

Maintaining a Balanced Distribution of Language Skills in Textbooks for Young Learners: A Selection of Pedagogical Interventions

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Abstract

This study focuses on the importance of maintaining a balanced exposure to the four language skills in English textbooks for Young Learners. Giving equal importance to the four skills in the early stages of language development is crucial to laying a solid foundation for long-term communicative competence. The study uses a mixed-method design to (1) study the distribution of the four language skills in two Tunisian textbooks for young learners, and (2) to propose remedial strategies for teachers to maintain a more equitable skill exposure across the activities presented to learners. The first part is quantitative in nature and reveals a clear imbalance in the teaching of the listening skill, which is completely missing in one textbook and is visibly less frequent in the other. The diagnosed distribution may hinder the attainment of the desired communicative proficiency level declared in the official curriculum and may have longer-term effects on students' preparation for subsequent learning. To address the uneven distribution of listening skills across the two textbooks, the second part of the study presents a qualitative analysis of selected activities and proposes a range of adaptive solutions that reinforce the integration of listening input into tasks involving the other three language skills, as well as grammar and vocabulary.

Keywords: classroom activities, communicative competence, language skills, TEYL, skills integration

1. Introduction

Developing proficiency in English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) requires a balanced development of the four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Cappellini, 2005). The four skills are equally important because they are interconnected and essential for communication with others. A balanced focus on them would train learners on using language effectively in both receptive and productive modes and in different types of contexts and situations (Reynolds-Young & Hood, 2014). Teaching the four skills unequally can have a negative impact on the learner's communicative competence and ability to interact with others effectively. The four skills are highly interdependent, requiring equal attention from teachers and curriculum designers throughout the learner's ESL/EFL journey.

The scaffolding of balanced proficiency levels in the four language skills starts in the early stages of the learner's experience with English (Kurniasih, 2011). In Teaching English to Young learners (TEYL), the types of materials adopted by teachers and the teaching methods employed in class should guarantee a gradual development of the four language skills, providing learners with ample opportunities to practice language in authentic communicative situations (Octavia et al., 2022). The beginning of the learning experience is particularly important because it sets the foundations for subsequent learning and guarantees transition to more advanced levels. The careful consideration of the four language skills in the learner's experience with English as a new language is effective in developing a set of sub-skills (associated with the four language skills) and, therefore, in initiating learners to meaningful language use and practice (Nikolov & Timpe-Laughlin, 2021).

The balanced development and integration of the four language skills is also important for learner motivation and engagement (Seven, 2020). The learner's ability to use the four skills equally would give them a sense of achievement, motivating them to practice the target language in its various modes. They would find the learning process more authentic and the learning experience more enjoyable. Contrarily, the uneven distribution of the four language skills in the teaching/learning process may lead to learner frustration, especially when it causes a gap between their receptive and productive modes. Giving more importance to the receptive or productive mode may reduce the learner's self-confidence in specific learning situations, and may increase their anxiety in particular types of tasks (Koizumi et al., 2022).

To study the potential risks associated with the uneven distribution of language skills, this study focuses on how input is structured in two textbooks for young learners in Tunisia, with the view of assessing the distribution of the four language skills and the potential implications of the diagnosed distribution on the learner's overall proficiency development and preparation for subsequent learning. The study aims to offer a concrete example of whether the four skills are viewed as having equal importance by textbook designers and how teachers can consolidate a balanced use of language skills through specific types of teaching strategies and remedial activities. Although the findings presented in the study are unique to the Tunisian context, the implications related to the patterns associated with the teaching of the four language skills and the solutions that can be adopted by teachers to fix language-skill anomalies in their textbooks can be helpful for textbook designers and teachers working in similar contexts or using similar types of materials.

In the Tunisian public-education system, English for young learners (EYL) is taught in the last two years of primary education (grades 5 and 6). This two-year TEYL cycle is meant to prepare learners for a subsequent seven-year EFL experience in middle school (grades 7-9) and high school (grades 1-4). In all these levels, students use textbooks authored by the Tunisian Ministry of Education (MoE). The series of textbooks presents input structured according to the goals outlined in the Official Curriculum, also authored by the Ministry of Education.

