Palestinian EFL Teachers' Attitudes Towards English Textbooks Used at the First Three Grades of Elementary School

May 2014 – Volume 18, Number 1

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Abstract

Evaluating language materials is very useful for language teachers, and one essential consideration in evaluating language materials is obtaining the teachers' views on its value (Tomlinson, 2003). Thus, this study aimed to explore Palestinian English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' attitudes towards the different aspects of the English textbooks used at the first three grades of elementary school in Gaza, *English for Palestine*. The data of the study were collected through administering a questionnaire to 70 teachers and conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers selected from the seventy. The results revealed that the participants had positive (high) attitudes towards the English materials in that the topics in such materials were perceived by the teachers to be relevant to pupils' cultural background and needs. However, the teachers had some problems related to the large number of unfamiliar words and the inadequacy of the time devoted to delivering the materials.

Keywords: Palestinian, EFL teachers, attitude, textbooks, elementary

Introduction

Instructional materials play a vital role in teaching and learning languages. According to Tomlinson (2008), some materials can facilitate language learning, while others can hinder it depending on their characteristics. Thus, for language teaching and learning to be improved, evaluating language materials is crucial. In this context, some authors (e.g., McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Rubdy, 2003; Tomlinson, 2003) view that evaluation is very useful for language teachers.

One essential consideration in the evaluation process is obtaining the teachers' perceptions of the value of the materials. Since language teachers can teach successfully if they enjoy the materials they are employing, it is essential to take teachers' opinions and experiences into consideration (Tomlinson, 2003). Additionally, the selection of materials involves matching them against the context (teachers' and students' needs and interests) in which they are going to be used (Rubdy, 2003). Thus, there is a critical need to involve teachers in the evaluation process (Ellis, 1998).

As for evaluating EFL materials in particular, Hammad and Abdellatif (2012) view that exploring EFL teachers' perceptions of the learning materials can offer insightful information about such materials. Tok (2010) also provides that EFL teachers have the right to participate in evaluation since they are the real users of school textbooks. Based on the necessity of taking EFL/ESL (English as a second language) teachers' opinions into account in evaluating language materials, previous studies have investigated EFL/ESL teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards textbooks in many ESL/EFL contexts. For example, Ismail (2010) focused on ESL students' views on a new grammar model including four stages: confrontation, clarification, confirmation, and consideration and on their perceptions of grammar learning in general. Karatas and Fers (2009) examined the perspectives of 35 EFL teachers about English curriculum used in one of the Iranian universities. Kayapinar (2009) administered a questionnaire to 94 teachers and open interviews with 40 to measure teachers' views on the quality of foreign course books packages in Mersin. Likewise, Musallam (2009) administered a questionnaire to thirty-two female college EFL teachers and semi-structured interviews with 9 teachers for assessing their attitudes toward authentic EFL reading materials. Su (2007) measured the attitudes of 21 instructors towards the texts used for teaching intermediate and advanced ESL students in Indiana and Kentucky. Furthermore, Wilhelm and Pei (2008) investigated teachers' and students' perceptions of ELT (English language teaching) methodologies at three universities located in China.

Among the studies conducted in the Palestinian EFL context, Masri (2003) is the only study of English materials used at the first three grades of the first schooling period in Palestine. According to Palestinian Ministry of Education (2012), people are educated through two schooling periods: elementary school and high school. Whereas in the elementary school the pupils receive the first stage of learning starting from the first grade and ending with the tenth grade, the high school includes the eleventh and twelfth grades. Most schools in Palestine are formed by gender as all-female or all-male schools. They begin in September and end with June, with six days a week beginning on Saturdays and ending on Thursdays. Every school day runs from 7:15 am to 12:00 pm, with six 40-minutes class periods broken by fifteen minutes after the third class.

