EFL teachers and EFL learners see the usefulness of social media.

The aim of the present exploratory qualitative research was to collect the insights of university students concerning the use of social media applications. The research questions that the study aimed to answer were the following:

- 1.) How do students training to become EFL teachers in a Hungarian university perceive the use of the social media applications Instagram and TikTok in EFL?
- 2.) How do the students see the course aimed at developing their use of these applications?

## **Methods**

In the spring semester of 2020/2021, a course about the usefulness of social media applications in EFL teaching was held for university students at a Hungarian state university in Budapest, which provided the researcher with an opportunity to conduct an exploratory case study. At the beginning of the semester, all participating 13 students were asked to fill in a questionnaire consisting of both closed and open-ended questions, to elicit their opinion and experiences of using social media in EFL teaching. During the last session of the semester, they filled in the same questionnaire, and they were asked to volunteer for an interview for the present study. Altogether eight students took part in the retrospective interview, whose answers are reported in the present article.

### **The Course**

The participants of the case study were eight female students who completed a semester-long course called “Popular Websites and Applications in EFL Teaching and Learning” where they had the opportunity to explore how social media and other online platforms could be used in EFL teaching. During the 14 weeks of the semester, they looked at six online platforms, out of which the two most popular ones were chosen for the purpose of this study: Instagram and TikTok. The remaining applications included Snapchat, YouTube, Netflix and Twitter. All the students were asked and encouraged to try these applications if they had not done it earlier, so they would have a general understanding of how the applications work. Both chosen platforms were discussed in two consecutive sessions. The students of the course had to read at least two academic articles or pieces of research about the use of the given applications in the EFL context, and they also had to design tasks based on the studies. The tasks then were presented in class where the participants had the chance to give feedback and comment on each other’s ideas. Besides practical advice, students were given the chance to discuss the

advantages and disadvantages of each application regarding education and EFL teaching and learning.

## Participants

The eight participants were all females, in their early twenties. All of them were second or higher-year students and had spent 7.25 semesters at the university on average. The data on their time spent at the university with their pseudonyms and teaching experience can be found in Table 1. In addition, they were also asked about their own experiences with using the applications. The biographical data of the participants can be seen in Table 1. Each participant was allocated a pseudonym, starting with the students who spent the least amount of time studying in higher education.

**Table 1**

*Biographical Data of the Participants*

Pseudonym	Semesters spent at university	Teaching experience	Frequency of using the applications	
			Instagram	TikTok
Anna	4	Private students	Frequently	Frequently
Bori	4	None	Frequently	Frequently
Csenge	6	Private students	Frequently	Frequently
Dóra	6	Private students	Frequently	Frequently
Emma	8	None	Rarely	Never
Flóra	10	Primary school	Rarely	Never
Gerda	10	Secondary school	Sometimes	Never
Helga	10	Private students	Frequently	Frequently

## Instruments

In order to collect data on the students' initial attitudes to using social media in EFL teaching, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions (see

Appendix A). The language of the instrument was Hungarian, the native language of the participants so that there would be fewer misunderstandings, and in this way everyone could easily share their thoughts. The same questionnaire was administered again at the end of the course to examine how their opinion had changed on the matter after spending a semester experimenting with the applications. The questionnaire originally included more applications, all of which were covered in class, but in this study only the data relating to Instagram and TikTok were used. In the questionnaire, the students were asked how often they used the given applications and if they had ever used them for language learning or teaching.

After filling in the questionnaires, the participants took part in semistructured interviews, where they were informed that the recordings would not be heard by a third party and that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. The interview consisted of eight main questions for each application (see the interview guide in Appendix B). It was a semistructured interview, where participants were asked about their own habits regarding the use of the given applications and if they had ever used it in teaching before the course. After that, they expressed their thoughts on using these platforms in EFL teaching based on the course, as well as their own experiences. The interviewees were asked to list a number of advantages and disadvantages of the applications before they were asked if they would consider using the given application in EFL teaching. While the longest interview lasted for 1 hour and 20 minutes, the shortest was slightly over 22 minutes. On average, participants spent 42 minutes answering the interview questions.

## **Procedure**

The interviews were conducted during the last week of the semester and the first week of the exam period—when both applications had already been covered in class. Besides contacting the students who previously agreed to the interview, others were encouraged to take part as well, and in this way eight students, which is 61% of the group, were asked about their

thoughts. After the final interview, the oral data were transcribed and analysed according to emerging themes (Dörnyei, 2007), which were as follows: practical solutions to issues in connection with social media use in EFL teaching, using the applications in an out-of-class context, the different language skills, and the main differences between the two applications that interviewees felt necessary to mention. Their answers to the questionnaire and the interview questions are detailed in the following sections.

## **Results and Discussion**

A major finding of the research is that the participants frequently engaging with the given applications have generally positive attitudes towards them, while those who rarely or never use them were first rather sceptical about their usefulness in EFL teaching and their application as teaching tools. Based on the questionnaire results, whose data were based on the answers of all 13 students, Instagram is used by all participants at least some of the time, while TikTok is not used at all by three of them. However, they all tried both platforms in class, so they would know how both work. They were also shown some tasks that could be done with the help of these applications. As for Instagram, when first asked, 46% of the students said that they would try using Instagram in EFL teaching, while this number went up to 89% in the final questionnaire. TikTok was slightly less popular, but compared to the initial 39%, by the end of the semester 67% of the students had a positive attitude towards this application as a teaching tool.

Only one of the interviewees reported having tried TikTok in EFL teaching before the course. Anna was the one who talked about using TikTok with her private students. She gave a task to them that had to be done with the use of TikTok. On the platform, there is a sound that people often use to introduce themselves. The sound her students had to use was a part of the song entitled *Some things abt [sic] me* (Rowell, 2020), and the lyrics say “My name, my age, my favourite colour/ My height, my sign” (track 1), and for each trait, video creators write or

show what is true about them. The stanza continues with mentioning one's nationality, favourite food, and preferred TV show as well. In Anna's case, instead of an introduction letter, this task was given to the students. In this way, they got to know each other a little better, they were not complete strangers anymore, and they were able to find some common interests to talk about. Although no one else from the group had tried using the application with students before, some participants agreed with Anna on the usefulness of the task.

Students all said that they use social media in out-of-class contexts. Most of them mentioned giving extra tasks to their learners with the help of these platforms, and all of them agreed that it should not be compulsory for learners to contribute to the online accounts, show their faces, or set up an account for the applications. Anna had the idea of using Instagram stories to post homework, in this way "it would not take up time of the lesson to correct homework, and teachers can monitor when learners send their answers" (author's translation). Besides having a platform where students can always check and look back at their homework, and since these stories pop up at the top of the page when students open the application, they can also function as a reminder to do the homework as teenagers often use their Instagram in their free time.

All of the participants found it important to follow the guidelines provided by the platform regarding age and online behaviour. Some of them (Anna, Emma, and Helga) also mentioned establishing rules with the group before using social media. Anna "imagined it in a way that students can collect points for extra tasks on social media, but if any of them would make a negative remark in a comment on a peer, they would get banned". Some students suggested having written rules, either in the classroom or in the social media profile. It was argued that the latter would be more effective as group members could see them every time before contributing to the profile.