The input presented to learners in their last two years of primary education offers a good corpus to study how the four language skills are distributed in the adopted textbooks. The exploration of the frequency and type of language skills in the tens of thematic units included in the two textbooks is thought to offer a diagnosis of the learning modes preferred by textbook designers. It is also thought to present empirical data on the skills that need more attention from teachers to create a more balanced learning experience, especially through supplemental work and remedial tasks. The findings presented in this study, and the recommendations inspired by them, may offer methodological insights on conducting similar research on language skills in other ESL/EFL contexts and provide concrete solutions to the potential problems associated with the uneven distribution of language skills in course materials, in Tunisia and beyond.

The study aims to answer the following two questions:

- 1) How are the four language skills distributed in Tunisian textbooks for young learners?
- 2) How can teachers modify textbook activities to achieve better skill distribution?

2. Literature Review

The four language skills have been classically divided into two sets of modes: receptive mode (listening and reading) and productive mode (speaking and writing) (Yuzar & Rejeki, 2020; Sreena & Iankumaran, 2018). This division has then been challenged by research findings showing that real-time communication is a spontaneous two-way process, and cannot be reduced to a purely receptive or productive mode (Aysu, 2025). Besides, listening and reading are not purely receptive skills; they demand considerable cognitive effort to process meaning. Both involve active processes, like predicting, guessing, inferring, and using contextual information to construct meaning. In the ESL/EFL classroom, the classical division of the four skills into receptive and productive modes does not capture the complexity of the teaching/learning process. In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as one of the major approaches to second and foreign language teaching, the nature of classroom roles played by teachers and learners allows for complex types of interactions where the four language skills are used simultaneously (Ghafar et al., 2023; Mangaleswaran & Aziz, 2019).

Additionally, the classical view of language skills as discrete processes has also been challenged. Each skill can actually be divided into a set of sub-skills involving different abilities and processes that contribute to the mastery of that skill (Clark & Terrett, 2024; Spoden et al., 2020). In the listening skill, for example, the learner may be asked to perform various tasks that involve different types of abilities, like listening to identify the main idea vs listening for specific details, or listening for general understanding vs. listening to identify meaning from context, etc. The same division applies to the other three skills. Table 1 summarizes the major sub-skills associated with each language skill. The list in the sub-skills column is not exhaustive. It is derived from recent research on the topic (Kaur et al., 2024; Morgana, 2024; Peltonen, 2024; Chen et al., 2022).

Table 1: Language Skills and their Component Sub-Skills

Language Skill	Sub-Skills Associated with it
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Listening for gist/the main idea- Listening for specific information- Listening to infer meaning- Listening to recognize tone- Listening to predict/guess

Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading for the main idea (skimming) - Reading for specific information (scanning) - Reading to understand vocabulary in context - Reading to infer meaning - Reading to identify purpose and tone
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speaking for fluency - Speaking for accuracy - Speaking in interactive communication (turn-taking) - Speaking to practice appropriate register - Speaking to express ideas, opinions - Speaking to clarify and repair
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing to generate ideas and planning - Writing to organize content logically - Writing to practice vocabulary and grammar - Writing to edit and proofread - Writing for cohesion and coherence - Writing for different purposes

The use of these sub-skills depends on the learner's level and cognitive abilities. For beginners, the learner may be required to use less demanding sub-skills, like listening to determine speakers and their roles or reading to understand new vocabulary in context. With more advanced levels, learners may be required to perform more complex tasks, like speaking to defend ideas and opinions or writing for cohesion and coherence. The selection of suitable sub-skills may also be guided by the type of task in focus. For instance, the sub-skill of listening to infer meaning is most useful with listening activities requiring learners to read between the lines and understand what is not obviously stated. Similarly, the sub-skill of writing to edit and proofread is more appropriate in writing tasks that require learners to work on writings produced by others (e.g., their peers or others). In short, the learner's linguistic proficiency level and the cognitive effort invested in each sub-skill remain important considerations in selecting the appropriate language sub-skills for different types of classroom activities (Goh & Taib, 2006).