The Ministry of Education in Palestine considers English one of the main school subjects. It is taught as a compulsory subject at government schools, starting from the first grade. While three class periods a week are devoted to teaching English to first, second, third, and fourth graders, students of the other grades have five English class periods a week. The Ministry rules imply that all teachers of English should have at least B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) in English language teaching from a teaching education program offering a number of courses, that is, English linguistics, literature, and TEFL (Teaching English as a foreign language) courses. Additionally, the Ministry holds annual training courses and workshops to improve EFL teachers' professional skills and to help them use textbooks intelligently. In fact, training teachers is only one of the factors contributing to English language learning development. As stated by Tomlinson (2008), language materials are one of the other important factors affecting learning. That is why the Palestinian Ministry of Education has taken steps to improve EFL curricula since 2000, the year that witnessed the introduction of the national curriculum in all Palestinian schools.

Before 2000, the *Hello* textbook series, designed by the Egyptian Ministry of Education, used to be learned at Gaza public elementary schools, whereas the *Petra textbook series* designed by the Jordanian Ministry of Education was learned at West Bank public elementary schools. At that time, English was not taught as a compulsory subject at Palestinian public elementary schools. In 2000, the Palestinian Ministry of Education brought about a change in the English materials used at public schools as English has become compulsory in all the elementary grades. A team of Palestinian EFL experts prepared a new series of textbooks entitled *English for Palestine* in collaboration with Macmillan Publishing Limited, an international publishing company. Thus, the first graders attending Palestinian public elementary schools in 2000-2001 studied the Palestinian Ministry of Education first textbook of *English for Palestine* (2000).

During her experience as an instructor supervising EFL pre-service teachers, the researcher noticed that most governmental elementary school teachers were complaining about the readability problems of the new textbooks, including the irrelevance of these textbooks to pupils' needs and interests. To compensate for the shortcomings of such materials, the Ministry of Education brought about another change in 2011. For the second time, the majority of teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with some aspects of the newly introduced textbooks, including those related to the large number of key words in each unit, the very thing which caused conducting more research to evaluate the newly implemented materials. Thus, the present study attempts to examine Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the newly implemented textbooks: *English for Palestine 1*, *English for Palestine 2*, and *English for Palestine 3*.

Significance of the Study

1. The study may be useful to EFL education policy in Palestine. It may assist textbook designers in determining the readability problems of the new EFL textbooks used at the first three grades of elementary school in Palestine, and therefore it may help in reforming such textbooks.
2. It may offer useful instrumentation related to EFL/ESL materials assessment research.
3. The implications of the study also shed some light on EFL vocabulary instruction, particularly in the Palestinian context.

Previous Studies

Some relevant studies (e.g., Fattash, 2010; Hamdouna, 2007; Keshta, 2008; Mahmoud, 2007; Masri, 2003) evaluated some aspects in the *English for Palestine* textbooks used in Palestinian schools. Fattash's (2010) study investigated teachers' responses to a questionnaire about the way the communicative approach is integrated in *English for Palestine* textbooks used at all elementary grades (from first grade to twelfth grade). The study revealed that reading materials in these textbooks were perceived by teachers to be interesting and relevant to students' cultural background. Hamdouna (2007) used content analysis to investigate life skills in the content of *English for Palestine 6*. The study showed that the materials focused on communication skills. Likewise, Keshta (2008) employed content analysis to examine the skills enabling students to deal effectively with the demands of everyday situations in *English for*

Palestine 5. The study found that communication and social interaction were the highest emphasized life skills in *English for Palestine 5*, whereas problem solving and critical thinking were the least emphasized. Moreover, Mahmoud (2007) evaluated *English for Palestine 4*, revealing that the number of the class periods devoted to teaching English language for Palestinian fourth graders was perceived by teachers to be inadequate. Masri's study (2003) investigated EFL teachers' views on *English for Palestine 1* used in Palestinian primary schools in 2002. The study indicated that teachers highly appreciated the English materials employed in first grade classrooms.

Masri (2003) is the only study probing the EFL materials used at the first three grades of elementary school in Palestine, and none of the reviewed studies approached the EFL materials implemented at the first three grades of Palestinian elementary schools in the school year 2011-2012. In fact, very little research has been done in this research area. The present study attempts to address this gap through examining Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the newly implemented three textbooks.

