Speaking Instruction in the Algerian Secondary Schools: EFL Teachers' Attitudes and Classroom Practices

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ABSTRACT

The modern approaches to language teaching have privileged the teaching of oral communication skills in the EFL classroom. In the case of Algeria, new Competency-Based syllabuses were designed to break with the old teaching practices putting more emphasis on the teaching of speaking. The present study sought to investigate the Algerian secondary school teachers' attitudes and their practices of teaching speaking. A qualitative methodology is used and two questionnaires were administered to 200 participants. The data analysis revealed that teachers are aware about the importance of oral production skills but their teaching practices are characterized by a significant emphasis on reading and writing. Factors like lack of guidance and teacher training, overloaded syllabuses, textbooks content and the Baccalaureate examination system were found to hinder speaking instruction.

Keywords: Speaking skill; speaking instruction; teachers' attitudes; classroom practices; CBLT.

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INTRODUCTION

The Following the twenty-first century global trends in language education, the Algerian Ministry of Education decided to reform its primary, middle and secondary education. This reform led to implementing the Competency-Based Approach in teaching English as a Foreign Language at the secondary school level in 2005. In this respect, new syllabuses were designed to equip the learners with the linguistic and communicative skills that would allow them to get harmoniously integrated in modernity by sharing and exchanging ideas in a world where English is used as a Lingua Franca. Contrary to the old teaching methods that focused on the written form of language and grammatical accuracy, the new EFL teaching philosophy stresses the importance of oral communication .

However, the success of any educational reform cannot be attained until the classroom practices are tied to the instructional objectives set by policy makers. After a few years of implementing the new syllabuses, the Ministry of Education realized that the EFL classroom teaching practices were still characterized by an excessive emphasis on the written form of language at the expense of oral production. Therefore, the ministerial circular N° 321 put a spotlight on this issue and recommended that teachers at the school and district levels should work collaboratively to address this problem (Algerian Ministry of National Education, Sub-Directorate for Educational Documentation, 2013, p. 149). Accordingly, Omari (2017) attempted to investigate the challenges of teaching speaking under the CBA; she concluded that there was a lack of congruency between the stated objectives of English language teaching and the classroom practices through which speaking was taught. Although Omari's enquiry provided significant insights into the actual state of the teaching and learning of speaking in Algerian secondary schools, her study was based on data collected from three secondary schools in the city of Tlemcen. Moreover, Omari's study, which constitutes one of the scarce research works that addressed this issue, emphasized mainly on the observation of third year scientific-stream classes during a period of three weeks. Hence, more national-scale studies are needed to describe the current state of teaching speaking in the Algerian secondary school EFL classrooms from different perspectives.

The purpose of the present study is to assess the Algerian secondary school EFL teachers' attitudes towards speaking instruction and to explore their practices of teaching speaking to their learners. Investigating the teachers' attitudes is important to understand their behaviour and to measure their

commitment to the implementation of the educational reform. The researchers also intended to examine the position of speaking in the teachers' practices as compared with the other language skills in order to describe the current state of teaching speaking in Algerian secondary schools.

Thus, to carry out this study, we hypothesize that:

١. Algerian secondary school EFL teachers have negative attitudes towards the teaching of speaking.

٢. The speaking skill is given less attention than the other language skills by the Algerian secondary school EFL teachers.

3. Speaking is not taught appropriately to the Algerian secondary school EFL learners.

2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 The Nature of Speaking

According to Bailey (2003, p. 49), speaking is a real-time productive aural/oral language skill which consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. It is real time since the interlocutor is waiting for the speaker to speak right then and it is both aural and oral because the speaker's utterances are depend on the interlocutor's speech received aurally. From the skill-building perspective, speaking refers to "*A collection of micro-skills, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.*" (El-Koumy, 2002, p. 54). In this respect, speaking is a complex skill that requires mobilizing an array of linguistic knowledge in addition to the kinesics and semiotics that are necessary in producing communicative speech (Correia, 2016, p. 89).

