# An Investigation of English Teaching Methods and Practices in The English as a Foreign Language Classroom in Gaza Strip

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**Abstract:** This paper investigated the English language methods and practices in the classroom in relation to the Ministry of Education's goal of developing communicative English skills in the Palestinian secondary school learners. The results of the study show that the current practices and methods employed by the EFL teachers do not serve the requirements of the Ministry's goal. The study concludes that there is not equal focus on the four language skills, nor is there a focus on a related teaching method or approach, or a testing mechanism that serves the goal of improving the communicative English skills of EFL learners. Based on the results of this study the researcher proposes recommendations such as carrying out of further studies to evaluate the EFL teachers' perceptions of communicative teaching methods, the attitudes of the EFL learners towards learning English as a foreign language, and the effects of the in-service training workshops that should be conducted to improve the professional skills of EFL teachers.

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**الملخص**: اجريت هذه الدراسة لكشف مـــدى فاعلية الوسائل وطرق التدريس المـــستخدمة ومدى ملائمتها لتحقيق هدف وزارة التربيـــة والتعليم في تطوير مهارات الاتصال باللغـــة الانجليزية لدى طلبة المدارس الثانوية. وقـــد بينت نتائج الدراسة أن المتبع داخل صـــفوف اللغة الانجليزية لا يساعد على تحقيق هـــدف وزارة التربية والتعليم. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن أسباب ذلك تعود إلى عدم التركيـــز علـــى المهارات اللغوية الأربع بالتـــساوي، وكـــذلك عدم اختيار طرق التدريس والوسائل وطـــرق الاختبارات المناسبة لتحقيـــق هـــدف وزارة التربية والتعليم في تطوير مهارات الاتـــصال باللغة الانجليزية. وبناء على نتائج الدراسة تم تقديم عدد من التوصيات، منها اجراء بعـــض الدراسات لقياس مدى فهم المدرسين لطـــرق التدريس الإتصالية، وقياس اتجاهات الطلاب نحو اللغة الانجليزية التي يتعلمونها، وقيـــاس التغيرات التي قد تطرأ فـــي اداء المدرســـين نتيجة لورشات التدريب التي ينبغي أن تقـــدم لهم أثناء الخدمة لتحسين مهاراتهم المهنية.

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## Introduction

English is taught as a foreign language in the secondary schools of Gaza Strip, Palestine. A major goal defined by the Ministry of Education is that the EFL curriculum stresses "the integral role of foreign language education in developing the Palestinian students in all domains—psychomotor, social, moral, cognitive, and effective" (Ministry of Education (MoE) 1999, P.13). This general goal is divided into 25 sub goals. To the end, English is taught from grades five to twelve. In the secondary schools whose teachers were the focus of this study, English is studied for three years, and since they have taken all the English language courses, yet EFL research suggest that secondary school graduates in the Gaza Strip show serious weakness with regards to English competence (Thabit 2007). There appears to be a gap between the official goal for English instruction and the pupil's overall performance in English. And yet, according to the MOE "developing Palestinian students' competence in English and equipping them with the ability to use it both accurately and appropriately serves the Palestinian national interests by increasing the language resources available as Palestine competes in the global economy." (MoE 1999, p. 8). In the light of this expressed need, this study investigated current practices in the EFL program in the secondary schools of Gaza Strip and provides evidence to the Ministry of Education to strengthen the EFL program in its secondary schools.

## The Current Context of English in the Gaza Strip:

The social and economic evolution towards a global economy requires that English be taught extensively in the secondary level. This policy is mostly due to Palestinian Authority's need to establish diplomatic ties with the English speaking countries, and to successfully expand the commercial, scientific, and technological interests of an evolving nation. English language has always been viewed by many people as the primary and/or universal language of commerce, science and technology. The growing size of import and export market in Palestine has increased the need to continue the expansion of current trading policies with a growing number of English-speaking nations, companies and institutions around the

world.

Due to its importance as a means of international communication, English instruction has become a priority in the educational system of Palestine. During the last decade, a significant educational reform has taken place in the instruction of English as a foreign language since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. The end result has generated a serious governmental syllabus for English.

By examining the Ministry's plan for the English language teaching program in the secondary schools of Palestine, one finds that the Ministry of Education adopts equal emphasis on the development of the four basic language skills. So far research reveals that language skills nourish one another and ought to be developed side by side (Jacobs & Schumann, 1992;Rigg 1989; Ausubel 1968).