Research Question

The study attempted to answer the following research question: What are Palestinian teachers' attitudes towards the English textbooks used at the first three grades of elementary school?

Methodology

Design of the Study

The study adopted the descriptive method of research for describing Palestinian teachers' attitudes toward *English for Palestine* used at the first three grades of elementary school, employing both quantitative and qualitative instruments.

Participants

The participants were Palestinian EFL teachers working in governmental elementary schools located in two areas: West of Gaza and East of Gaza. Gaza directorate includes seventy-five governmental elementary schools, thirty-seven in the West of Gaza and thirty-eight in the East of Gaza. This study used the stratified systematic random sampling technique to select a representative quantitative sample of teachers from both these areas. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), stratified sampling technique involves the blend of randomization and categorization so that it can help in getting a sample representative of the whole population. Based on this definition, twenty-five schools (twelve in the West and thirteen in the East) were selected from all governmental elementary schools in Gaza. All the teachers (seventy male and female) working in the twenty-five schools responded to the study questionnaire.

For the in-depth data about the Palestinian EFL attitudes towards the materials used, another five separate gender schools were selected based on the areas their students belonged to, i.e., East of Gaza and West of Gaza; and the gender attending them, i.e., male and female schools. A total of twelve teachers working in those five schools were invited to participate in this study: six female and male teachers from the East and another six female and male teachers from the West. The teaching experience of those twelve teachers ranged from two to thirteen years with an average of five years.

Instruments

A self-developed Questionnaire

Based on some relevant previous studies (e.g., Hammad, 2012; Henrique, 2009; Miekley, 2005), a 28-item questionnaire was designed. It was made up of four categories: Content, Vocabulary and Structures, Exercises and Questions, and Teacher's Guide or Teaching Procedures. The items required multiple-choice answers with a five-point Likert scale: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3= uncertain, 4=disagree, and 5=strongly disagree. Verifying the content and face validity of the questionnaire, the internal consistency reliability was achieved through using Cronbach Alpha. According to Johnson and Christensen (2012), Cronbach Alpha is used for measuring reliability, and an internal consistency of 0.70 or above is required. The alpha coefficient for the overall questionnaire (28 items) was at 0.960, which is considered a high level of reliability. Cronbach Alpha was also run for the categories of the questionnaire: the alpha coefficients were at 0.902 for Content (8 items), 0.819 for Vocabulary and Structures (8 items), 0.808 for Exercises and Questions (8 items), and 0.776 for Teacher's Guide (4 items). Table 1 shows the alpha coefficients of the questionnaire categories.

Table 1. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the questionnaire

Category	Number of Items	Alpha Cronbach
Content	8	0.902
Vocabulary & Structures	8	0.819
Exercises &Questions	8	0.808
Teacher's guide	4	0.776
Total	**28**	**0.960**

A semi-structured interview

To complement the data gathered by the questionnaire, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006), semi-structured interviews assist in collecting in-depth data through allowing the researcher to probe beyond the interview questions. The semi-structured interviews in this study were face-to-face sessions with five groups of teachers. The questions were developed in consideration to some questions used in previous studies (e.g., Hammad, 2012; Henrique, 2009; Miekley, 2005). Each interview lasted thirty minutes and was audio-recorded for transcription. Interview questions are given below:

1. What good and weak points do you find in the English textbooks used in the first three grades of elementary school?
2. What do you think about the content of the English textbooks? Are the subject matters of the English textbooks presented in a logical, organized manner; is it

relevant to students' culture, students' grade, students' interests, and target culture?

3. What do you think about the vocabulary and structures included in the English textbooks? Are they presented at an appropriate rate so that the texts are understandable and students are able to retain new vocabulary? Are they easy to pronounce? Are structures easy to use? etc.
4. What do you think about the exercises and activities included in the English textbooks? Do they promote higher abilities? Are they relevant to students' achievement level? etc.
5. What do you think about the pictures of the English textbooks? Are they appealing? If yes, how?
6. How do you feel towards the English textbooks you teach?
7. To what extent do your students understand the English textbooks and answer their questions? Do they encounter problems in English classes? Give examples for such problems.
8. How is your students' achievement level in English language? If it's low, why?