In the following section, the different language skills mentioned by the participants will be taken into consideration. The most commonly mentioned skill in the interviews was listening. Although Instagram was not the main platform mentioned in relation to listening skills, since there is the option of posting Instagram TV (IGTV) videos, it is now possible to use the platform for the improvement of this skill as well. IGTV videos can be up to 15 minutes long; however, they are not as popular as posting pictures or short videos. For this reason, TikTok was mainly associated with developing listening skills, as, on this application, creators share videos only, which, at the time of the research, could only be maximum 1 minute long. At the time of writing, this limit was already pushed up to 3 minutes. Besides giving students the chance to listen to authentic English, participants mentioned the importance of being exposed to different accents.

Gerda and Bori also argued for using TikTok to learn the latest slang words and informal language, which, according to them, can be beneficial for students if they would like to get in contact with foreigners. The students argued that it would be beneficial for teachers to know the latest slang words as well, so that they would not be puzzled if a student mentioned them. However, the amount of new slang expressions, memes, and viral quotes grows day by day, making it impossible to keep up with everything. Nevertheless, making a lesson more exciting by adding an activity covering social media slang could be interesting, and students would have the chance to teach something to each other and maybe even to their teacher.

As for productive skills, all of the participants claimed that speaking could be improved with the help of TikTok if students were willing to share their own content. The results of Zaitun et al.'s (2021) study, in which researchers compared the story telling skills of students before and after using TikTok, showed a significant change in scores which backs the participating students' opinion on this matter. The author used TikTok to teach students how to speak about people and objects; however, it is not mentioned if the students received language training in



other ways. In the present study, speaking was mentioned by half of the participants (Anna, Bori, Gerda, and Helga) as part of in-class activities: probably in pairs and giving opinion in social media posts. As part of the course, the students were assigned to design different tasks linked to the social media platforms. They most commonly came up with speaking activities during the semester, especially in the case of TikTok. Participants suggested tasks of varying difficulty. For example, Csenge presented a collaborative task which is suitable for all levels and uses the duet function of the application. In this task students should act out everyday situations together. However, it is not as easy as it sounds because the duet function is the combination of two videos displayed side by side, recorded at two different times. On TikTok, first, one side of the conversation needs to be recorded. This means one person records their lines with calculated breaks that give enough time for the response, and the second person then can reply to the whole video. This requires collaboration and timing and targets more skills than a traditional role-play activity. Another student, Dóra, had the idea of students recording an elevator pitch, in which they talk about a topic that they find interesting. It means that they have a limited amount of time, on TikTok up to 3 minutes to deliver a convincing monologue about a topic. This task, besides preparing students for short presentations, for example, at a language exam, also makes it possible for them to rewatch their performance. Seeing one's performance on camera can help recognise frequent mistakes and is suitable for conscious nonverbal communication improvement.

Participants most commonly mentioned the development of writing skills as the main advantage of Instagram. According to Handayani (2017), students do not only benefit from writing tasks on Instagram, but they also have a positive attitude towards using the platform and believed that they can improve their writing skills in this way. The students all agreed that Instagram can provide learners with a safe space to write short comments, thus practise specific expressions and writing brief summaries. In addition, "reading each other's

comments would also give them the chance to practise reading” (Gerda). However, it is important to keep in mind that on Instagram anybody can write comments. Due to this fact, although students can see real-life English used on the platform, it also means that posts are not checked, which can result in a number of mistakes in the written text. The content of different comments can be another issue as users’ style and opinion can be insulting, and online bullying happens on all platforms. These comments, however, can be reported and removed. Although teachers cannot check all the comments students read, it is worth discussing some of them, both in terms of grammar and content. TikTok also allows users to write comments; nevertheless, it was not mentioned by the students as a platform where writing skills could be developed. Based on these ideas, writing skills can be developed within a closed Instagram group, where all comments are monitored by the teacher, but this application does not seem to be the best choice for writing longer essays or learning grammar.

When considering using social media in teaching, there are a number of possible problems. First of all, it is important to consider the age group of students to avoid violating the given application’s guidelines. To address other safety issues, such as bullying or disrespectful manners, interviewees suggested some practical solutions in connection with social media platforms for EFL teaching. For instance, they all mentioned creating separate accounts for their groups in order to make students feel safe by being part of a closed group that no other users can see. Moreover, discussions with students about online behaviours can help them understand the importance of the issue. Creating rules and monitoring the students’ activities is beneficial for all members of the group. These rules, according to the interviewees, should be clearly visible every time students open the group. They should also be discussed with the group in advance, highlighting their importance.

In the course of the interviews, participants tended to compare and contrast the platforms they were asked about. While TikTok is available for anyone without an account, in order to use

Instagram one must register and follow others. Other main differences that emerged according to them are the interfaces of the applications, which they find more user-friendly on Instagram, and the creation of profiles, which is a must in the case of Instagram, but not necessary to use on TikTok. When talking about a group profile, it is only the teacher who should create an account and share its details and login information with the students. Once everyone can access the group, Instagram is said to be easier to use. The reason for this can be the fact that on this platform users only see those members whom they follow. In contrast, on TikTok, the so-called “for you” page is a series of videos from different creators, based on the user’s interests. Thus, here, it can take some time to customise the interface by watching English learning related or other educational videos.

Besides the possibility of online bullying, the main disadvantage of these sites is the unpredictability of the content students will encounter online. Although Instagram is considered safer from this point of view, it is still not entirely secure as some adverts and unwanted messages can pop up. Nonetheless, it is not very difficult to control these messages, and it is possible to follow requests as the administrator of a group. However, TikTok is notorious for its occasionally poorly working algorithm that constantly tries to offer new types of videos in terms of content. With the established rules, it is possible to only like videos which are appropriate for the learning goals and agree with students on how to handle unwanted videos. For example, the easiest way is to scroll on; moreover, there is the option of marking it as something that is not interesting for the user, and in extreme cases it is possible to report a given video.

Nevertheless, students who use these applications in their free time cannot be protected from inappropriate content; thus, it might be to their benefit to follow creators who post useful content as well as to have an adult, in this case a teacher, with whom they can talk about their experiences. Showing good examples can be beneficial for students. Thus, they can see the

educational side of TikTok and Instagram and also the ways in which these applications can function as learning tools in their everyday lives. All in all, the students seemed to agree with Li's (2017) words: "Let's just welcome the new era of learning. No worries but take precautions!" (p. 152).

## **Conclusions**

The university students who participated in this study found it beneficial to attend a course on using social media applications in EFL teaching. They all reported having a new perspective of the platforms and various ideas of how it would be possible to use them in education. Social media applications received mostly positive feedback; however, there were some contrasting opinions considering their structure and uncensored content. Because of this, the participants agreed that some guidelines and rules are needed when using social media with a group of students. Disregarding the disadvantages, students mentioned benefits of using these applications for both receptive and productive language skills. Instagram was regarded as the most effective with writing and reading skills, while TikTok was recommended for the development of listening and speaking skills.