In CLT classrooms, ESL/EFL teachers often use different skill combinations to engage learners in activities requiring the integration of more than one skill at a time. Skills integration can be defined as "the process of combining different skills within learning activities to create authentic communication scenarios that promote effective language use and improve overall proficiency" (Brown, 2007, p. 233). Skills integration reflects how language is used in real-life communication and helps learners build communicative competence (Gherdan, 2022). By engaging with listening, speaking, reading, and writing together, learners can reinforce vocabulary, grammar, and functional language use more effectively. Moreover, integrated tasks encourage learners to transfer skills across modalities, which enhances both fluency and confidence (Oxford, 2001).

Skills integration can be done through multiple mode combinations. Table 2 illustrates these possible combinations and the types of activities they are most suitable for (Dewi & Muslim, 2023; Hama Said & Bostanci, 2022; Rukthong & Brunfaut, 2020; Lee & Schallert, 2016; Tavil, 2010).

Table 2: Possible Mode Combinations for Effective Skills Integration

Mode Combinations	Skills Involved	Examples of Relevant Activities
Receptive + productive	Listening + speaking	Listening to discuss an idea.
	Listening + writing	Listening to write a report.
	Reading + Speaking	Reading to formulate opinions.
	Reading + writing	Reading to summarize a text.
Productive + productive	Speaking + writing	Discussing ideas to write a paragraph.
	Writing + speaking	Writing a blog to share with peers/class.
Receptive + receptive	Listening + reading	Listening to a dialogue to understand related reading materials.
	Reading + listening	Reading a text to understand the context of a listening activity.

In theories on curriculum design, it is common to structure input according to language skills. The activities presented to learners are often grouped under headings involving a skill, a mode, or a combination of skills or modes (Alemi & Hesami, 2014). The careful distribution of skills in school curricula (separately or interactively) guarantees a balanced exposure to authentic communication and a steady growth towards more advanced proficiency levels. When the four language skills are addressed equally, learners tend to improve more evenly. Besides, balanced skill coverage creates input variety and increases interest and motivation (Nation, 2007). Students are less likely to get bored because alternating between skills promotes real communication modes and makes classroom interactions more authentic. In addition, balanced skill distribution supports linguistic transfer and allows learners to use their knowledge in one skill to practice another. For example, reading facilitates vocabulary development, and listening improves pronunciation and speaking fluency. The learning potential offered by a particular language skill is often seen in another, and the overall proficiency growth of learners is often conditioned by their ability to use the four skills equally in different contexts and situations (Altmisdort, 2016).

Research directions on the distribution of language skills in ESL/EFL school curricula have taken three main directions. A first set of studies has focused on the balance across the four skills in school materials and its implications on learners' proficiency development (Khairati & Rozani Syafei, 2024; Qian, 2022; Alemi & Hesami, 2014). A second set of studies has focused on whether/how skills integration in school curricula promotes communicative competence and the learner's overall performance in the target language (Dewi & Muslim, 2024; Aljahdali & Alshakhi, 2023). Eventually, a third set investigated the impact of skill integration on student fluency, motivation, and transfer (Robb, 2022; Nation, 2007). Interestingly, the three research orientations yielded similar findings: that balanced skills distribution leads to balanced communicative competence, and uneven skill distribution results in limited proficiency development.

3. Research Methods

This study focuses on (1) the distribution of language skills in two Tunisian textbooks for young learners, and (2) the types(s) of supplemental work the teachers can adopt to address the four skills equally, regardless of their frequency in the textbooks. The textbooks in focus are authored by the Tunisian MoE and are used in all public schools across the country. They are designed for the last two levels of primary education, before students move to middle school. The

fifth-grade textbook is entitled *Activity Book for the Fifth-Year Basic Education*, and the sixth-grade textbook is entitled *Learn and Grow: a Student’s Book for the Sixth-Year of Basic Education*. Both textbooks are divided into thematic units (six and seven, respectively), and the units are divided into different types of input and learning activities that use the four language skills in different ways.