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The study took place in Gaza in the first semester of the school year 2012-2013, and the quantitative data were collected in September. After obtaining the consent from the Palestinian Ministry of Education, the researcher contacted all schools principals and agreed with them on a suitable schedule for administering the instruments. First, the questionnaire was administered to seventy male and female teachers working in the twenty-five schools selected from all Gaza governmental elementary schools within twenty working days. The questionnaire copies were given to the participants, who were assured of complete confidentiality of their answers. Administering the questionnaire took approximately twenty minutes.

After administering the questionnaire, the researcher started gathering in-depth data about the teachers' attitudes towards the textbooks used in the first three grades of elementary school. From the seventy male and female schools administering the study questionnaire a total of twelve teachers were invited to participate in this study. As pointed out earlier, the researcher agreed with the schools' principals on a suitable schedule for conducting the study. The twelve teachers were interviewed and audio-taped in five focus groups. The twelve interviewees were informed that their participation was voluntarily and identities would be kept confidential. The participants were encouraged to express their opinions freely. The researcher conducted each interview in the psychologist's room in every school, and allowed the participants to use their mother tongue (Arabic) while talking.

The questionnaires data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Means, standard deviations, and percentages were calculated to identify the participants' attitudes towards the textbooks employed.

For analyzing the qualitative data, the interviews were fully transcribed in Arabic verbatim, translated into English, and reviewed by the participants. Then, the transcribed data were coded and organized into a number of categories (content,

vocabulary and structures, pictures, exercises and questions, and Teacher's Guide). For achieving data credibility, another researcher reviewed and coded the transcribed material, and the two researchers agreed with each other on 88% of the coded data. Additionally, the researcher compared the data obtained by the questionnaire and that of the semi-structured interviews.

Results

In an effort to examine the teachers' attitudes toward the different aspects of the English materials used at the first three grades of elementary school in Gaza, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were utilized in the present study. Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the mean scores and percentages of the questionnaire categories and items. Attitudes were determined based on the degree of agreement of each participant on each statement. Additionally, the study used Masri's rubrics (2003) to determine participants' attitudes towards the textbooks. Following is the rubric put by Masri:

- Very high: 80% and over
- High: 70%-79.9%
- Moderate: 60%-69.9%
- Low: 50%-59.9%
- Very low: less than 50%

Mean scores, standard deviations, and percentages of all the questionnaire categories are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and percentages of the participants' responses on the questionnaire

Category	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
Content	3.86	0.47	77.3
Vocabulary and Structures	3.76	0.61	75.3
Exercises and Questions	3.74	0.58	74.8
Teacher's Guide	3.81	0.87	76.3
Total	**3.79**	**0.46**	**75.9**

As table 2 shows, the overall frequency of teachers' responses to the questionnaire items was 75.9 %. The participants showed positive attitudes towards the different aspects of the English materials used at the first three grades of elementary school in Gaza. The highest score was related to 'Content', 77.3% (high), followed by 'Teacher's Guide', 76.3% (high); 'Vocabulary and Structures', 75.3% (high); and finally 'Exercises and Questions', 74.8% (high). Table 3 shows a detailed description of the questionnaire and interview results data.

Content

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and percentages of the 'Content' items in the questionnaire

No.	Content	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
1	The topics of the textbooks are presented in a logically-organized manner.	3.96	0.73	79.1
2	The content serves as a window into learning about the target language culture.	3.71	0.93	74.3
3	The content is appropriate to students' English competence levels.	3.67	0.91	73.4
4	The content is relevant to students' needs and interests.	3.84	0.88	76.9
5	The content is relevant to students' culture.	3.91	0.76	78.3
6	I enjoy teaching the textbooks.	4.14	0.82	82.9
7	I'm satisfied with the variety of the topics of the textbooks.	4.03	0.70	80.6
8	I don't find any problems in getting my students interested in the topics of the textbooks.	3.63	0.98	72.6
Total		**3.86**	**0.47**	**77.3**

Table 3 shows that the percentage scores of all items except item 6 ('I enjoy teaching the textbooks') and 7 ('I'm satisfied with the variety of the topics of the textbooks') fell into the high level. These data were further supported by the interview analyses, which revealed that all the teachers were satisfied with the textbooks' topics. From their perspectives, such textbooks cover a variety of topics relevant to pupils' interests and needs.