The limitations of the study are of two kinds. Firstly, there was a limited number of participants. Secondly, the fact that the teacher and the researcher were the same person might have had an effect on the students' answers. As for further research, it would be useful to see if a study with a different group of students would yield similar results, and the opinions of experienced EFL teachers could also be investigated. Moreover, investigating learners' opinions on using social media applications would be important to gauge the effectiveness of using social media in EFL teaching and learning.

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## Appendix A

### Questionnaire – Popular Websites and Apps in EFL Teaching and Learning

1. I am a student of the Popular websites and apps in EFL teaching and learning. course and I would like to take part in the research  
 Yes  
 No

#### Bio data

2. Your name  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Your age  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How many semesters have you completed in teacher training?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you currently teaching?  
 Yes  
 No
6. Where do you teach?  
 Primary school  
 Secondary school  
 Language school  
 I have private students  
 Other  
 Currently I am not teaching
7. How many hours do you teach a week?  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Instagram

8. Do you have an Instagram account?  
 Yes  
 No
9. Have you ever used Instagram with the purpose of language learning?  
 Yes  
 No
10. If yes, please explain in a few sentences how you used Instagram for language learning.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Have you ever used Instagram with the purpose of teaching a language?  
 Yes  
 No
12. If yes, please explain in a few sentences how you used Instagram for language teaching.



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13. Would you consider using Instagram for language teaching?

- Yes, definitely
- Probably yes
- I have never thought of this
- Probably no
- Definitely no

14. Please indicate how often you do the different activities

	Never	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	More than once a day
I open Instagram					
I check the latest posts on Instagram					
I share a picture or a video on Instagram					
I react to a post (like) on Instagram					
I write a comment to a post on Instagram					
I use Instagram for language learning					
I use Instagram for language teaching					

15. How much time do you spend on Instagram a day?

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### TikTok

1. Do you have a TikTok account?

- Yes
- No

2. Have you ever used TikTok with the purpose of language learning?

- Yes
- No

3. If yes, please explain in a few sentences how you used TikTok for language learning.

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4. Have you ever used TikTok with the purpose of teaching a language?

- Yes
- No

5. If yes, please explain in a few sentences how you used TikTok for language teaching.

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6. Would you consider using TikTok for language teaching?
- Yes, definitely
  - Probably yes
  - I have never thought of this
  - Probably no
  - Definitely no
7. Please indicate how often you do the different activities

	Never	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	More than once a day
I open TikTok					
I check the latest posts on TikTok					
I share a video on TikTok					
I react to a post (like) on TikTok					
I write a comment to a post on TikTok					
I use TikTok for language learning					
I use TikTok for language teaching					

8. How much time do you spend on TikTok a day?
-

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide

My name is Boglárka Spissich and I would like to ask you about your habits in using popular applications in EFL teaching. The applications I will have questions about are Instagram and TikTok. The interview includes asking about your opinion on these platforms, and the change of your attitudes towards them after completing the course called *Popular websites and applications in EFL teaching and learning*. The interview will be recorded but will not be given or listened to by a third party. Your data will be kept anonymously and for the questions asked there are no right or wrong answers. Do you agree to proceed?

#### 1. Instagram

Do you use Instagram in your free time? How often? How do you use it?

- Have you ever used this platform for learning a language?

Before the course, did you use Instagram in EFL teaching or have you ever thought of that?

What do you think about using Instagram in EFL teaching after completing the course? How would you use it with your students?

- What circumstances?
- What skills can it improve?

What other benefits can you think of when talking about using Instagram for EFL teaching?

What disadvantages are there of using Instagram in EFL teaching?

All in all, are you planning to use Instagram in EFL teaching in the future? Why/Why not?

#### 2. TikTok

Do you use TikTok in your free time? How often? How do you use it?

- Have you ever used this platform for learning a language?

Before the course, did you use TikTok in EFL teaching or have you ever thought of that?

What do you think about using TikTok in EFL teaching after completing the course? How would you use it with your students?

- What circumstances?
- What skills can it improve?

What other benefits can you think of when talking about using TikTok for EFL teaching?

What disadvantages are there of using TikTok in EFL teaching?

All in all, are you planning to use TikTok in EFL teaching in the future? Why/Why not?

# A Qualitative Investigation of Tunisian Teachers' Perceptions of Practice and Efficiency of TEFL in Tertiary Education

Wijdene Ayed

It is Tunisian Arabic that is spoken as a native language by the majority of the population of the Republic of Tunisia, which is different from Modern Standard Arabic or Classical Arabic (Hermessi, 2017). French is the first foreign language in the country, and English is the second foreign language. The Tunisian constitution acknowledges Arabic as the country's official language (Tunisian Presidency, 2014). In 1968, the first Tunisian president, Bourguiba gave the impetus of a modern educational policy to be adopted in the Tunisian context, one which favours the learning and use of French (Bel'Kiry, 2021). This has changed considerably after Independence as the 1990s were characterised by a radical change in the international political scene, which affected Tunisia's international relations, paving the way towards the acknowledgement of English as the global lingua franca (Bel'Kiry, 2021).

Globalisation—driven by technology, communication, and economic and political interdependence—has significantly influenced language dynamics in Tunisia (Harrabi, 2013). To meet the demands of the rapidly evolving global landscape, Tunisian citizens must be adequately prepared. Learning foreign languages has become essential for facing real-world challenges and fostering development. Consequently, the Tunisian government mandates that students acquire proficiency in at least two foreign languages in addition to Arabic, their native tongue (Boukadi, 2013). With English emerging as a prominent language due to its

association with 21st-century skills and technology, it competes closely with French in Tunisia's linguistic marketplace (Ben Said, 2019).

## **Literature Review**

### **English Language Policy and Planning in the Republic of Tunisia**

Contributing to the betterment of education starts with looking at the policies governing the educational system and the perceptions of major educational stakeholders involved (Peláez & Usman, 2017). Language policies in this study are defined as follows: “various patterns such as educational policies, historical factors, identity factors, legal issues, linguistic ideologies, beliefs and how these forces interact in existing practices” (Boukadi, 2013, p. 47). Boukadi (2013) stated that such language policies encapsulate various political, historical, and economic perspectives, and address local language issues.

Tunisia was colonised by France; therefore, the French language has become the language of administration, education, and economic progress (Daoud, 2011). Due to the dominant presence of French in almost all spheres of life in Tunisia, it is difficult for the English language to spread within the society (Daoud, 2011).

Tunisian EFL teachers, therefore, have various opinions regarding the status of English in the country while highlighting the lack of language policies, language planning, and implementation plans. However, according to the reviewed literature and the available official documents, there are several decrees, acts, and official notes that have been issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research as well as the Government. The problem is that teachers working in Tunisian universities are not aware of their existence, and they do not receive copies of such documents regularly. It is then left to the teachers to familiarise themselves with the regulatory documents organising EFL education.