The first part of the analysis is quantitative in nature and focuses on the four language skills in the textbooks. The thematic units dividing the input presented to learners are used as analysis units to determine the frequency of each skill in each unit and textbook. The quantification of language skills over the thematic units is meant to collect findings on how each skill is represented in the course of the school year and whether the four skills are addressed equally as students move from one part of the textbook to the other. The gradual move towards the linguistic proficiency levels declared in the Official Curriculum presupposes a continuous and equal exposure to the four skills. Table 3 illustrates how the four skills are quantified in terms of units and textbooks. For the sake of consistency, the distribution of the skills in each textbook is studied separately. This is meant to reflect potential differences between the two textbooks, and consequently, differences in how teachers can act upon the diagnosed problems.

Table 3: Quantification of Skill Distribution in the Two Textbooks

Thematic Units	Type and Frequency of Language Skills			
	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
Unit 1				
Unit 2				
Unit 3				

The second part of the analysis is qualitative in nature and focuses on concrete examples of textbook activities featuring the least frequent skills, as determined in the first part of the analysis. The study of these activities also relies on the thematic division of input as conceptualized by the curriculum designers to offer a variety of options that support a more balanced distribution of language skills. For each unit featuring a limited use of a particular language skill, the analysis will select an activity from that unit, analyze how it is conceptualized, and propose a solution to integrate the missing skill without compromising the activity as a whole. The analysis of the selected activities will follow the same pattern:

- **Activity description:** The selected activity is analyzed in terms of form, content, and skills involved.
- **Activity modification:** for each selected activity, a modification is proposed at the level of form, content, or skills involved.
- **Learning benefits:** each proposed modification is presented with its potential benefits for learners, especially in maintaining a balanced exposure to the four language skills.

The examples of activities presented in the second part of the analysis and the possible modifications to be introduced by teachers are relevant to the context in focus - TEYL in Tunisia - and to other similar contexts. Addressing the four language skills equally, especially in the early stages of the learner’s experience with English as a new language, is crucial to communicative competence. When the adopted teaching materials do not address the four skills equally, it is the teacher’s responsibility to remedy that.

4. Results and Discussion

The TEYL experience in Tunisia is governed by an official document entitled *Curriculum of English for Primary Education*. The document was published by the Ministry of Education in 2019 and includes sections on teaching methods and techniques, components of language teaching, assessment methods, etc. On the teaching of the four language skills, the Curriculum states that “language skills (listening/speaking/reading/writing) are taught in an integrated way in meaningful contexts and situations” (MoE, 2019, p. 7). Besides, it divides the four broad skills into a wide variety of sub-skills to be practiced in class. The two textbooks under study are therefore expected to reflect the recommendations outlined in the Official Curriculum, and the way language skills are presented to learners is expected to be a faithful reflection of the teaching philosophy described in the official document. The textbooks are prepared by senior Tunisian EFL teachers and inspectors, and then the MoE assesses their compatibility with the Official Curriculum and adopts them for all public schools across the country.

Another recommendation in the Official Curriculum stresses the importance of viewing “English as a means of communication. Learners are involved in short and simple communicative activities.” (MoE, 2019, p. 7). This recommendation may explain why the textbook designers opted for dividing the input presented to learners into thematic units, focusing on topics relevant to the students’ age. The division of input thematically would create communicative contexts for learners to practice the target language, and would facilitate the integration of the four language skills into classroom activities reflecting real-life communicative situations. The themes dividing the input presented to learners in the two textbooks are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Topics Presented to Learners in the Selected Textbooks

Thematic Units	Fifth-Grade Textbook	Sixth-Grade Textbook
Unit 1	Introducing others	Entertaining myself
Unit 2	Describing people and places	Keeping fit
Unit 3	In the playground	Having fun in the seasons
Unit 4	Celebrating my birthday	Caring
Unit 5	Eating habits	Celebrations
Unit 6	Using means of transport	Going shopping
Unit 7	-	Around the world

The two textbooks organize the input pertaining to thematic units in different ways. The thematic content presented in the fifth-grade textbook is connected and revolves around the same theme, whereas the content presented in the sixth-grade textbook is divided into small units relating to the major theme in different ways. For example, in the thematic unit “Introducing Others” in the fifth-grade textbook, all the activities presented to learners start from a reading passage on a teenager called Paul who introduces himself and his family, and talks about his family members and their hobbies. The rest of the activities in the same unit include tasks on family members and hobbies, referring to the reading passage in multiple ways, and engaging learners in activities using different language skills. As for the sixth-grade textbook, the thematic units are further divided into “lessons”, each dealing with a sub-topic relating to the major theme. For example, the thematic unit “Entertaining Myself” is further divided into lessons entitled “Let’s Have Fun”, “My Free Time Activities”, “A Day out”, “Let’s Go on a Picnic”, and “Pass the Ball”. The lessons pertaining to each unit involve learners in activities using the four language skills in various ways.