Participant T. 12 (a female teacher with six years of experience):

In comparison with the textbooks first implemented in 2000-2001, the newly used ones are very interesting. The textbooks cover a variety of topics which are so fantastic, and related to pupils' daily life, i.e. food, drinks, daily routine, animals, family, clinic, TV children programs, etc. Moreover, the names mentioned in the lessons are picked from both pupils' culture and English culture, i.e. Tala, Jameela, James, etc. In fact, I easily get my pupils involved in the English classes. That is why I enjoy teaching the textbooks.

However, some teachers (seven out of twelve) complained that the new English language curricula focused on listening at the expense of other language skills, specifically writing.

Participant T. 3 (a female teacher with ten years of experience):

Unlike the old textbooks, the newly implemented textbooks do not focus on the four skills of English language, specially writing. In addition to the listening activities included in the first grade textbook, the pupils are required to only read the English letters rather than to write them. My supervisor told me that it is not necessary for children to practice writing at this stage, the thing which I am not convinced of. I think that teaching pupils how to write English letters is necessary at the first grade. That is why I devote all PE (Physical Education) classes for helping pupils write some English letters.

Unlike the opinion mentioned above, many interviewees (five out of twelve) believed that beginning with teaching the skills of listening and speaking could facilitate the teaching of reading and writing in later stages. In their view, developing listening and speaking first can be the foundation on which to build reading and writing. According to Saraswathi (2004), the communicative approach implies that all language skills should be equally emphasized in teaching a foreign language, whereas the audio-lingual method focuses only on spoken language in the early stages of learning. In the researcher's opinion, only in the case of having adequate class time (six or seven periods a week) for teaching English, giving attention to all language skills in the early stages of learning will be more effective than focusing only on listening and speaking.

Vocabulary & Structure

Table 4 reflects the views of EFL Palestinian teachers on the key vocabulary words included in the English materials used at the first three grades of primary school in Gaza.

Table 4. Means, standard deviations and percentages of the 'vocabulary and Structures' items in the questionnaire

No.	Vocabulary and Structures	Mean	Standard deviation	Relative Weight %
1	The new vocabulary and structures are presented at an appropriate rate.	3.94	0.88	78.9
2	The new vocabulary and structures are repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meanings and uses.	4.17	0.66	83.4
3	The vocabulary is related to real life English situations.	4.01	0.67	80.3
4	I'm satisfied with the vocabulary and structures included in the textbooks.	3.87	0.98	77.4
5	I feel comfortable with the order of the vocabulary in the textbooks.	3.89	0.97	77.7

No.	Vocabulary and Structures	Mean	Standard deviation	Relative Weight %
6	I do like the types of the vocabulary and structures included in the textbook.	3.90	0.80	78.0
7	I can easily get my students able to use the new vocabulary and key structures.	3.29	1.09	65.7
8	I don't encounter problems when presenting the new vocabulary and key structures.	3.21	1.10	64.3
Total		**3.76**	**0.61**	**75.3**

As shown in table 4, the percentage scores which fell into the moderate level are of item 7 ('I can easily get my students able to use the new vocabulary and key structures') and 8 ('I don't encounter problems when presenting the new vocabulary and key structures'), whereas the percentage scores which fell into the very high level are of item 2 ('The new vocabulary and structures are repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meanings and uses)' and 3 ('The vocabulary is related to real life English situations.) These scores indicate that although the teachers had positive views on the appropriateness of the vocabulary they taught, they encountered many difficulties when teaching them. The interviews revealed that such difficulties stemmed from the large number of key words and the pronunciation practice in the units. The following excerpts illustrate those problems:

Participant T. 8 (a female teacher with five years of experience):

The units have long difficult vocabulary, i.e., playground, church, mosque, pineapple, roundabout, climbing frame, tracksuit etc. I can still remember that we learnt such words when we were at the secondary stage. How can EFL children pronounce and learn such words? Moreover, pupils have to learn a large number of vocabulary words within only one class, for example, first graders should learn the words: home, table, television, sofa, and chair in the first period and the words: in, on, under, in the second period? I don't have adequate time for teaching all these vocabulary words effectively.