## **Educational Reforms in the Republic of Tunisia**

Educational reforms in Tunisia have been integral to the country's development and progress. The Educational Reform Law of 1958, which introduced English in the secondary school cycle (Daoud, 2001), was seen as crucial for modernising the educational system to meet the evolving needs of society. The period following Independence until the rise of President Ben Ali in 1987 marked another significant phase of reform, aiming to address emerging challenges and aligning education with national goals.

During Ben Ali's regime (1987–2011), educational reforms continued, often with a focus on maintaining political stability and control. Details of Article 51 in the Education Act of 2002 provide the scope and the objectives of teaching these foreign languages as “a means of communication and a way of being acquainted with the discoveries of the thinking world”, which will enable students to “keep abreast of developments” and contribute to the country’s prosperity (Tunisian Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 22). Article 50 of the 2002 Tunisian Education Act further emphasises the fact that schooling programmes and curricula ought to focus on linguistic and language-related skills and not only on scientific and technological competence and knowledge development (Tunisian Ministry of Education, 2002).

The official English language publications also determine the goal of English education as an opportunity for Tunisian learners to learn self-expression and interaction with others, which will enable their access to other cultures through English as a lingua franca (Tunisian Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 4). English as a subject can also help students develop their analytical and critical skills, and use the language to collect information and work collaboratively on different projects (Tunisian Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 4).

However, the years leading up to the Jasmine Revolution in 2011 saw increasing demands for educational reform as part of broader calls for social and political change. The Revolution itself highlighted the urgent need for systemic overhaul, including the educational sector.

Subsequently, in 2016, the Ministry of Education and Training introduced the White Book, representing the latest phase of reform efforts. This comprehensive programme aimed to address various issues within the educational system and included a 4-year strategic plan spanning from 2016 to 2020. The reforms outlined in the White Book sought to enhance the quality of education, improve access and equity, and better align curriculum and teaching methods with the needs of a rapidly evolving society. Overall, these reform initiatives have been crucial for Tunisia's educational system to adapt to changing circumstances, meet the demands of globalisation, and equip citizens with the skills and knowledge needed for success in the modern world.

### **English Language Education in the Republic of Tunisia**

English as a subject in the Tunisian educational system has historically received less emphasis than Arabic or French, which are designated as the first and second languages, respectively. Assumptions regarding language use and its societal roles are influenced by dominant discourses, primarily centred around Arabic and French, and further reinforced by prevailing ideologies and beliefs (Badwan, 2019). Previously, French was regarded as a means of modernisation and was deeply ingrained in the Tunisian identity and linguistic repertoire. However, in the 2000s, English began to gain traction and has been in constant competition with French.

### **English in Higher Education**

The number of students enrolled at the various public higher education institutions in Tunisia (14 universities in total) was 232,614 for the 2020–2021 academic year (Tunisian Ministry of

Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2022). All university programmes are under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Two years of English language education is now required at all universities in the country (Harrabi, 2010). Specialisations offer different English language learning opportunities. There are English studies major programmes, usually at the faculties of humanities or the institutes of applied languages, available for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies. The other specialisations universities offer are courses for English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), or Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL; Boukadi & Troudi, 2017).

It is important to note that in Tunisian higher education, competencies and skills development have been defined by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in order to increase the rates of employability among fresh graduates (British Council, 2016). These changes include but are not limited to the prerequisite of an English language proficiency certificate for obtaining a degree, for instance, in engineering schools (British Council, 2016).

Boukadi (2013) claimed that even though national policies and guidelines highlight the importance of English as a global language, teaching and learning English are problematic in Tunisian schools. The dominance of the French language, the lack of a unified national curriculum for English language university teachers, and the declining proficiency level in English are factors that prevent students from professionally developing.

### **English as a Subject of Study**

Daoud (2011) described the language situation in the Tunisian context as an ongoing rivalry between Arabic and French. However, both Arabic and French show declines in proficiency levels, especially among the younger generation (Daoud, 2011). To better understand the situation of English education in this context, it is important to point out that there have been



no significant changes introduced recently that could improve English language education in Tunisia (including restructuring the current English study programmes for primary, preparatory, secondary, and university learners), even with English being a compulsory subject at all levels of education (Derbel, 2001). The English language educational curriculum has not been updated since the 2000s, and it has lagged behind contemporary teaching methodologies, potentially failing to meet the expectations and requirements of today's learners (Mokhtari, 2018).

The English language is introduced in the fifth year of primary school and is taught as a subject until the end of secondary education, leading to 9 years of English language education and the claim by the British Council that English as a subject of study is well established and that there is a growing demand for its instruction in Tunisia. Tunisian university teachers and students value their multilingual profiles, which is in line with the official governmental support for citizens to speak Arabic and to master two foreign languages.

### **Previous Studies on the Status of English Among Teachers and Students in Tunisia**

Boukadi (2013) investigated, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the factors influencing Tunisian teachers' views of EFL education in the country. She sent out surveys to and interviewed teachers working at different levels: primary, preparatory, and secondary, as well as teacher trainers and inspectors. Her study showed that there is a disjunction between Tunisian language policy and EFL teachers' perceptions of education in Tunisia, and concluded that authorities should devote more effort and time to improving the teaching of English in Tunisian schools as well as including technology in the learning process. Boukadi also added that teachers had not witnessed any changes in the educational system since 2011. However, they hope that English language education will be transformed in the upcoming years.

Similarly, in a quantitative investigation with a sample of 100 Tunisian university students, Melliti (2012) studied adult students' perceptions of the status of English in the country and their use of the language. Melliti reported that the participating students were aware of the importance the language holds even if they had not mastered it, and the study also confirmed that for Tunisians, the primary goal behind learning English is academic and professional development. Therefore, to the question of whether perceiving teaching English in tertiary education as a compulsory subject is beneficial or not, some of the students answered that they would also favour a move towards English as a medium of instruction in their university studies. Such a move would be highly influential for the future of the Tunisian educational system and society by unlocking potential international investments and collaboration in all domains, which is currently not the case because of the dominance of the French language (Melliti, 2012).

In another quantitative study, Harrabi (2010) looked at Tunisian university students' perceptions of their English for ESP. These courses are usually tailored towards the needs of the students and their fields or specialisations. Harrabi highlighted the lack of Tunisian ESP practitioners' awareness of their students' reasons for learning English and the unsuitable materials as well as the irrelevant content of different disciplines.

Mazandarani and Troudi (2017) affirmed that there is a scarcity of research into English as a lingua franca, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, particularly in tertiary education in Tunisia. In the Tunisian context, "Tunisian educational policy makers are aware of the necessity to cope with the demands of today's world" and of the fact that Tunisian schools should play an important "role in coping with these changes ... through the promotion of learning foreign languages" (Abid, 2013, p. 26). Based on Education Act 5 (Tunisian Ministry of Education, 2002), teachers are "entrusted with implementing national educational goals". They are responsible for educating

the younger generation jointly with other members of the education community (p. 6).