2.2 Speaking Instruction in the Language Classroom

In the modern world, the speaking skill enjoys a special position in language pedagogy is due to the prevalence of the spoken form of language over the written one in communication (El-Koumy, 2002, p. 54). Accordingly, Nunan (2015, p. 48) points out that the ability to speak a language is often equated with proficiency in that language. Hence, developing the learners' speaking skills must be at the core of the language teaching practice.

2.3 Teaching Speaking or Teaching with Speaking Classroom?

The complex nature of speaking as a language skill may lead to a confusion

among language teachers and material writers concerning the effective instruction of this complex skill. According to Hughes (2011, p. 07), a distinction should be made between 'teaching the spoken form of a language' and 'teaching a language through speaking'. The former refers to the teaching of speaking as a holistic skill putting emphasis on how spoken genres are structured and what forms are typical of them while the latter includes simply getting the learners to speak in the classroom. Accordingly, Goh (2016) insists that speaking instruction should go beyond giving the learners opportunities for oral practice. She considers that, "*To teach speaking is to facilitate our students' understanding of speaking processes and scaffold their development of speaking competence in a systematic and theoretically- principled manner.*" (p. 157).

2.4 Speaking Instruction under CBLT in Algeria

Competency-Based Language Teaching is an outcome-based approach which focuses on what the learners can do with the target language rather than what they know about it (Wong, 2008, p. 181). In addition, the CBLT shares some features with the Communicative Language Teaching like seeking to develop functional communication skills in language learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 143). Hence, developing the learners' speaking competence is one of the most important objectives of language instruction within the framework of CBLT.

In the case of Algeria, the ultimate objective of teaching English as a foreign language at the secondary school level is developing the learners' ability to use oral and written English for communication. Balancing between the oral and written forms of English is explicitly indicated in the first year English syllabus that stipulates, "*Indeed, the same importance is equally accorded to oral and written communication*" (Ministère de l'Education Nationale. Direction de L'Enseignement Secondaire. Commission Nationale des Programmes, 2005, p. 05) .

However, the Algerian Ministry of Education, Sub-Directorate for Educational Documentation (2013) reported in the ministerial circular N° 321 that the teaching of English in the secondary school classrooms was still characterized by a considerable focus on the written form of language. This ministerial circular recommended that EFL teachers should give more attention to the development of the learners' oral communication skills through their teaching practices. In an attempt to shed light on this issue, Omari (2017)

conducted a study to examine the state of teaching speaking in three secondary schools in Tlemcen. She concluded that there was a mismatch between the objectives stated in the syllabus and the teachers' practices of teaching speaking .

Due to the scarcity of national-scale studies to investigate this problem from different perspectives, it remains unclear why the Algerian secondary school EFL teachers tend to neglect the instruction of oral communication skills. Hence, the present study draws on the teachers' voices to explore their attitudes and practices in relation to the teaching of speaking.

3. METHODOLOGY

The teachers' attitudes along with their practices of teaching speaking were investigated by using a qualitative methodology. In what follows, the participants, instruments for collecting data and the data-collection and analysis procedures are explained.

3.1 Participants

A convenience sample of 200 secondary school EFL teachers (male and female) who teach English in 45 different Algerian provinces were randomly selected as participants of this study. Their teaching experience ranged between 01 to 29 years.

3.2 Instruments

For data collection, two five-point Likert-type questionnaires were administered to the participants. The first questionnaire included ten close-ended items, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to explore the teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of oral communication skills. In addition, a second questionnaire was used to describe the teachers' classroom practices of teaching speaking; it was constituted of nine close-ended items ranging from never to always.

3.4 Procedure

The questionnaires were administrated to the participants who were asked to complete the items and choose one of the options based on five-point Likert scales. Then, SPSS software was used to provide a descriptive analysis of the closed items of the two questionnaires.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Teachers' Attitudes towards Speaking Instruction

Data about the teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of speaking skills were gathered through a five-point Likert-type attitude questionnaire. The questionnaire contained ten items that were coded including: 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly agree .