Participant T. 8 (a female teacher with seven years of experience):

The biggest problem I encounter in teaching English to second and third graders is connected with the key vocabulary words that can not be successfully taught within the time devoted. Each lesson contains eight or nine key words related to different topics, for example, I can remember a lesson whose key words are related to four topics, i.e. clothing, parts of body, family, and colors. I tried to teach this lesson through three class periods, but the learners could not acquire the words successfully. I wish I could lessen the number of the vocabulary words included in the textbooks.

Participant T. 11 (a female teacher with two years of experience):

Though the three textbooks include active vocabulary, some key vocabulary are difficult to pronounce, i.e. excuse me, watched, and the words having the same pronunciation with different spellings, i.e. flour and flower. Additionally, the pupils can not pronounce some English consonants and vowels correctly, i.e., p, th, Sometimes pupils are also required to recognize two sounds in one unit, i.e., p and b, t and d. I can clearly notice that the pupils find difficulty in mastering such sounds. To overcome this problem, I usually repeat the pronunciation of every word several times, then I conduct a lot of drills through which pupils can practice the pronunciation as well as the meanings of the words.

It seems apparent that having extra time can help most teachers conduct mechanical drills, meaningful drills, and communicative drills (repetitions, controlled role-plays, and short free dialogues), assisting in overcoming the problem related to the large number of unfamiliar words and the pronunciation practice in the units.

Pictures

The interview data showed that all participants had a positive attitude towards textbooks' pictures used for presenting key items, revising previously learnt words, and discussing the text ideas.

Exercises & Questions

Table 6. Means, standard deviations and percentages of the 'exercises and Questions' items in the teacher's questionnaire

No.	Exercises and Questions	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
1	The exercises of the textbook reinforce students' vocabulary learning and use.	4.00	0.87	80.0
2	The exercises of the textbook help develop students' meaningful communication by referring to realistic situations.	3.83	0.88	76.6
3	The exercises of the textbook promote students' critical thinking.	3.57	0.81	71.4
4	The instructions in the textbook are clear.	3.93	0.82	78.6
5	I feel comfortable when my students answer the questions and exercises.	4.09	0.83	81.7
6	I feel comfortable with the variety of the questions and exercises in the textbooks.	3.87	0.76	77.4
7	My students can answer the questions and exercises easily.	3.30	1.01	66.0
8	I have the adequate time to answer the questions and exercises with my students.	3.34	1.26	66.9
Total		**3.74**	**0.58**	**74.8**

Table 6 shows that item 5 ('I feel comfortable when my students answer the questions and exercises') fell into the very high level; item 6 ('I feel comfortable with the variety of the questions and exercises in the textbook') into the high level; and item 8 ('I have the adequate time to answer the questions and exercises with my students') and 7 (My students can answer the questions and exercises easily') into the moderate level. A close look at the percentage scores of those items indicates that although the participants' views on the exercises and questions were positive, they seemed to encounter some problems related to the time devoted to teaching such activities. The following excerpt summarizes such problems.

Participant T. 4 (a female teacher with two years of experience):

The exercises are relevant to pupils' competence level, and encourage the communicative use of language, i.e., rehearsing a dialogue between a patient and a doctor. In addition, they reinforce students' vocabulary learning and use. The only problem I have with exercises is that I don not have an adequate time to practice role plays and dialogues with students. Each classroom consists of at least forty pupils, and we have only three periods a week for teaching English language. How can I enable pupils to learn English communicatively in such conditions. If I were one of the textbooks designers, I will devote 5 periods (instead of three periods) a weak for teaching such curricula.