The EFL goal defined by the Ministry of Education emphasizes the necessity " …to enable students to use English, orally and in writing, to communicate freely and effectively in different situations and settings" (Ministry of Education 1999, p. 13). It is noticed here that the goal of EFL curriculum in Palestine consists of activities to enable the students to listen, speak, read, and write the language correctly, specifically it aims to "develop communicative skills in order to acquire, record, and use information from aural and written texts using traditional and non-traditional sources -- and to develop understanding and appreciation of cultures where English is used" (Ministry of Education 1999, p. 13). The Ministry's goal appears to be unreachable due to a variety of factors: First, the political situation and the state of unrest has decreased the number of English language native speakers who used to live in the Gaza Strip, lead to a disturbed school program which negatively affects, among other subjects, the English language program. Second, most parents in the Gaza Strip do not speak English and thus cannot give feedback relevant to the performance nor can they reinforce this element of their children's schooling. It is widely accepted that "the role of parents' language is undeniably crucial" in the development of the child's level of proficiency and language competence (Brown 1980, p. 317). Because the language is rarely used outside the school, Gaza Strip needs an effective English instruction system that takes into account the current political situation and its socioeconomic needs.

This study investigated the current curriculum of English as a

foreign language in the secondary schools of the Gaza Strip. To place this study in context, a review was conducted with reference to the following key areas. First, English curricula in Palestine were examined in terms of their goals. Second, instructional methods which are based on theories that have been proved inappropriate and which are frequently utilized in the English program in the Gaza Strip.

According to Doll (1989, p. 8), "the curriculum of a school is the formal and informal content and process by which learners gain knowledge and understanding, develop skills, and alter attitudes, appreciation, and value under the auspices of that school." In Palestine, school curricula are defined according to the political leadership's philosophy of education, the society, the student's needs, and the subject area requirements of each grade level.

Along with the variety of socioeconomic needs in the Palestinian society, many educators perceive the need for effective communication as an essential sociopolitical requirement. The ability to successfully communicate in a foreign language allows Palestine, as a developing nation to effectively utilize a variety of technological and scientific skills. As a result of this philosophy, the Ministry of Education in Palestine believes that content and process of school curricula ought to empower the learners with practical knowledge and skills to meet the future needs of the twenty-first century.

Regarding the English curriculum in Palestine, one needs to take into consideration the unrest and the destabilized reality that the Palestinian society is currently facing when examining the practicality of its program of instruction. The Ministry of Education in Palestine believes that for the English curriculum goals to focus on "communicative competence, cultural awareness, study and thinking skills, and values" (MoE 1999, p. 15), the curriculum needs to promote communication in English and make the learners aware of the cultures of the English –speaking countries. At the surface level, the English curriculum goals appear to be plausible, but the question that poses itself here is that is it possible that this goal can be achieved when English is being taught as a foreign language and not as a second language? (Gee et al, 2004). To make this clearer, one needs to present to the reader the difference between the two in order to fully appreciate the difficulties related to instruction of English in Palestine.

The difference between ESL (English as a Second Language) and

EFL (English as a foreign Language) rests in he extent to which English is used inside and outside the classroom as is suggested by Ovando and Coller (1985):

> "EFL instruction is similar to ESL instruction. The main distinction between the two is in how much English the students are exposed to outside of their English class. EFL is taught in countries in which English is not generally spoken among its population, nor is it a part of the regular instruction of their subject areas" (p. 45).

In this case, English becomes an isolated subject matter, and is perceived as an irrelevant exercise within the context of schooling (Stern, 1992; Poole2003; Gee, James, Paul 2004). In EFL classes, the teacher is the main and possibly the only English Language model. In contrast, in an ESL context learners generally acquire large portions of their second language outside the ESL classroom, thus accelerating their second language proficiency and competency.

Like all countries of the Third World who have not been British colonies, Palestine has chosen to teach English as a foreign language (EFL), and has put it as one of its objectives to establish a successful nation-wide EFL program through its school system.

As an English Language teacher in Palestine for over 29 years, the researcher admits that it is a fact that English in Palestine is generally used more often in written than in spoken communication and more often in receptive than productive language behavior. In other words, English is used more in reading books, newspapers, and magazines than in interacting in oral communication. Palestinians listen more to English materials than they use the language to write. Thus, educated Palestinians use more of their reading and listening in English than their writing and speaking ones. In this case, educated Palestinians do not use English in a free (informal) communication mode; therefore, it is worth examining the English content in the curriculum.