The four language skills are presented in two different ways throughout the two textbooks. Sometimes, the activities presented to students come under headings related to specific language skills, and sometimes the language skills are embedded in the activities without being declared. The study of the quantitative distribution of the four skills has included all instances of occurrence, whether explicitly mentioned or not. Table 5 illustrates the frequency of occurrence of the four language skills in the two textbooks and their distribution over the thematic units, dividing the input presented to learners.

Table 5: Distribution and Frequency of Language Skills in the Two Textbooks

Units	Fifth-Grade Textbook				Sixth-Grade Textbook			
	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
Unit 1	0	1	3	1	2	5	7	3
Unit 2	0	2	2	2	1	5	3	3
Unit 3	0	1	3	3	0	3	5	4
Unit 4	0	2	4	2	2	3	3	4
Unit 5	0	2	2	2	2	3	3	4
Unit 6	0	1	3	3	2	4	1	3
Unit 7	-	-	-	-	1	4	1	3
Total	0	9	17	13	10	27	23	24

A global view of the table shows an uneven distribution of the four language skills across the activities presented in the two textbooks. In the fifth-grade textbook, the listening skill is completely missing, and in the sixth-grade textbook, it is visibly less frequent, accounting for 8.4% (n=10) of the total occurrences of language skills presented to learners. On the contrary, speaking and writing skills are consistently more frequent in the two textbooks, accounting for 83.33% (n=30) and 55.95% (n=47) of the total skill frequency, respectively. This pattern may indicate a shared conviction among the authors of both textbooks about the importance of engaging learners in the productive mode (speaking and writing) to meet the requirements of CLT, viewing the learner as an active participant in the teaching/learning process. This is overtly stressed in the Official Curriculum, stating that “the learner is not a passive recipient of information; he/she constructs and reconstructs knowledge through active involvement, experiencing and reflection” (MoE, 2019, p. 7).

The very limited exposure to the listening skill, especially in the fifth-grade textbook, may have a negative impact on the learners’ communicative competence in general. The imbalanced practice of the four skills may lead to imbalanced language development and deprive learners of reaching the linguistic proficiency levels declared in the Curriculum. Okunlola & Oladunjoye (2022) maintain that “a learner’s proficiency in language use is reflected in their ability to master all aspects of communicative competence” (p 53). The listening skill exposes learners to natural language use and helps them internalize vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and discourse patterns. When it is completely overlooked, the learner may lose confidence in real-life interactions and face problems with understanding others and responding properly in meaningful conversations. Poor listening skills may also undermine the learner’s ability to interpret tone in context and create gaps in their understanding of the target language.

At the end of primary education, Tunisian students take an optional national exam to enter a highly selective educational system known as “Pioneer Preparatory Schools”. As part of this national exam, students take an English test that focuses mainly on reading comprehension, language (including vocabulary and grammar), and writing. The content and structure of this test (excluding the listening skill) may explain the very limited practice of the listening skill in the two textbooks under analysis. This phenomenon is known as the wash-back effect: when testing practices affect teaching practices, materials development, and even effort and time allocation. This finding is further consolidated by the steady practice of the reading skill in both textbooks, accounting for 23.07% (n=9) and 32.14% (n=27) of the total skill frequency, respectively. The textbook authors, having in mind the form and content of the national sixth-grade exam, may have opted for more practice in the skills tested in that exam, namely reading and writing, at the expense of the listening skill.