Furthermore, a few teachers complained that the exercises did not promote students' higher abilities of thinking:

Participant T. 12 (a female teacher with six years of experience):

Though most questions and exercises promote daily language use, they do not encourage higher faculties of thinking. The pupils should answer questions whose answers are explicitly stated in texts.

Teacher's Guide

Table 7. Means, standard deviations and percentages of the teachers' responses on the 'The Teacher's Guide' items in the questionnaire

No.	Teacher's Guide	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
1	The teacher's guide provides me with the means of involving students in communicative meaningful learning situations.	3.97	1.08	79.4
2	The instruction procedures included in the teacher's guide activate students in the English reading classes.	3.76	0.94	75.1
3	I feel comfortable when using the procedures of the teacher's guide	3.86	0.95	77.1
4	I keep following the teaching procedures of the teacher's guide in my English language	3.67	0.93	73.4

No.	Teacher's Guide	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
	classes.			
Total		**3.81**	**0.87**	**76.3**

Table 7 shows that the percentage scores of all items are of a high level. The data do not seem to be very similar to the interview data, which revealed that most teachers interviewed complained that while teaching English lessons they were unable to follow all the procedures put in Teacher's Guide due to the time needed for utilizing them.

Participant T. 9 (a female teacher with four years of experience):

Sometimes I get the benefit when reading the procedures given in Teacher's Guide; It provides me with the way I should follow in teaching role plays and songs. In other times, I find that the procedures put for teaching listening and speaking are not implementable in our English classes. Implementing such procedures require having five periods instead of three periods per week. For example, due to shortage of time, I allow students to listen to the taped material only once instead of three times.

Participant T. 3 (a female teacher with ten years of experience):

In fact, most procedures given in teacher's guide are not implementable. According to the teachers' guide , the key vocabulary words should be taught within only fifteen minutes. I do not think that this time is enough for teaching the key vocabulary words which are large in number. Sometimes I give only a class for teaching a lesson that is planned to be taught within two classes in the Teacher's Guide. Moreover, pupils can not practice listening due to the absence of electricity though most activities in the three textbooks are listening activities, and pupils are required to practice listening in most English class periods.

In fact, it was revealed that all teachers had problems with the time devoted to teaching the English language materials. The next excerpt may clearly show the negative consequences resulting from this problem.

Participant T. 7 (a female teacher with five years of experience):

The biggest difficulty I encounter in teaching the Palestinian textbooks is that the time allocated for teaching the textbooks is not enough. I can hardly finish teaching lessons within the time devoted. What actually happened is that I do not give my pupils the opportunity to practice all listening tasks, conversations, and role plays included in the textbook, and therefore they loose the interest in the English classes, the thing which precludes them from using language effectively.

Discussion and Implications

This study has indicated that Palestinian EFL teachers had positive attitudes towards the English materials used at the first three grades of elementary school in that the topics in such materials were perceived by the teachers to be relevant to pupils' cultural background, interests, and needs. The result obtained by the present study is similar

with those of Masri (2003) and Fattash (2010), which showed that the topics in *English for Palestine* were perceived by the teachers to be relevant to pupils' cultural background. However, it was concluded in this study that the teachers had some problems with *English for Palestine 1*, *2*, and *3*.

One problem expressed by some participants in this study was that the new English language curricula focused on listening at the expense of other language skills, specifically writing. According to Saraswathi (2004), the communicative approach implies that all language skills should be equally emphasized in teaching a foreign language, whereas the audio-lingual method focuses only on spoken language in the early stages of learning. In the researcher's opinion, only if we have adequate class time (six or seven periods a week) for teaching English and pay attention to all language skills in the early stages of learning we can be effective.