Due to the increasing importance of English language, Palestine has decided to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) for the following economic reasons: 1) the Western English speaking countries have more economic power than other western countries,

and 2) English has become the dominant language of trade around the world.

To fully comprehend the implications and significance of EFL program in Palestine, one needs to establish a clear understanding of the curricular goals of EFL instruction. According to Strevens (1987), EFL goals aim at enabling the learners to acquire English skills which make it possible for them to secure a job that requires English communicative skills. Expected goals of EFL program are to encourage the learners to develop their ability to use the foreign language at the native speaker's level.

Since the general format of the EFL program is structural and the recommended methodological interpretation is functional and communicative, the result is that high school students, having studied English for at least six years, should be able to develop a high level of confidence and performance in English. However, this is not reflected in reality; for the learners level of performance is not that good. Since the EFL program in Palestine aims first at enabling the learners to understand, speak, read, and write correctly the language and second, for making them aware of the culture of the English-speaking countries (MoE, 1999, p.15), and since the aims of the curriculum are to "develop skills in exchanging and conveying ideas – develop social interaction and communication skills – and refine the ability to use the language appropriately" (MoE. 1999, p. 36), the possibility of achieving such aims seem too remote where there is a lack of teaching materials and equipment as well as a lack of qualified and trained teachers. Hamoudeh (1999) argues that the competencies and performance of Palestinian English teacher in Gaza Governorates is influenced by "the lack of awareness and communications in the current age of knowledge and technology revolution", (p. 2). Hamoudeh (1999) finds out that "Gaza English language teachers master five competencies out of a total of (38) competencies" (p. 33). As for Palestinian EFL learners at Gaza schools, Thabet, (2007) found out that "students have very limited chances to use and practice the language especially in crowded classes where very good students dominate and the majority withdraw or just watch" (p: 9). In another situation and in his study of the evaluation teachers' performance in teaching English communicatively in preparatory stage in Jabalia area, Almashharawi (2006) recorded his suggestions and recommendations

for teachers of English, curriculum designers and supervisors and Ministry of Education to develop teaching speaking skills communicatively. This would help in reducing the students' reticence and anxiety when they attempt to speak English. Similarly, Hammad's (2004) findings in his study to measure the effect of role play strategy on enhancing the eighth graders' achievement in English Language in Gaza Strip showed that in order for students to have more confidence in Language performance, it was recommended that the teachers of English should use communicative techniques as well as improvisational strategies in teaching English. He suggested that EFL teachers try to teach vocabulary and structure through interactional situations. Anxiety and reticence among Palestinian EFL students inspired a number researchers to find ways to improve communicative skills among them, and in this context, Al-Ghuneime (2003) suggested that video programs be used to promote the communicative skills of the students through exposing them to actual functional use of language. Likewise, Al-Ghussain (2001) suggested that teachers use effective techniques for teaching oral communication.

Before investigating how educational theories and instructional strategies are applied to English instruction in Gaza Strip, it is helpful to examine first how those theories, methods or approaches are applied for effective communication in English. Communicative language as a teaching approach is used to promote communication in English. This approach developed from the notional- functional syllabuses and is used on "communicative language use" (Omaggio-Hadely 1993, p.104) It is characterized by the following features:
1. Meaning is paramount.
2. Dialogues, if used, center around communicative functions and are not normally memorized.
3. Contextualization is a basic premise.
4. Language learning is learning to communicate.
5. Effective communication is sought.
6. Drilling may occur, but peripherally.
7. Comprehensive pronunciation is sought.
8. Any device which helps the learners is accepted –vary according to their age, interest, etc.
9. Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very

beginning.

10. Judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible.
11. Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.
12. Reading and writing can start from the first day, if desired.
13. The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate.
14. Communicative competence is the desired goal.
15. Linguistic variation is central concept in materials and methods.
16. Sequencing is determined by any consideration of context function, or meaning which maintains interest.
17. Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language.
18. Language is created by the individual often through trial and error.
19. Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal: accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context.
20. Students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writings.
21. the teacher cannot know exactly what language the students will use.
22. Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language (Finocchario and Brumfit, 1983, p.91- 3).