Considering the horizontal distribution of the four skills across the thematic units dividing the input presented to learners, Table 5 shows a balanced frequency of the speaking, reading, and writing skills across the two textbooks. The communicative nature of the topics addressed, like describing people, celebrating birthdays, and going shopping, has entailed a variety of tasks involving learners in communicative situations requiring them to read, speak, and write about the topics in focus. A closer view of the way input is presented to learners shows that the authors of both textbooks opted for presenting the activities under subheadings like “Let’s Read”, “Let’s Speak”, and “Let’s Write”. This recurrent division of input according to language skill has entailed a steady practice of these skills in both textbooks. However, in most activities involving the listening skill, the input presented to learners comes under the heading “Let’s Pronounce”, reducing the learning potential associated with listening activities to the pronunciation of isolated words and language structures, often through repetition after the teacher.

When the textbooks display an uneven distribution of the four language skills, teachers may adopt various strategies to compensate for the communication void caused by the less frequent skills. In educational settings similar to the Tunisian one, where textbooks are authored by a central authority, and teachers are required to use the same materials in all public schools, teachers may develop the activities presented in the textbooks in various ways to achieve a more balanced practice of the four language skills. The following section presents a variety of adaptive strategies that may help Tunisian teachers consolidate the learners’ exposure to the listening skill. The suggested strategies will start from real activities in the two textbooks under study and focus mainly on integrating a listening component into them, given that this skill is completely missing in one textbook and is less frequent in the other. For each strategy, the analysis will follow the same pattern: (1) analyze the activity as it is presented in the textbook, (2) suggest a possible modification that integrates listening into it, and (3) explain the learning potential associated with the suggested modification. To avoid disturbing the diagnosed balance in the distribution of the other three skills, the suggested strategies will target activities involving the reading, speaking, and writing skills in the first place, but more solutions may come from the teaching of other aspects of the language, namely, vocabulary and grammar.

4.1 Speaking Based on Listening Input

Most speaking activities in the two textbooks are presented in isolation and come under the independent heading “Let’s Speak”. An example of these activities is illustrated in Image 1. The activity is taken from the “Keeping Fit” unit in the sixth-grade textbook. It is meant to engage learners in a pair-work activity to give advice to Max on what he “should do to stay fit and healthy”. It is presented with a visual depicting Max enjoying eating and drinking, and a list of linguistic

prompts that students may use to form structures fulfilling the communicative function of “giving advice”.



Let's speak

- a- Look at the picture. Max is getting fat; he can't stay fit.
b- Pair work: With your classmate, discuss and tick (✓) the things that Max *should* do to stay fit and healthy.

- 1- Eat fruit and vegetables.
- 2- Eat much bread and spaghetti.
- 3- Play sport.
- 4- Have four meals a day.
- 5- Eat much salad.
- 6- Walk for an hour every day.
- 7- Have three meals a day.
- 8- Eat less chocolate.
- 9- Drink much soda.




Image 1: A speaking Activity from the Sixth-Grade Textbook (p. 53)

One of the options available for teachers to consolidate the practice of the listening skill in activities like this is to start with some listening input. Within the general theme of keeping fit, the listening input may take the form of a basic conversation between a doctor and patient about healthy eating habits. Conversations like this are available online and can be accessed by the teacher easily. The input presented in the conversation may offer a valuable context for the speaking activity in general and may support vocabulary development and provide a model for correct pronunciation. The tips provided by the doctor on healthy eating habits in general may help learners give more diverse advice to Max in the speaking activity. Li et al (2023) maintain that “listening is a foundation for English learning (...). Language input is essential, but the purpose of language learning is to output, and sufficient input is beneficial to output (p. 223).

4.2 Pre-Reading Listening Warm-up

A global view of the reading activities presented in the two textbooks shows that the warm-up tasks associated with them almost never start with a listening input. The most recurrent pre-reading tasks include visual illustrations and separate questions on the topic presented in the reading activity. In the sixth-grade textbook, these tasks come under the heading “Let’s Get Started” and provide learners with visual and textual prompts to guess what the reading passage is about. An example of these tasks is illustrated in image 2. The task is taken from the “Having Fun in the Seasons” unit. It aims to prepare learners for a reading passage on outdoor activities for children in the spring season. The warm-up task includes a visual illustration of children playing in a large park and separate questions on where the children are, what they are doing, and what the weather is like.

 **Let's get started**

Look at the picture and answer the questions.

- Where are the children?
- What are they doing?
- What's the weather like?