Related to the results was that most teachers interviewed complained that while teaching English lessons they were unable to follow all the procedures put in Teacher's Guide due to the time needed for utilizing them and to its irrelevance to the local educational conditions Gaza teachers and students lived under (large numbers of pupils in classrooms, lack of audio-visual materials, pupils' low achievement level in English language, and the small number of English class periods). In this context, Nation (2006) provides that the conditions under which the learning takes place can affect the ease and difficulty of language learning. Furthermore, for Widdowson (2012), if the teachers raise critical questions about theoretical approaches, they can make their practical activities relevant to the local conditions. It is apparent that Gaza governmental school teachers tried to raise critical views on the theoretical assumptions in the three Teacher's Guides and adapt them to the local circumstances. Such critical views imply that it is essential for EFL textbooks authors in Palestine to consider the educational conditions in Gaza prior to designing EFL materials so as to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Ortega (2006) also points to the necessity of connection between theory and practice in syllabus design.

The study also revealed that most participants had problems with the time devoted to practicing the textbooks activities, the large number of key words, and the pronunciation practice included. These things imply a dire need for modifying the number of class periods allocated for teaching *English for Palestine* series. The results reached by the present study are in line with the findings of Mahmoud (2007) and Ali (2010) that showed that the number of the class periods devoted to teaching *English for Palestine* was perceived by teachers to be inadequate. Thus, the study recommends that the Palestinian Ministry of Education should assign extra class time for teaching the different aspects of the English materials used in the three grades of elementary school.

Another important finding is that all the participants had problems with the vocabulary words included in *English for Palestine* series. All of the teachers reported that most students had problems with learning EFL vocabulary words because they could not acquire the words easily. For assisting EFL learners to learn key vocabulary words effectively and appropriately, Ghazal (2007) argued that learners should be trained to use different vocabulary learning strategies including decontextualized and contextualized skills. Learners should be trained to use language items through context

and semi-real situations (role-play, dialogues, games, and simulations). In fact, using such vocabulary learning strategies can facilitate learning unfamiliar vocabulary items. In order for Palestinian EFL teachers and learners to practice a variety of vocabulary teaching and learning strategies (such as decontextualization and contextualization), the Palestinian Ministry of Education needs to devote considerable time to EFL instruction in Gaza governmental elementary schools. Related to this point, Chou (2011) confirmed that EFL teachers should spend time in class conducting the tasks that can improve pupils' vocabulary knowledge. Nation (2001) also views that adequate time should be spent on teaching and learning vocabulary, specifically high frequency vocabulary.

As for the number of key words that should be included in EFL elementary school curricula, Nation (2006) views that in the early stages of language learning, the learning burden of vocabulary words (word form, meaning, and use) tends to be high because the learner is likely to be unfamiliar with the system of the new language. It was revealed that most participants in the present study complained about the huge numbers of key vocabulary words included in the textbooks. Thus, it is important for elementary school EFL textbooks designers in Palestine to consider the number of key language vocabulary that should be included in the textbooks and to focus only on small number of vocabulary words in this early stage of learning.

Another important point related to the vocabulary items that elementary school EFL materials should contain is that the words should be easy to pronounce. Nation (2006) maintains that words that are easy to pronounce are easy to acquire, and the words introduced in early stages of an English course should be easy to pronounce so that small amount of pronunciation practice can help young learners easily learn unfamiliar vocabulary. The present study reported that Palestinian EFL teachers complained that the vocabulary items included in *English for Palestine* series are long and difficult. Based on Nation's viewpoint, elementary school EFL textbook writers in Palestine are recommended to avoid words difficult to pronounce (i.e., homophones, homographs, and multi-syllable words) while designing EFL materials. In doing so, Palestinian EFL young learners can learn unfamiliar words more easily and quickly.

About the Author

Enas Hammad has been teaching ELT courses at Al-Aqsa University in Palestine since 2007, and she also taught linguistics in Al-Quds Open university for three years. Additionally, from 1998- 2007, she worked as a teacher of English at Gaza governmental and United Nations Relief and Work Agency schools. She is the winner of the 2010 Sheikh Nahayan Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship granted by the International Research Foundation for English Language Education (TIRF). Her research interests include EFL language reading and writing, EFL materials evaluation, and language assessment.

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