The findings were computed and the questionnaire reliability test was performed through Cronbach's Alpha. Table 1 below shows the results of the reliability analysis.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No. Of items
.701	10

The reliability estimated for the ten items of the questionnaire was .701. This index was higher than the minimum required (from .60 to .70) suggesting that the reliability of the attitude questionnaire was acceptable. In the following section, the detailed findings regarding each questionnaire item will be presented.

Table 2. Teachers' beliefs about speaking instruction

Items		1 SD	2 D	3 U	4 A	5 SA
1. The teaching of speaking is an important part of language teaching.	(N) %	(8) 04	(3) 01.5	(3) 01.5	(40) 20	(146) 73
2. To be proficient in English, my learners need to speak it.		(6) 03	(3) 01.5	(4) 02	(94) 47	(93) 46.5
3. Within the framework of the CBA, the teaching of speaking is given an important position.		(10) 05	(31) 15.5	(17) 08.5	(114) 57	(28) 14

Regarding the teachers' attitudes towards the importance of speaking instruction in language teaching, 186 of them agreed that the teaching of speaking was an important language instruction. This was equal to 93% of the

participants. Similarly, 93.5% of the respondents agreed with item (2) which suggested that learning to speak a language was an important part of language learning.

As far as item (3) is concerned, 71% of the respondents agreed that speaking instruction was given a significant importance under the Competency-Based Approach to language teaching. On the other hand, 20.5 % of the participants expressed their disagreement with this item .

These numbers show that the teachers had positive attitudes towards the teaching of oral communication skills and its importance in language teaching and learning. Although the numbers show that fewer respondents agreed with item (3) as compared with items (1) and (2), the majority of them showed a positive attitude towards the position of speaking instruction within the framework of the CBA.

Table 3. Teachers' beliefs about the current state of speaking instruction

Items		1 SD	2 D	3 U	4 A	5 SA
4. Speaking is neglected in the Algerian secondary school EFL classrooms as compared with the other skills.	(N) %	(6) 03	(19) 09.5	(7) 03.5	(116) 58	(52) 26
5. There is a gap between the stated objectives in the syllabi and the classroom practices concerning speaking instruction.		(3) 01.5	(9) 04.5	(12) 06	(108) 54	(68) 34

Table 3 presents statistics for items (4) and (5) which investigated the teachers' attitudes towards the current state of speaking instruction. 84 % of the total number of the participants agreed with item (4) which suggested that speaking was a neglected skill as compared with the other language skills. In addition, 88% of the participants agreed that there was a significant gap between the stated objectives regarding the teaching of speaking skills and their actual classroom teaching practices. On the other hand, an absolute minority of them (06%) disagreed with this statement through their answers to item (5). Hence, the absolute majority of the participants believe that speaking instruction in the Algerian secondary school EFL classrooms lags behind the stated objectives in the curriculum.

Table 4. Teachers' reported circumstances of teaching speaking

Items		1 SD	2 D	3 U	4 A	5 SA
6. I need more practical guidance and documentation on how to teach speaking.	(N) %	(3) 01.5	(7) 03.5	(4) 02	(80) 40	(106) 53
7. The overloaded syllabi prevent me from devoting enough time to teach speaking.		(7) 03.5	(15) 07.5	(3) 1.5	(71) 35.5	(104) 52
8. I find myself compelled to prepare my learners for the Baccalaureate exam that is based on reading and writing.		(3) 01.5	(8) 04	(3) 01.5	(80) 40	(106) 53
9. English textbooks give more room for reading, writing and grammar than for speaking.		(4) 02	(20) 10	(4) 02	(104) 52	(68) 34

Table 4 presents statistical data about the teachers' responses to items (6), (7), (8) and (9) of the attitude questionnaire. With respect to item (6), 93 % of the respondents agreed that they needed more practical guidance and documentation in order to learn how to teach speaking under the CBA while 05% of them disagreed with this item. Concerning item (7), 87% of the surveyed teachers agreed that the English syllabi were overloaded and that this prevented them from devoting enough time and effort to the teaching of speaking. Whereas, 11 % expressed their disagreement with this item .

Regarding item (8), 93 % of the participants agreed that they often found themselves obliged to prepare their learners to meet the requirements of the Baccalaureate exam, neglecting oral communication. Similarly, an absolute majority of the surveyed teachers (86% of them) agreed that the English textbooks did not give enough room for the teaching of oral communication skills.