Studying these teachers' views of the current language educational system implemented at universities would allow the development of effective educational policies and the enactment of efficient reforms (Mokhtari, 2018).

### **Rationale and Research Questions**

Investigating the topic with Tunisian university teachers is expected to highlight the challenges of English language education in Tunisia. Teachers are at the frontline of the educational process, and their constructive criticism can lead to change. It is, therefore, imperative to investigate the present EFL scenario “for the pursuit of excellence in English language teaching and learning practices” (Liton, 2013, p. 20). Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What do Tunisian university English language teachers know about the English language policies of their country?
- 2- How do Tunisian English language teachers at universities perceive the current situation and the quality of English language education at Tunisian universities?
- 3- What pedagogical approaches and methods do Tunisian English language teachers employ when teaching at universities?
- 4- What do English language teachers at universities envisage for the future of TEFL in Tunisia?

### **Methods**

This study is based on qualitative data. Seven Tunisian teachers of English working in state universities were interviewed based on a semistructured interview instrument.

## **Research Paradigm and Justification**

The exploratory nature of this study is “in line with the discovery-oriented character of the qualitative inquiry” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 110). The need to understand the different aspects of English language education in the Tunisian context from the teachers’ points of view justifies the use of the qualitative method, which is supported by Creswell’s (2014) constructivist paradigm, which builds upon vivid real-life experiences to investigate a certain area of research in the humanities in order to construct a comprehensive set of views and knowledge of the world. To follow the aims of this research, my main intention is not to see how representative the data could be or to generalise the findings but rather “to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the experience” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 110), and who can describe and explore the relevant aspects of TEFL in Tunisian universities best.

## **Instrument Design**

In this study, the instrument has been adopted from a previous qualitative study I compiled targeting primary, preparatory, and secondary school teachers in Tunisia. To match the research aims with the research questions and to ensure quality control, the qualitative design is served by “a fitness-for-purpose selection” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 54). The questions were modified and adapted to gather data from university teachers, and one pilot interview was conducted to ensure the suitability of the instrument (for the instrument, see Appendix A). An example of one of the questions that had to be changed is “in what ways can you achieve the objectives stated in the official English language education curriculum in your classes?” Since university teachers do not have a specific curriculum to follow, this question was modified to “are there any learning objectives that you usually set before your classes or before the beginning of each semester? In what ways do you try to achieve these learning objectives?” The semistructured interview questions, which take advantage of both structured and unstructured instruments, allowed me to guide my participants during the interview process

and have prompts for some questions as well as give them the freedom to elaborate and add any information they might deem relevant while answering the questions (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 120).

### **Data Sources**

To align the purposes of this study with my sampling plan for finding active Tunisian university English language teachers, I relied on purposive homogeneous sampling when choosing the participants (Dörnyei, 2007). I selected six Tunisian university teachers working in state universities. There were three male and three female participants aged between 25 and 46 years during the time of the interviews in 2021. They had been teaching for a period of 2 to 25 years and working in humanities and engineering in six different cities (North: Tunis, Manouba; Middle: Sousse, Kef; South: Gabes, Tataouine) and universities.

The geographical location of the teachers highlights the difference between the regions in terms of the accessibility to teaching and learning resources, students' willingness and motivation to learn, as well as the dynamicity of the classrooms. Northern regions tend to be more economically developed and more open to the world compared to the rest of the country. The economic disadvantages of those living in southern and western regions of the country influence learners' decisions whether to take part in foreign language lessons. If they do not drop out of school because of poverty, they usually believe that scientific courses would benefit their future plans much more. The interviewed teachers teach English as a foreign language for three different majors: Three teach English majors, one teaches education majors, and two teach engineering majors. Their students study for bachelor's (3 years of study), master's (2 years of study), and engineering (5 years of study) degrees. To ensure anonymity, each participant is referred to by a pseudonym in this study. Table 1 below gives an overview of the demographic data of the participants.

English language teachers working at universities usually graduate with a degree in English language, literature, and civilisation at the bachelor’s level and a master’s degree in either linguistics, translation, civilisation, or literature. The majority of the teachers may also continue doctoral studies, which is 5 years of independent research on a specific topic.

Some other teachers also graduate from the “Ecole Normale Superieure”, which is a very competitive elite higher education institute, where there are 2 years of preparatory studies followed by a national examination to pursue 3 more years of specialised studies in linguistics, civilisation, and literature. These programmes barely include any preparation or training for becoming English language teachers, except for two courses in one semester related to TEYL or TEFL.

**Table 1**

*Participants’ Demographic Data*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Length of teaching experience</b>	<b>Age groups taught</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Field of teaching</b>
Rola	33	9 years	BA and MA students	Mannouba (North region)	English majors
Mahmoud	25	2 years	BA students	Kef (North region)	English majors
Ilef	28	5 years	Secondary level then engineering and MA students	Sousse (Middle region)	Engineering majors
Mayar	46	25 years	Secondary level then BA and MA and engineering students	Tunis (North region)	Engineering majors
Marwen	31	8 years	BA students	Gabes (South region)	English majors
Amir	26	2 years	BA students	Tataouine (South region)	Education sciences majors

**Data Collection and Transcription Procedures**

The participants provided data on a voluntary basis. An interview consent form was sent via email to all the participants before conducting the interviews to be digitally signed and emailed back (see Appendix B). The teachers who did not send the form back before the

interview gave their consent at the beginning of their interview. The data collection took place between January and February 2021. For further accessibility to these different regions, universities, and fields—and because I was conducting my research outside of Tunisia—I opted for the snowball technique to get recommendations from the interviewees about other potential participants (Dörnyei, 2007). The one-to-one interviews were conducted online via a video conferencing platform. The interviews were conducted entirely in English. During the interviews, I tried to keep the discussion flowing and make the participants feel at ease and comfortable when they were answering the questions. They were also informed that they could benefit from the research once it had been prepared for publication.

Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and was simultaneously recorded on my laptop (video and sound) and on my smartphone (sound only) to have a backup copy in case of any technical issues. All the records were saved with the names of the participants with no one else having access to it to ensure information privacy and confidentiality.

Following the standard transcription scheme for conversations, the six interviews were first transcribed online via the Otter application, then the transcription was manually reviewed to eliminate any inconsistencies and to correct any errors. The data included 63,677 words.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

I opted for an inductive data analysis procedure based on the interpretive research design (Dörnyei, 2007). I looked for common patterns and themes that could be useful for interpretation. Hence, I relied on the interpretivist paradigm to analyse the thematically coded responses to enhance the quality of the analyses and to give a comprehensive and extensive answer to the research questions (Dörnyei, 2007). The interpretivist paradigm relies on the fact that reality is subjective and socially constructed, meaning that we can understand such reality by delving into the experiences of people living this reality (Dörnyei, 2007).

## **Results and Discussion**

In the following section, the findings of the study are presented in line with the main research questions and partitioned based on the themes that emerged from the responses of the participants.