This list demonstrates the comprehensive nature of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA)and the fact that it is the result of some combined learning theories. That is why it " does not claim a particular theory of learning as its basis" (Omaggio –Hadley, 1993, p.104). The approach thus fulfills the principles of communication, task and meaningfulness which must characterize language instruction (Omaggio-Hadley, 1993). It must be taken into consideration when dealing with such a topic that the CLTA is based on two groups of language teaching theories: Rationalism and Humanism (Stevick, 1990).

According to the Rationalist approach to language learning, a foreign language is acquired based on the learners' prior knowledge and knowledge of the world. That is why "meaning is paramount" and

"judicious use of the native language is accepted where feasible" (Omaggio-Hadley, 1993). In this respect, Ausubel (1968) states that "it is both unrealistic and inefficient for the learner to try to circumvent the mediating role of his native language when learning a second language" (p. 74). Ausubel also states that "meaningful learning is an even more important consideration in teaching adults that in teaching children" (p. 75). Furthermore, the rationalist perspective emphasizes that the target linguistic system will be learnt best through the process of struggling to communicate and that language is created by the individual often trial and error (Stevick, 1990).

The humanistic approach on the other hand, proposes that language acquisition takes place by considering the 'whole person' in the process. The learning process needs to be learner – centered. This is the driving concept in humanistic psychology as advocated by Rogers (1961). This scholar feels that "if the context of learning is properly created, then human beings will, in fact, learn everything they need to" (Brown, 1980, p.77). Motivation among the learners is another important aspect of humanism. Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language (Gagne et al, 1993).

Individually, "students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writing." this specific feature of the strategy draws from the authentic principle of being which, "… involves (1) interacting with others directly rather than through a mediating persona and (2) acting and living according to one's own directives rather than the expectations of others" (Geller quoting Rogers, 1982, p.58). In this respect it appears appropriate to investigate how communicative language teaching is applied in Gaza Strip.

Since many teachers in Gaza strip are using the Grammar-Translation Method, and some others using the Audio-lingual method and for the purpose of this study, the author has chosen to examine both methods.

The Grammar Translation Method:

The grammar translation method focuses on learning grammatical rules and vocabulary which are used to translate from the target

language into the native language of the learner. Conjugating the verbs and analyzing the inflections are all important in the process of learning a second or foreign language in this method (Brown 1994).

The grammar translation method, according to Richars & Rogers (1986 p. 5) "has been and still is extensively used, even though, it is a method for which there is no theory. There is no literature that offers a rationale or justification for it or that attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory". In his description of the method, Omaggio – Hadley (1993, p. 91) states that "the lack of orientation toward proficiency goals is the most obvious drawback of this method". In this case, the lack of age appropriate, subject specific and content oriented goals is found to be weakness within this model of instruction. According to this, this method is not recommended to be used in any EFL instruction situation.

The Audio-lingual Method

The Audio-lingual method was developed in the USA after the Second World War, and it has the following features:
1.  Attends to structure and form more than meaning.
2.  Demands memorization of structure-based dialogues.
3.  Language items are not necessarily contextualized.
4.  Language learning is learning structures, sounds and words.
5.  Mastery or "over – learning" is sought.
6.  Drilling is a central technique.
7.  Native speaker-like pronunciation is sought.
8.  Grammatical explanation is avoided.
9.  Communicative activities only come after a long process of rigid drills and exercises.
10. The use of the student's native language is forbidden.
11. Translation is forbidden at early levels.
12. Reading and writing are deferred till speech is mastered.
13. The target linguistic system will be learned through the overt teaching of the patterns of the system.
14. Linguistic competence is the desired goal.
15. Varieties of language are recognized but not emphasized.
16. The sequence of units is determined solely by principles of linguistic complexity.
17. The teacher controls the learners and prevents them from

doing anything that conflicts with the theory.

18. "Language is habit" so errors must be prevented at all costs.
19. Accuracy, in terms of formal correctedness, is a primary goal.
20. Students are expected to interact with the language system, embodied in machines or controlled materials.
21. the teacher is expected to specify the language that the students are to sue.
22. Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in the structure of the language. (Finocchario and Brumfit, 1983, p.91-3).

The advocates of this method believe that because all native languages are learned orally before reading ever occurs, second should be learned in the natural order: "listening, speaking, reading and writing." (Omaggio-Hadley 1993, p. 95). The Audio-lingual method, which was based on behaviorist psychology, stresses stimulus-response, or experience as the mechanism of learning a second language. Thus, pattern, drills, repetition, substitution of words, memorization of sentences, pronunciation and correct grammar constitute the main instructional activities in the classroom.