Table 5. Teachers' commitment to the teaching of speaking

Item		1 SD	2 D	3 U	4 A	5 SA
10. As a teacher, I should take the initiative to look for creative ways to teach oral production skills.	(N)	(2)	(2)	(8)	(109)	(79)
	%	01	01	04	54.5	39.5

Finally, item (10) investigated the teachers' commitment to the make change and incorporate speaking instruction in their teaching practice. In their responses to this item, 94% of the surveyed teachers agreed that they should look for efficient ways to integrate the teaching of speaking into their daily classroom practices. On the other hand, only 02 % of the participants disagreed with this item.

**4.2 Teachers' Reported Practices of Teaching Speaking**

Another five-point attitude Likert-type questionnaire was used to collect data about the teachers' practices regarding the teaching of speaking skills. It contained nine items that were coded including: 1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Very often and 5= Always. After collecting the participants' responses, a questionnaire reliability analysis was made through Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 6. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No. Of items
.674	09

The reliability estimated for the nine items of the questionnaire was .614. According to Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson (2014, p. 90), values of .60 to.70 are considered the lower limit of acceptability. Hinton, McMurray, & Brownlow (2014, p. 359) consider that values between .50 and .70 show moderate reliability. Therefore, we estimate that the reliability of the questionnaire is acceptable. This questionnaire's findings are presented in the figures that follow.

Fig.1. Teacher' practices in relation to textbook usage
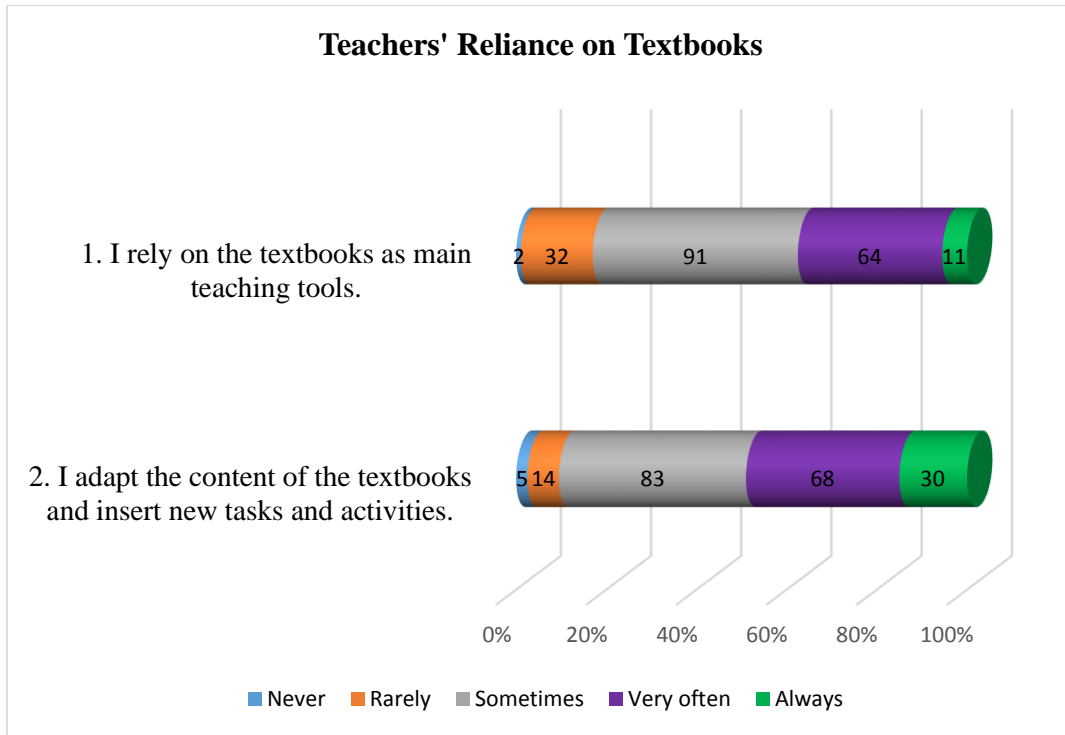
As shown in figure 1, the items (1) and (2) investigated the teachers' usage of the English textbooks. Concerning item (1), 17% of the surveyed teachers never or rarely used textbooks while 45.5% of them sometimes relied on theses textbooks as main tools of instruction. Besides, 37.5% of the participants used them very often or always to teach English in their classrooms. With regard to item (2), 09.5% of the respondents never or rarely replaced the content of the textbooks with new tasks and activities, whereas 41.5% of them sometimes changed the textbooks' activities with new ones. In addition, 49% of them very often or always adapted and replaced the textbooks' content with their own materials .