### **Teachers' Views of the Overall Quality of ELT in Tunisian Universities**

I started the interviews by asking the participants to reflect on what they thought of the overall quality of English language education in Tunisian universities. While Mahmoud believed that it is a “debatable” situation, most of them agreed that it is generally improving. It is important to note that “teaching English at university became only available in 2002” as Mayar noted. Marwen affirmed that Tunisia is “becoming more culturally relevant responding to this generation of students that is more anglophone than the previous generations are”, which is in correspondence with Daoud's (2011) claims of a younger generation that is more anglophone-oriented.

Although it has been around 20 years since English was introduced at Tunisian universities, there are “no smart objectives” behind teaching it as Mayar pointed out. SMART objectives refer to Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound goals that are set by the Ministry of Higher Education to reach quality education that matches the international standards of language learning. According to Mayar, the goals of English education only reveal “the good intentions on the governmental and ministerial level” with no concrete or measurable or time-bound objectives for English language education. Interviewees teaching in English studies departments witnessed an increasing number of students specialising in English majors. However, these students' levels of English are also worsening. This is because there is “a very standard rupture between how English is taught in secondary schools and how it is taught in higher education” (Mahmoud). This could be explained by the very



different structures and programmes planned for English language courses at secondary schools and at universities. At the university level, which was the focus of this research, teachers plan their classes and choose their resources, which is not the case for secondary school teachers as they have to follow the Ministry of Education workbooks and guidelines. When it comes to engineering students, they are far less concerned with their English lessons as they do not deem these classes relevant for their future careers, especially since the medium of instruction is French, and local employers require knowledge of French rather than English.

Students seemed dissatisfied with the current content of English language lessons. According to Mahmoud, “there is a large discrepancy between that and the real world”. English lessons do not help students acquire life skills. Although the syllabi offered to English majors are fairly varied, most of the teachers claimed that they are outdated. English majors at the bachelor’s level learn about English-language literature, British and American civilisations, linguistics, and translation. In each of these four fields, the materials used have not changed for more than 20 years, and they do not reflect the needs and goals of the current generation of students. On the MA level, English majors select one of the several specialisations available at their faculties. This can range from a degree in linguistics, civilisation, literature, or business and commerce English to translation. Mahmoud commented that different English courses are simply “crammed” with unnecessary activities and tasks. There is little room for creative and innovative tasks or group projects as the students have to spend most of their classes working on activities that they do not see as useful for their current learning and future.

Mayar mentioned that students are not satisfied with “the quality of teachers”. The reason is that teachers often find themselves lacking any professional training because of the nonexistence of English language teacher training programmes at Tunisian universities. In

addition, Mayar pointed out the teachers' lack of training in ESP. Mayar also claimed that many teachers resist professional development and are unlikely to try to learn anything new. This resistance is usually based on the teachers' unwillingness to adapt to the changes and to use modern materials to teach or recent topics to discuss. Teachers claim that they are overworked, which is why they do not have the time to learn about new techniques and train themselves to use new materials. Teachers also believe that old methods are the most suitable for promoting learning.

The absence of quality control at universities is a double-edged sword for teachers of English in Tunisia. While university teachers are given the freedom to design their classes independently, novice university teachers find it relatively difficult as they are not experienced enough and are not fully acquainted with English as a subject that they should be teaching. Mahmoud asserted that "there are no real measures that could be taken to control the quality of the course that is given", which might lead to negative results among students and poor teaching quality at departmental level. Rola also added that there are no entrance exams for English majors, and many students find themselves struggling to complete the 3 years of their BA studies because of their low level of English.

In sum, teachers seemed to be very critical and knowledgeable about the deficiencies in the system. Although they asserted that the importance of English is increasing compared to French among university students and society, teaching English as a foreign language is rather problematic from various aspects. French is still an influential and dominant language in Tunisia. Teaching English at universities has not been adequately organised or well-planned at the ministerial level. Teachers of English as a subject do not have any guidelines to help them work effectively. This can be problematic in the sense that students graduating with a bachelor's degree, for example, are not able to write or communicate appropriately in English. The interviewees voiced their general dissatisfaction with the current programmes

implemented at the different institutes in the country to teach English either to English majors or to engineering majors. University EFL teachers consider their own training and academic background as insufficient for working as EFL instructors, and there is a strong need for further training programmes.

## **TEFL Approaches and Objectives Adopted by Teachers**

### ***TEFL Approaches and Teaching Materials***

The findings indicate that English language teachers working at Tunisian universities attempt to fuse a variety of approaches and techniques during their classes. While some of the teachers opted for communicative classes, others attempted to contextualise the lessons' content they designed to fit the Tunisian cultural context. Rola explained that it was common for teachers to tailor their lessons to their students' needs and expectations, for example, during her literature classes and analysis of literary pieces she would

always ask straightforward questions at the beginning of the lesson, and then by the end of the semester, whenever we are close to the exam, I always try to make the questions more complicated. So, I can stimulate their critical thinking and ... guide them regarding the content of the course.

Although the content is very different for students majoring in English and those majoring in engineering studies, students in these programmes do not have access to a wide variety of resources and materials. Ilief mentioned that there are “no materials provided to us English teachers”. Most of the participants pointed out the absence of appropriate English language teaching classrooms and technological devices. Libraries in different universities are available and accessible, but there is a limited number of books and articles that can be used due to the shortage of resources.

### ***TEFL Objectives and Challenges***

Although TEFL in Tunisian universities mainly focuses on reaching a high level of proficiency in the language, stimulating critical thinking is also one of the main objectives of English language teachers. Lessons for English majors tend to be more about in-class discussions and analysis of literary pieces, the interviewees said. These discussion-based courses help the students formulate opinions and share their ideas and thoughts with their groupmates. In discussing the objectives of English language classes, Rola mentioned that her goal is “to cover the programme I design for the students, and to get the information (as in knowledge) passed on to as many students as possible”. She tried to make the classes learner-dominated rather than teacher-centred. She also considered her objectives teacher-oriented as they helped her to change her strategies and be innovative. She was looking for professional development opportunities within her network to help her improve her teaching techniques, but she could rarely find any. Ilef believed that it is part of her learning and professional development as a novice teacher to design her lessons and to choose suitable teaching strategies. Nonetheless, attempting to cover the curriculum prepared by the staff of the Department of English Studies might be a burden for both the teacher and the learners as such curricula are lengthy and highly demanding. Mahmoud believed that although “teachers would try to deliver as enriching material as they can”, he “had teachers who would try to cram (because of the imposed rules to complete the curriculum) as much content as they possibly can (into the students) without any emphasis on the benefit of critical analysis”.

The interviewees elaborated on the challenges they constantly face when working on achieving the above objectives. Both Ilef and Amir emphasised the lack of materials inside and outside the classroom hindering the learning and teaching process. Another problem is that students are far from being autonomous learners. Due to crammed timetables, most of the English classes are left to the end of the day when students are exhausted and unfocused. In

addition, in the English language classes there is not much room for innovation and professional development for the teachers.