From a theoretical viewpoint, Ausubel (1986) states that features of the audio-lingual method "are psychologically incompatible with effective learning process in adults" (p. 73). Karshen and Terrel (1983) argue that the Audio-lingual method "cannot be expected to produce students able to communicate using the language they study" (p.13). Thus, it is clear that the Audio-lingual method was proven inappropriate in terms of promoting communicative skills among second or foreign language learners. (Brown 1994, Omaggio-Hadley 1993, and Karshen and Terrel 1983).

The major weakness of the Audio-lingual Method lies in its emphasis on habit formation as the way to learn a second or a foreign language; for language acquisition "is not a habit structure" (Chomsky, 1973, p. 13). In other words, Conklin & Lourie (1983) state that "language acquisition whether first or second, occurs not through imitation but through the learner's gradual creative construction of how a language operates, based on repeated exposure to it" (p. 237)

According to the researcher's experience as a teacher of Englsih in

the Gaza Strip for over **29** years, it appears from the behavior of the students that the Audio-Lingual Method is still used by some teachers in Gaza Strip. The reason that some teacher may utilize it is because it is easy to use in a classroom setting and effective for pronunciation, grammar acquisition, and vocabulary retention; however, as stated above, it does not promote communicative skills among the learners as required by the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MoE). Based on researcher's experience, one can safely say the majority of the Palestinian university students can rattle off grammar rules, but they have great difficulty in applying them. They fail to grasp the function and the appropriate contexts for employing the structures they have been taught. The reason could be due to teachers' utilization of inappropriate teaching methods as those discussed above.

Based on this review of related literature, this study will attempt to assess the extent to which the EFL instructional activities in the secondary schools in Gaza Strip meet the goals defined by the Ministry of Education. It will also examine the extent to which the content of the English language taught and the methods used to teach it are appropriate to the current economic and social needs of Palestine. However, to fully understand the implications and importance of this paper, it becomes necessary to examine the current EFL practices in Palestine.

The official status of the Palestinian EFL program, as expressed by the Ministry of Education, has consistently been the establishment of an instructional program that seeks to empower the students "to communicate with others skillfully, appropriately, and effectively. [and that] The challenge of contemporary education is to prepare all the students for life in the new world." (MoE, 1999, p. 7). Furthermore, the MoE has constantly stressed the statement that "in the present curriculum, communicative competence(CC) is the goal." (MoE, 1999, p. 15).

In order to ascertain that the EFL program is effectively implemented, the MoE has stipulated that " …FL learners need learning environments that provide demonstrations of the interdependence of listening, speaking, reading, and writing." (MoE, 1999, p. 9-10). Unfortunately, this teaching structure is a key component of the audio-lingual method, which has been found to be psychologically incompatible with the cognitive learning process of

learners, and hence inappropriate for foreign language instruction (Robinson, 2003; Wolfe, 2001; Sousa, 2001). To proceed through this sort of teaching structure as it appears consistently through the MoE's 'graded objectives', teachers are required to rigorously adhere to an instructional structure which is closely ineffective, unsuitable, and contradictory to the official goals of Palestine's EFL program.

The following section will focus on the examination and evaluation of the EFL curriculum practices in relation to the implementation of the MoE's education policies related to the instruction of English as a foreign language for the tenth grade classes. This class level is truly representative as it comprises all the secondary level students before they are distributed between the two main areas of specialization; Arts and Science.

## Research Questions

In this paper, the researcher first examined the consistency (or lack of it) between practices of teaching English in the secondary schools of Palestine and the EFL goal set by the MoE.

To address this issue, the following research questions were investigated:

RQ1. What types of English are being taught in the tenth grade of Gaza secondary schools and to what extent do they contribute to the MoE's goal of developing communicative language skills in English?

RQ2. Do the testing styles used in the tenth grade of Gaza secondary school classrooms match the MoE's goal of developing communicative language skills and cultural backgrounds?

RQ3. Do the teaching materials and methods used in the tenth grade of Gaza secondary classroom support the MoE's goal of acquiring communicative language skills with a supporting cultural background?

RQ4. How are the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills viewed by the EFL teachers with regard to their relative importance in helping the tenth grade of Gaza secondary school students to achieve the MoE's goal of developing communicative language skills?