Hence, these results suggest that textbooks constitute one of the important teaching tools for the surveyed teachers; however, the participants did not report any excessive reliance on textbooks. The data show that teachers were selective when using the official textbooks and that they felt free to adapt them whenever it was necessary.

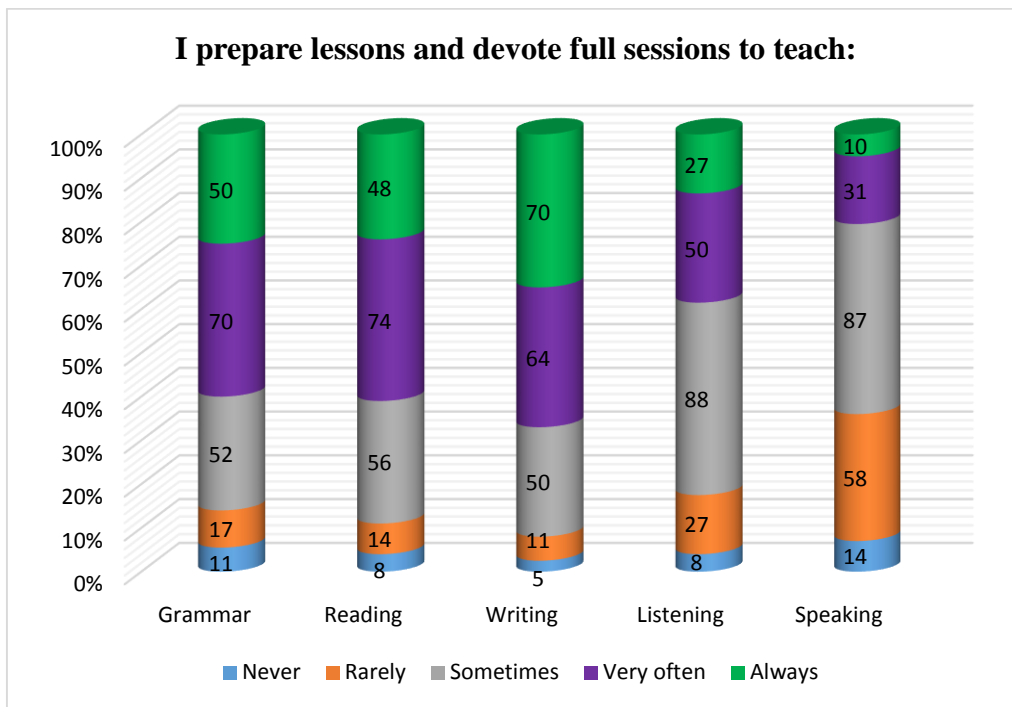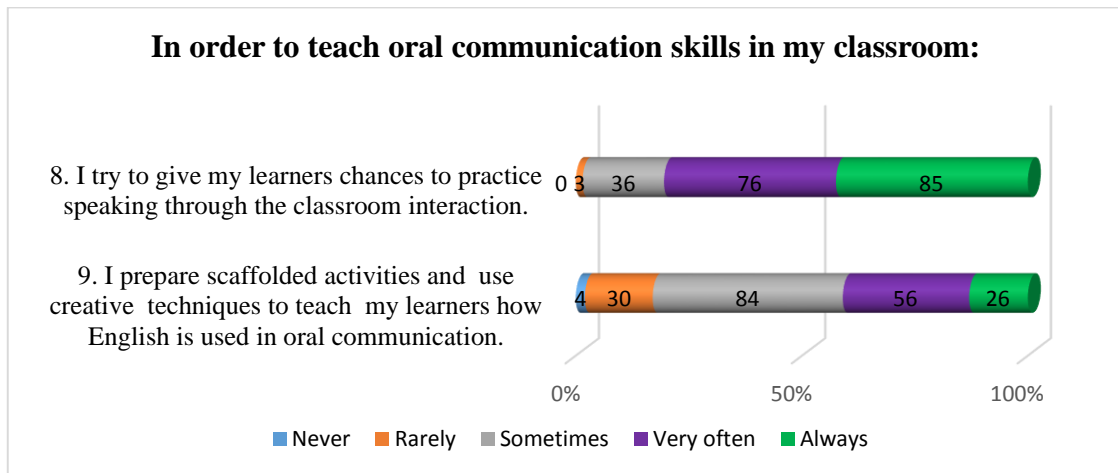**Fig.2.** The position of speaking instruction in the EFL classroom