The “varying English language level of students” is also problematic as Mayar and Mahmoud pointed out. Rola commented on the students’ strikes at some faculties across the country (calling for educational change and assisting students in their needs and educational concerns), which resulted in no classes for long periods during the semesters: “Different strikes may take place due to UGET or the Students’ Union” (UGET: Union Générale des Etudiants Tunisiens, which translates into English as General Tunisian Students’ Union). Due to student-initiated strikes, student absenteeism is on the rise. In addition, studying for examinations has been engraved in the students’ minds, and their major objective is to pass exams rather than learn foreign languages, including the English language. The reason for this is that the educational system in its current form favours learning to pass the examinations.

In sum, it has been acknowledged by the Tunisian community of learners and teachers that the English language is needed for future career prospects and international employment or further study opportunities, which is why many of the English lessons are planned to develop both soft and hard skills. As far as English majors are concerned, it is crucial to develop analytical and critical thinking, which requires that the classes are more interactive and discussion-based. Nonetheless, teachers face several challenges including the timeframe, students’ motivation and absenteeism as well as student and teacher unions’ strikes. Also, teachers are expected to put into practice crammed and old curricula prepared by the Ministry of Education. EFL teachers have the responsibility to not only deliver courses but also to prepare for and plan English language lessons, learn about recent developments in different academic areas, and meet the objectives set by their department, faculty, university, and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Tunisia. The general objectives for English Studies programmes are aimed at preparing the students to learn only about English

and American literature (drama, poetry, novels), British and American civilisations, English language (grammar, professional and academic writing, oral skills and presentations, linguistics), and translation (English/French, English/Arabic).

## **Teachers' Awareness of Regulatory Documents of TEFL in Tunisian Universities**

### ***Lack of a Unified National Curriculum***

According to the interviewees, there were no official documents that teachers working in Tunisian state universities must take into consideration. As far as the curricula are concerned, Marwen mentioned that there is “nothing that is really unified at the national level”, which means that there is no national curriculum. Ilef went further by saying that almost all teachers of English in the different fields at the university level “are improvising on our own”.

### ***English Language Policies in Tunisia***

The fact that there are no clear policies and there were no significant changes in education and language education in particular, strongly influences the practices of teaching and learning in the Tunisian context. English language education and its programmes “give the impression that they are an afterthought or half-baked sort of programmes” (Mahmoud) and “since there are no regulations, there is no curriculum, teachers would do what they want” (Mayar).

Marwen described the governmental policies as follows: “The policy is to introduce English more into the public sphere, and even into more learning programmes that, for example, we see more scientific disciplines, teaching in English and requiring students to write in English, rather than in French”, whereas the idea should be to keep both languages alive in academia. Some of the interviewees also think that English should be introduced outside of classroom settings and that learners should be encouraged to use it daily. It would be also beneficial to have more university degree courses taught in English alongside French.

In discussing the ongoing rivalry between French and English in the Tunisian context, Mahmoud commented that “English is gaining more and more ground in our social and economic and political spheres, especially with the advent of technological companies and businesses”. Mahmoud, who thinks that there are no concrete language policies in the country, continued by adding that “this notion of language policy also suffers from the same traditions that are eating away our educational system”. Rola did not think that “the educational system is being at the attention of the government”. Marwen shared the idea by saying that

at some point, I think last year or 2 years ago, there was a movement, public movement that is popular movement to call for the shift of French into a third language and the promotion of English into a second language, which led to no results. So, I think these legal implications are political rather than educational or academic.

### **Teachers’ Perceptions of the Future of TEFL at Tunisian Universities**

Tunisian teachers believed that educational “reform should be made a priority, and the priority is to prepare students for the labour market” (Mayar). Mayar also suggested that “as far as engineering is concerned, we need to link academic life and professional life. They need to learn the skills they can make use of later”. Mahmoud also asserted that “many more reforms are needed to bring our educational system back to the minimum and decent requirements of a working educational system, and the requirement is being up to date”.

Marwen suggested that change should have started with training the older generation of English language teachers to keep up with the latest teaching approaches and methods in English language education and aiding the younger generations to professionally develop and gain expertise. As Rola pointed out, “becoming a university teacher does not mean that it is

the end as Shakespeare would say. I mean it is not the end of one's professional life; it is the beginning, so we are still learning". Mahmoud proposed that English language classes should be more open to creativity and change:

I think we should work on better training for our teachers, the teachers should be better equipped for today's students, and there should be a reform of textbooks and programmes... We should integrate more and more communication, technological communication devices, and audiovisual teaching aids materials.

Mayar added that "we do not have an issue with technology, but we would like to get training on how to use this technology". It is also imperative, as Amir pointed out, that there should be "strategies regarding the status of teachers of English that ensure their accessibility to scholarships and exchange programmes", which will help them in their careers. There is also a strong need for "making information accessible everywhere" not only about fellowships and professional opportunities, but also resources and materials for future and current teachers and researchers of the field (Ilef).

Having a unified curriculum for all university students specialising in English studies is not welcomed by some of the participants. Rola explained that this is not necessary as "the principle of variety is not a multiplicity, so we think every university needs to follow the basics of English education, but not to fall into the trap of having the same curricula which are not enriching". Mahmoud emphasised the fact that we cannot have a generalised curriculum because it is up to the teacher to bring something valuable and unique to the table. For Mahmoud, the teacher is responsible for nurturing the curiosity of students as well as developing their research capabilities and critical thinking skills and boosting their self-confidence so that they are well-prepared for their future careers. Employability is all that matters in the educational and learning process in the country according to both teachers and



learners. Marwen, when recalling his own experience as a university student and about becoming a teacher, noted that he did not have any academic or training classes to help him become a teacher. His experience may be one way of making the various syllabi more teaching-oriented rather than lecturing to the students. Amir, based on his experience, agreed with the importance of decentralisation and having different programmes for each department. “Moving from French as the language of instruction to English as the language of instruction” would be a revolutionary step towards the future of education in the Tunisian context, Marwen explained. There is an interest in foreign languages particularly in English in the country, and it is indeed a step forward to see the English language added to the curriculum from the early years of primary school as a compulsory subject until the end of secondary school, with approximately 8 years of English language learning in public and state institutions. However, “under different circumstances, education, let us say, has been a little bit aside, and there are other issues that are now the focus of the country, our state, and our government” claimed Rola. The country needs all stakeholders to initiate change. Mayar believes that “we need researchers, we need people who are specialised in curriculum design in charge of a national programme... and to train people... to keep up to date”. It is also the teachers’ responsibility to be part of this future development of English language education. According to all the participants, the future of English language education at the tertiary level in Tunisia is gloomy. There are several initiatives in which the teachers are willing to take part; however, the lack of support hinders their aspirations and work. The dominance of the French language over English in higher education and academia does not open the door for Tunisian educators to compete and publish at the international level. The challenges are numerous, but the participants still hope for a better future and a transformation-driven education. The participants agree that the aim should be multilingualism not bilingualism (i.e., Arabic and English).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, education stakeholders including teachers and learners need to initiate change and improvement. Teachers ought to be well equipped and better qualified in both the mastery of the English language and the mastery of relevant teaching approaches. The last and central element of the educational process is the student who should be well equipped and trained for their future careers.