## Significance of the study

The MoE 1999 states that there are "…several compelling reasons or the study of a second/foreign language, namely to improve employment opportunities, to learn to value other cultures, and to enhance metal capacity" (p. 7). The MoE 1999 concludes in setting the goals that "…developing Palestinian students' competence in English and equipping them with the ability to use it both accurately and appropriately serves Palestinian national interests by increasing the language resources available as Palestine competes in the global economy" (p. 8).

This study will provide such data and propose essential recommendations to the MoE to hopefully give direction as to the best approaches that can be used to fulfill the goals of the communicative English skills in the Palestinian students. In summery, the finding of this study may be important to:

1. English teachers who seek to develop their students' skills.
2. Designers and planners of English language teaching curriculum.
3. Educational supervisors of EFL program in Palestine.

## The Population of the Study:

The sample of this study is drawn from the population of all EFL teachers of the tenth grade of Gaza secondary schools in Palestine. 92 school teachers were selected from 46 secondary schools in Gaza Strip. Had it not been for the separation that is imposed on the Palestinian areas, the sample could have included EFL teachers of Palestine secondary schools in the West Bank. The accrual data represents two teachers from each school.

## Subjects of the Study

Of the 92 teachers who completed the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), level of training was an important variable to the researcher. The 92 teachers reflected three level of professional development. The highest level is MA in pedagogy and it represents 10 teachers. The next level is BA and it represents 75 teachers. The lowest level is Diploma, which is usually obtained from a two-year community college degree and it represents 7 teachers. (The BA

category makes up the highest portion of the sample with 81.5% of the total population). The range of teaching experience across all levels of education ranges from 1-24 years.

## Design of the Study

The questionnaire survey was selected for two reasons. The first reason is related to the Palestine EFL teachers, who are expected to carry out the EFL curriculum and meet the Education Ministry's goals. Therefore, their responses to the questionnaire will better reflect current EFL curriculum practices in the secondary schools. Second, classroom observations or other forms of experimental studies are not feasible and cannot be conducted due to logistical problems.

### Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher following the rules of questionnaire format developed by Nicolaos E. Synodinos (2003) "Constructing a good questionnaire requires a thorough grasp of the intricacies of the topical area and detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the different survey administration modes. In addition, questionnaire construction entails close attention to details about the wording of questions, their instructions, their response choices, and their sequence." (p. 221). The researcher took into consideration the rules of question format developed by Berdie and Anderson (1974):

1. Make the questionnaire attractive.
2. Organize the lay out questions so the questionnaire is easy to complete as possible.
3. Number the questionnaire items and pages.
4. Begin with a few interesting and non-threatening items.
5.  Include enough information in the questionnaire so that items are meaningful to the respondents (p. 34).

The questionnaire contained five parts: Part I pertained to the teacher's demographic information. Part II asked for data about the respondent schools. Part III addressed Research Questions One and Four. Part IV addressed Research Question Two. Part V addressed research questions Two and Three.

## Data Analysis

Since the goal defined by the Ministry of Education states that the Palestinian EFL program is meant "…to enable students to use English, orally and in writing, to communicate freely and effectively in different situations and settings" (Ministry of Education 1999, p. 13), the results are presented according the four research questions. Descriptive statistics (mean percentages) were computed to show the teaching focus on types of English, the extent of teaching English literature, kinds of literature taught, testing styles, frequency of language skill testing, frequency of teaching methods/approaches, use of supporting teaching materials, and ranking frequency of EFL skills

**Research Question One:**

*What types of English are being taught in the tenth grade of Gaza secondary schools and to what extent do they contribute the MoE's goal of developing communicative language skills in English?*

Table 1: Teaching Focus on Types of English in Frequency and Percentage

| Types of English | Focus | | No focus | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | (%) | No | (%) |
| General English | 60 | (63.8) | 34 | (36.2) |
| Commercial English | 4 | (4.3) | 90 | (95.7) |
| Technical English | 4 | (4.3) | 90 | (95.7) |
| Scientific English | 12 | (12.8) | 82 | (87.2) |
| Academic English | 0 | (0.0) | 94 | 100.0) |
| English Literature | 4 | (4.3) | 90 | (95.7) |
| General & Commercial English | 54 | (57.4) | 40 | (42.6) |
| General and Scientific English | 20 | (21.3) | 74 | (78.7) |
| General And Academic English | 10 | (10.7) | 84 | (89.3) |
| ESP English | 0 | (0.0) | 94 | 100.0) |
| All Types of English | 10 | (10.7) | 84 | (89.3) |

This question was addressed in Part III of the questionnaire. The Purpose was to determine the extent to which the various types of English are taught in the 10$^{th}$ grade. It is structured to test the limit and type of literature used in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. Tables 1, 2 and 3 show the results of the inquiry.