Figure 2 presents statistical data for the items 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the questionnaire that investigated the position of speaking instruction as compared with the other language skills in the EFL classroom. About 60% of the surveyed teachers reported that they very often or always prepared lessons and devoted full sessions to the teaching of grammar. Similarly, 61% of them very often or always devoted full sessions to teach reading while 67% of the participants always or very often scheduled full sessions to teach writing in their classrooms. On the other hand, 38% of the surveyed teachers very often or always devoted full sessions to teach listening. Moreover, only 20.5% of them reported that they very often or always prepared lessons and devoted full sessions to teach speaking in their classrooms.

These numbers show a significant difference in the amounts of attention given to the instruction of grammar along with the four language skills. It is now clear that most of the teachers' attention is dedicated to the teaching of grammar, reading and writing; while the development of the learners' oral communication skills is neglected.

Fig.3. Teachers' procedures for teaching speaking

In order to teach oral communication skills in my classroom:

8. I try to give my learners chances to practice speaking through the classroom interaction. — 0, 3, 36, 76, 85

9. I prepare scaffolded activities and use creative techniques to teach my learners how English is used in oral communication. — 4, 30, 84, 56, 26

Never · Rarely · Sometimes · Very often · Always

Finally, Items (8) and (9) scrutinized the teachers' procedures of teaching speaking in their classrooms. As depicted in figure 3, 80.5 % of the surveyed teachers very often or always taught speaking through giving their learners chances to speak while interacting in the classroom. On the other hand, only 41 % of them very often or always prepared activities and used different teaching techniques to develop their learners' speaking skills .

Therefore, these results show that, regardless of the amount of attention given to the speaking skill, it is not taught appropriately in the Algerian secondary school EFL classrooms.

5. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the Algerian secondary school EFL teachers' attitudes and to describe their practices in relation to the teaching of oral communication skills in their classrooms. The results indicate that, despite the teachers' awareness of the importance of speaking instruction, they believe that it is neglected in the context of Algerian secondary schools. They reported that factors like lack of guidance and documentation, overloaded syllabuses, textbooks' content and the absence of speaking in standardized examinations contributed to this situation. The findings also show that the teachers' daily classroom practices are characterized by a significant focus on reading, writing

and grammar at the expense of developing the learners' speaking abilities. Besides, the teachers seem to be at odds with the right way to teach speaking to their learners .

The results presented in Table 2 do not support our first hypothesis. They suggest that the teachers have positive attitudes towards the importance of teaching oral production skills and are aware of its significance within the framework of the CBA. This leads us to say that the teachers' beliefs about the value of speaking are not the reason behind neglecting its teaching in the EFL classrooms. In addition, the findings presented in Table 3 show that the teachers admit that there is a significant gap between the objectives set in the secondary school English syllabuses and the actual status of teaching oral production skills in the classroom. Hence, these results confirm the conclusion of Omari (2017) which suggested that there was a lack of consonance between the objectives of the educational reform and the EFL classroom teaching practices concerning speaking instruction .