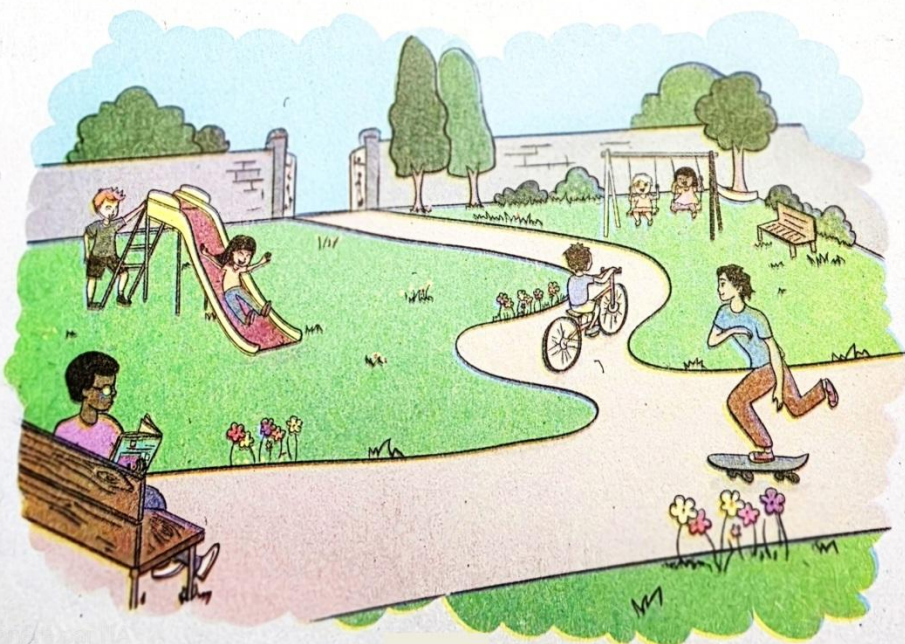


Image 2: A Reading Activity from the Sixth-Grade Textbook (p. 74)

To reinforce the learners' exposure to authentic listening input, the teacher may start the reading activity on the spring season with a song on seasons in general. Songs for beginners are available online and can provide a relevant context for the reading activity. Songs are effective educational tools because they combine language learning with music and rhythm, and create emotional engagement. Besides, songs create a funny classroom atmosphere and enhance students' motivation, encouraging them to participate actively in the next activities. They also foster intercultural awareness as they introduce learners to cultural artefacts and elements. Yang (2024) says: "songs, with their rhythmic and repetitive nature, engage young learners while fostering language awareness, motivation, and pronunciation skills" (147).

4.3 Listening as a Model for Writing

Some writing activities in the two textbooks are meant to engage learners in producing written output following specific structural patterns or forms, usually to express straightforward meaning in simple statements or descriptions. An example of these activities is illustrated in image 3. It is taken from the "Using Means of Transportation" unit in the fifth-grade textbook. The activity presents to learners three unarranged statements and asks them to reorder them to get simple, meaningful statements on using different means of transportation.

1- Reorder to make correct sentences

a- to/ always / park / . / taxi / We / by / go / the

.....

b- to / go / I / foot / never / . / on / school

.....

c- next / the / is / ? / When / train

.....

Image 3: A Writing Activity from the Fifth-Grade Textbook (p. 30)

To integrate some listening input into this activity, the teacher may start with a testimonial from a young commuter using London public transportation daily. Testimonials like this and short stories about children’s daily habits are also available on the internet. The listening input would add an interesting context for the writing activity and provide learners with language models that would guide them in the writing task. Model-based writing is an effective teaching strategy for beginners because it provides structure, reduces cognitive load, and supports the development of writing skills. Vandergrift (2004) conducted a study on the importance of listening in facilitating learning in general and concluded that listening can play a vital role in developing writing skills because it provides learners with exposure to language patterns and structures, which they can transfer to written texts.

In addition to activities focusing on the four language skills, the textbooks under study also include activities focusing on “language”, usually with basic instructions on the use of specific lexical items or grammatical forms. These activities also offer opportunities to increase the learners’ exposure to listening input.