Table (1) indicates that the largest number of surveyed teachers emphasized general English (63.8 percent) and the second greatest emphasis was placed on general and scientific English (57.4 percent). This emphasis can be due to the students' interest in using the language for scientific purposes that will be taught by the same teacher to the science student in the upper levels. The focus on general English is due to the fact that it serves as the basis for the development of English language needed by the students. However, these results do not well serve the Ministry's goal of developing communicative English which can only be achieved by drawing on the full range of the types of English shown in Table 1. Table 2 addresses the extent to which literature is taught.

Table 2: Teaching English Literature in frequency and percent.

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Yes | 14 | 14.9% |
| No | 80 | 85.1% |
| Total | 90 | 100.0% |

Table 2 indicates that only 14.9 percent of the teachers teach segments of the English literature. As part of the developing communicative English, **Al Maleh (2005) recommends students "to read the 'foreign' text cross-culturally" so that they can "bestride the cultural divide, and traverse moral controversy" (pp. 269-70).** The result obtained in this section is not in line with the Ministry's EFL goal to develop communicative skills in English, and it indicates the extent to which the cultures of the English speaking countries are introduced to the Palestinian EFL learners.

Table 3: Kinds of Literature Taught in Frequency ad Percent.

| Types of English Literature | Taught | | Didn't teach | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Arabic literature translated into English | 2 | 2.1 | 92 | 97.9 |

| British Literature | 29 | 30.9 | 65 | 69.1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| American Literature | 15 | 16.0 | 97 | 84.0 |

As reported in Table 3, about one third of the surveyed EFL teachers showed preference for British literature, while only 16% of them taught American Literature. This result is not in line with the Ministry's EFL goal for the learning of communicative English. In this case it is reasonable to expect teachers to use both British and American literature. Literature reveals the heart of language, and the selection of suitable literary texts (Scollon, 2001). According to Harrison (1990) "… students can be enabled to move from their own immediate world, over time, to other imaginative worlds" (p. 52). Since less than third of EFL teachers use teach British and American literature, the potential to support the Ministry's EFL goal of communicative English and cultural understanding is reduced.

**Research Question Two:**

*"Do the testing styles used in the tenth grade of Gaza secondary school classrooms match the MoE's goal of developing communicative language skills and cultural backgrounds?"*

To investigate this question, the surveyed Palestinian EFL teachers were asked to select the type of testing they regularly use in their classrooms from a list provided by the researcher. This question was asked in part IV and part V of the questionnaire. Table 4 shows the results of the investigation.

Table 4: Testing Styles in Frequency and Percent

| Types of Tests | Used | | Not used | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Material- based tests | 78 | 83.0 | 16 | 17.0 |
| Competence –based tests | 65 | 69.1 | 29 | 30.9 |
| Participatory Tests | 20 | 21.3 | 74 | 78.7 |

To support the Ministry's goal of developing communicative English and cultural awareness, research suggested that the best type of test to use is a competence-based test (Hughes, 2003 and Lytle & Wolfe 1989). This kind of test facilitates communicative production in language; for the learners are required to create meanings from a given context. The learners can elaborate on a simple sentence to go

beyond the level of the context provided.

Table 4 indicates that the majority (83.0%) of the surveyed Palestinian EFL teachers use material- based tests.  The next most frequently used test is the Competence –based tests (69.1%).  This result does not support the Ministry's EFL goal to of developing communicative skills in English, which necessitates that all the language skills be adhered to.  To investigate this assumption, the teachers were asked in the questionnaire how often they tested their students for these skills.