Despite all the presented challenges, the Tunisian EFL teachers who participated in this study would like to see real improvement at the different levels of the educational system and are willing to be part of this change. Although the overall situation of English language education at higher education institutes around the country seems unstable and problematic, there are various positive insights the teachers can offer. On the positive side of EFL education at the tertiary level in the country, teachers are very independent from the start of their careers. They can design their lessons, experiment in their classes, and learn at the same time as they teach.

Further research implications are to initiate change at the planning and management levels. Decision makers and curriculum designers should take into consideration the input of practitioners in planning and drafting language policies as “language learning projects in developing contexts such as Tunisia have to be carefully designed in a way that aligns itself with local needs and aspirations” (Badwan, 2019, p. 6).

This study had the prime goal of contributing to the existing literature and knowledge about English language education in the Tunisian context. As a qualitative investigation focusing on the opinions of active teachers at Tunisian universities, it also gives voice to these teachers, provides a holistic view of the current situation of EFL teaching, unveils the challenges and deficiencies, and opens the horizons and prospective views that will be crucial in serving the future developmental phases in the country (Boukadi, 2013). Nonetheless, the number of

participants in this qualitative study is limited; therefore, their opinions and views cannot be generalised. The discussion of further issues and challenges can be part of future research.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Instrument

Dear X,

I invited you to participate in my research as you are teaching at one of the Tunisian institutions, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I would like to inform you that you have the right to drop out at any time. You may also skip questions or stop participating at any time as well.

This interview will be recorded, and I will keep your records private. I will use a pseudonym of your choice rather than your name on study records and it will be destroyed after the research is conducted. Your record will be stored in the researcher's protected computer. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

This study aims to bridge the gap between language education policies, curriculum, and their implementation in the TEFL environment in the Republic of Tunisia. I, the researcher, aim to investigate your view of the current situation of English education, TEFL approaches and methods employed, and knowledge and dispositions about the existing curricula. The investigation ends with discussing your attitude toward the future of TEFL in Tunisia.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. A. Due to technical reasons, I have to ask your age: What year were you born in?  
B. Where and when did you graduate? What degree/qualifications do you have?
2. A. Could you please introduce yourself as a teacher?  
B. Why did you choose to become a teacher? How long have you been a teacher?
3. A. Throughout your career as a teacher, what age groups have you taught?  
B. Which educational level are you teaching English now? Where?

#### INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC

4. What is your opinion about the overall quality of Tunisian English language education? What characterizes the quality of English teaching in your context?
5. What quality control steps are included in the Tunisian education system to maintain the quality of English education? What do you think about their usefulness?

#### TEFL CURRICULUM AND APPROACHES

6. How would you describe the approaches and strategies you use when teaching English?
  - 6.1. Is there a Teacher's Guidebook and Students' Workbook that supports the approach you are following? Are there any supporting materials from the Ministry of Higher Education?
  - 6.2. What other materials you would want to have in your classes?
  - 6.3. Are there any objectives that you usually set before your classes or before the beginning of each semester? In what ways do you try to achieve these learning objectives?
  - 6.4. What are the most challenging aspects of the main barriers that you face regarding implementing the set objectives or achieving the courses' aims?



7. What are the regulatory or official documents that you have to take into account when teaching? *governmental decrees/Ministry of Education documents/publications/letters/recommendations/national pedagogical center/ inspectors' notes*)
8. Are there any national curricula for English language education at the university level?
9. How appropriate is the language education curriculum for your teaching context?

#### KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE POLICIES

10. What do you know about English language policies in Tunisia? What do you think of these policies?
  - 10.1. Do you know of any official document that explains the language policy? If yes, what are these documents? What do they contain?
  - 10.2. To what extent do these policies influence the way you teach English in Tunisia?
11. What do you know about the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research-initiated reforms in English language education?
  - 11.1. What do you think of the changes in TEFL that took place in the past few years?
  - 11.2. Do you think your teaching reflects the reform efforts? If yes, in what ways? If not, why not?

#### TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE OF TEFL

12. Do you think there should be a reform or change in English language policy? If yes, what further changes in TEFL policy do you expect?
13. Given the current situation of English education in the Tunisian context and considering your experience in the classroom and the teaching materials you use; do you think there is a need to develop a new curriculum?
14. What thoughts do you have about the teachers' role and involvement in revolutionizing TEFL education in Tunisian universities?
15. What would you like to change in the current English language education in Tunisia?
  - 15.1. What do you think about the success of TEFL in Tunisia?
  - 15.2. What would make TEFL successful in Tunisia?
  - 15.3. What would make an ideal TEFL environment in Tunisia?

#### FINAL QUESTIONS

16. Could you please raise any issue that needs to be discussed and studied?
17. What should I have asked you that I did not think to ask?
18. What would you like me to use as a pseudonym?

This was the end of my questions, and again I would like to thank you for giving me your valuable time, for your participation, and for your valuable insights into the topic.

## Appendix B

### Interview Consent Form

Interview consent form for the interviews

Eötvös Loránd University

PhD Programme in Language Pedagogy and English Applied Linguistics

Budapest, Hungary

**Title:** Investigating Tunisian teachers' perceptions of tertiary English education, language policies and the future of TEFL at universities

**Investigator:** Author

**I. Purpose of the Research:** This study aims to bridge the gap between language education policies, curriculum, and their implementation in the TEFL environment in the Republic of Tunisia. The researcher aims to investigate Tunisian English teachers' views of the current situation of English education, their thoughts about the current TELF approaches and methods employed, their knowledge and dispositions about the existing curricula, and, their beliefs and perceptions of the Ministry of Education-initiated reforms and TEFL policies. The investigation ends with discussing teachers' attitudes toward the future of TEFL in Tunisia.

**II. Procedure:** Interviews will be conducted online with one of these platforms that you chose: Microsoft Teams, Skype, Google Meet, or Zoom. You will be interviewed once, and the interview will take about 90 minutes.

**III. Risks:** The risks of participating in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

**IV. Benefits:** Taking part in this research may benefit you as an English teacher. You will have the opportunity to reflect on your teaching approach, methods, and techniques as well as your role as a teacher within the Tunisian educational system. The results of the research will show the role of English teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs in reforming English education in the Republic of Tunisia. This will help us find out more about how to improve English education in the country.

**V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:** Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**VI. Confidentiality:** I will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Kata Csizér, my PhD supervisor, will have access to the information you provide. I will use a pseudonym of your choice rather than your name on study records and it will be destroyed after the research is conducted. Your record will be stored in the researcher's protected computer. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarised and reported in such a way that you will not be identified personally.

**VII. Contact Persons:** Contact (this section is removed before the blind peer review process)

**VIII. Copy of Consent Form to interviewee:** You will receive a digital copy of this form.

# **31st IATEFL-Hungary Conference Selections**

**Edited by Éva Illés, Zsuzsanna Soproni,  
Árpád Farkas, and Anna Szegedy-Maszák**

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