4.4 Vocabulary Gap-Fill Listening Tasks

Most vocabulary activities in both textbooks are presented in gap-filling tasks requiring learners to select the appropriate words from a box to produce a coherent paragraph. In the fifth-grade textbook, one of these tasks asks students to fill in four blanks to obtain a paragraph on the World Car-Free-Day. The task is illustrated in Image 4.

5- Fill in the blanks with 4 words from the box.

pollution - cars - earth - ride - litter

Every year on 22 September, cities celebrate the World Car-Free Day. People do not use their for a day. On that day, many children walk and run or their bikes. They want to reduce traffic and air It is good to save the..... and stay safe.

Image 4: A vocabulary Activity from the Fifth-Grade Textbook (p. 29)

One possible way to add a listening component to this activity is by presenting an authentic conversation on world pollution or any other pollution-related event involving some of the words

presented in the vocabulary activity. Instead of filling gaps with words from the box, the teacher would provide learners with incomplete sentences (or incomplete paragraphs) and instruct them to fill gaps with words from the listening passage. Listening is important for vocabulary development because it provides exposure to authentic communicative situations and allows learners to understand how words function in context, and hence internalize pronunciation and tone. Nation (2001) noted that listening provides rich input for vocabulary development and facilitates understanding and retention.

4.5 Listening for Specific Grammar Features

Some of the activities presented under the heading “Language” in both textbooks also focus on the practice of specific grammar features. Most of these activities are presented in dialogues requiring learners to add specific grammatical forms and structures to obtain a meaningful conversation. One of these activities is presented in the “Going Shopping” unit in the sixth-grade textbook, instructing students to read a dialogue between Sarah and Kate and put verbs into the right tense. The activity is illustrated in Image 5.

4- When will the children go to the party?



Let's practise

a- Read the dialogue carefully. Put the verbs in brackets in the correct tense.

- Hi Sarah!
- Hello Kate!
- How (be) your weekend?
- It was good. I (visit) my grandparents. I (see) my cousins and we (have) so much fun.
What about you?
- On Saturday evening, I (go) to the restaurant with my friends. We (eat) pizza and (drink) soda. On Sunday, I (stay) at home and (help) my mum with the housework.



Image 5: A Grammar Activity from the Sixth-Grade Textbook (p. 159)

The dialogue presented in this activity may be presented in listening. It features a casual conversation between two friends about their shopping experience on the weekend. The teacher may substitute the written dialogue with some listening input on the same topic and ask students to focus on the speakers’ activities over the weekend. The students’ answers may then be used to present and practice the grammatical feature in focus, namely the use of the simple past. Adding a listening input to grammar activities would allow learners to experience grammar in context, which leads to better understanding and more natural use of grammatical structures. It would also help

them internalize grammar patterns as they are produced in their authentic contexts. Akkaya & Doyumğaç (2023) maintain that “due to the semantic and syntax structure of a language and its universal dimension, listening plays a key role in the acquisition of language and grammar rules” (p. 1002).

6. Conclusion

The study of the distribution of the four language skills in the two textbooks shows a clear imbalance in the teaching of the listening skill. Listening activities are completely missing in one textbook and are visibly less frequent in the other. The early phases of language development are crucial for subsequent learning, and students need to practice the four skills equally to maintain a balanced communicative competence. The diagnosed distribution of the listening skill does not seem to support a steady development towards more advanced communication levels, as it may hinder the learners’ endeavor to grow more proficient. Listening is a foundational skill and a key element in authentic real-life communicative situations. When weakly addressed, the whole communication potential may fall apart.

To fix the uneven distribution of the listening skill, the study proposed five adaptive strategies for teachers to achieve a more equitable learner exposure to listening input. The proposed strategies focused on integrating some listening input into activities presented in the other three skills (speaking, reading, and writing) or activities focusing on vocabulary and grammar. While the solutions offered to teachers are specific to the textbooks in focus, they may offer methodological insights on the study of skill distribution in other educational settings around the world and provide possible remedial solutions to address potential uneven skill exposure in EYL textbooks. The solutions proposed in this study are not limited to the teaching of the listening skill; rather, they may serve as models for the integration of other (underrepresented) skills in different contexts and educational settings.

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