Furthermore, the results in Table 4 revealed that the teachers attribute this situation to a number of factors related to the circumstances in which English is taught and learned. First, the teachers reported that they were left to fend for themselves without any guidance and documentation about how to teach speaking under the CBA. Second, the participants pointed to the problem of overloaded syllabuses, which lead the teachers to disregard the instruction of oral communication. Therefore, the teachers are compelled to focus on the factual content of the syllabuses regardless of the stated objectives. Third, the evaluation of oral production skills is excluded from the Baccalaureate standardized examination; which implies that speaking instruction is not considered as an integral part of language teaching. This situation does not conform to the claims of Hughes (2003) who believes that developing the learners' oral ability cannot be given its due importance by the teachers and the learners if it is not taken into consideration while assessing the learners' language proficiency. Finally, the textbooks were reported to support the teaching of reading, writing and grammar neglecting oral production. This indicates that the textbook designers' tendency to neglect the instruction of oral communication skills is likely to be extrapolated to the teachers' classroom practices. According to Hill (1967), only exceptional teachers can teach oral production without relying on textbooks. He claims that, *"The average teacher, like the average actor, does his best when he is part of a team_ in his case, the expert textbook writers being his partners."* (p. 106).

Table 5 illustrates that the participants reported their readiness to look for

efficient solutions to develop their learners' oral ability skills. Hence, these results reflect the teachers' commitment to adjust their teaching and incorporate speaking instruction into their practices.

As figure 1 shows, the teachers demonstrated a certain flexibility in using textbooks; they reported that they did not follow their textbooks 'slavishly' in their teaching. These results contradict the claim of Omari (2017) who asserted that the Algerian secondary school EFL teachers tend to teach the textbooks rather than the syllabus. However, figure 2 shows that they still devote much attention to teach reading, writing and grammar. These results lead us to say that even when teachers decide to dispense with the official textbooks, they tend to neglect listening and speaking. Thus, the teachers' practices are inconsistent with their beliefs since, despite their awareness of the importance of oral communication, they deliver materials in a traditional way putting much emphasis on reading, writing and grammatical accuracy. Moreover, the findings in figure 3 suggest that teachers, in addition to the insufficient amount of attention given to oral communication skills, tend to 'teach the language through speaking' instead of 'teaching speaking'. Hence, based on the claims of Hughes (2011) and Goh (2016), speaking is a 'practiced' rather than a 'taught' skill in the Algerian secondary school EFL classrooms. Thus, the second and the third hypotheses are supported by the findings presented in figures 2 and 3.

The generalization of the results is limited by the sample size, which does not meet the requirements of representativeness. Geographical constraints made the researchers unable to reach more than 200 Algerian secondary school EFL teachers while collecting data. It would have been more interesting if the researchers could collect data from a representative sample.

6. CONCLUSION

The present paper investigated the Algerian secondary school EFL teachers' attitudes and their practices in relation to the teaching of speaking, in an attempt to shed light on the status of oral communication skills in the EFL classrooms. The findings of this study support the claim that the teaching of the speaking skills is not given its due attention in the Algerian secondary school EFL classrooms in spite of its important position in the syllabuses. Despite the teachers' awareness about the importance of teaching oral communication skills, their teaching is characterized by a large emphasis on the development of the learners' reading, writing and grammatical accuracy skills. This situation was reported by teachers to stem from factors like lack of guidance and

documentation, the overloaded syllabuses, the content of textbooks and the absence of speaking in the Baccalaureate examination. Besides, another interesting finding of this study was that, in addition to devoting an insufficient amount of attention to the teaching of speaking, teachers are not adopting an adequate approach to teach this productive skill .

Based on the conclusions, it is recommended that teachers should be extensively trained on how to teach oral communication skills within the framework of the CBA. In addition, subsidiary documentation and guidance ought to be provided to teachers in order to allow them to bridge the gap between theory and practice; ensuring a successful implementation of the new educational reforms. Besides, the Algerian secondary school evaluation system needs to be adjusted to incorporate the testing of the learners' oral communication skills. Finally, the secondary school English syllabuses and textbooks ought to be revised to fit the actual time allocation and maintain a certain balance between the four language skills.

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