Table 5:  Frequency of Language Skill Testing

| Language skill | Very often | | Often | | Sometimes | | Never | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Listening | 40 | 42.6 | 25 | 26.6 | 19 | 20.1 | 10 | 10.7 |
| Speaking | 62 | 66.2 | 21 | 22.6 | 11 | 11.7 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Reading | 38 | 40.3 | 45 | 48.3 | 9 | 9.1 | 2 | 2.3 |
| Writing | 32 | 34.0 | 31 | 33.0 | 31 | 33.0 | 0 | 0.0 |

Table 5 shows that (62.2 %) of the surveyed Palestinian EFL teachers test very often for speaking, whereas less than half of the survey teaches test for listening and reading. This inconsistency in testing for some skills more than for others weakens the skills that are less emphasized in testing.  Such testing practices may not develop communicative skills because language skills must develop side by side (Wragg, 2001; Jarvis, 2002; Ho, 2005).  Thus, the testing procedures currently used by the teachers may not support the goal for developing communicative competence in the learners.

### Research Question Three.

*Do the teaching materials and methods used in the tenth grade of Gaza secondary classroom support the MoE's goal of acquiring communicative language skills with a supporting cultural background?*

This research question was addressed in part V (Items 1 and 2) of the questionnaire.  The results are presented in Tables 6-9.

This table shows that (77.6 percent) of the surveyed EFL teachers

use the communicative Language Approach; about (61 percent) of them use the direct method. It also shows that about one third of the teachers use the grammar translation method.    It is clear from this table that a number of teachers use more than one method or approach in their classes.  Some use the grammar –translation method because it works with contents that can be presented in drills.  The Audio-lingual method is reported to be used by about one third of the teachers. This result may be due to reason that this method is mechanical and is sometimes considered easier to deliver to the students based on the principle that language learning is habit formation, and that the method fosters dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases and over-learning. Structures are sequenced and taught one at a time. Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills. However, there is enough evidence that the Audio-Lingual Method does not contribute to the improvement of communicative language skills (Omaggio-Hadley. 1993).

Table 6: Frequency of Teaching Methods/Approaches

| Method/Approach | Followed | | Not followed | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Grammar Translation Method | 22 | 34.0 | 43 | 66.0 |
| The Functional Notional Approach | 10 | 12.9 | 68 | 87.1 |
| The Communicative Language teaching Approach | 73 | 77.6 | 21 | 22.4 |
| The Natural Approach | 18 | 28.0 | 46 | 72.0 |
| Whole Language | 2 | 2.7 | 70 | 97.2 |
| Direct Method | 42 | 61.0 | 27 | 39.0 |
| Audio-Lingual Method | 23 | 29.0 | 56 | 71.0 |

Despite all this, the table shows that the Communicative Language Teaching Approach was used by the Majority (77.6 percent) of the EFL teachers surveyed.  The use of such a method contributes to the improvement of the communicative language skills, and thus supports the Ministry' goal.

As for the supporting teaching materials used by Palestinian EFL teachers of Eighth grade, this study attempted to examine whether the supporting teaching materials were suitable for the Ministry's goal of developing communicative language skills.  Research has proved that

teaching materials such as television, documentary films, radio broadcast, tapes, and other kinds are essential for consolidating cultural understanding and meaningful communications in foreign language learning (Peregoy et al 2001; Stevick 1982; and Finocchario & Brumfit 1983). Table 7 shows the responses of the surveyed EFL teachers to the questionnaire section dealing with the teaching materials used.

Table 7: Use of Supporting Teaching Materials

| Teaching Materials | Used | | Not Used | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Visual Aids | 83 | 88.3 | 11 | 11.7 |
| Textbooks | 85 | 90.4 | 9 | 9.6 |
| Audiovisual Aids | 18 | 20.22 | 71 | 79.88 |
| Chalk and blackboard | 86 | 91.48 | 6 | 8.52 |

Table 7 shows that from eighty three to ninety percent of the surveyed EFL teachers use calk and blackboard, textbooks, and visual aids as teaching materials. However, the low percentage (18 percent) of the teachers who use audio-visual aids undermine the Ministry's goal of developing the communicative skills of EFL learners. In this respect the weak use of authentic audiovisual materials representing the culture of the native speakers of the target language may have a negative effect on the learners understanding of the target language culture.

## Research Question Four

*How are the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills viewed by the EFL teachers with regard to their relative importance in helping the tenth grade of Gaza secondary school students achieve the MoE's goal of developing communicative language skills?*

This question is investigated through part III of the questionnaire. Since the MoE's goal is to provide the learners with"…learning environments that provide demonstrations of the interdependence of listening, speaking, reading and writing. They also need to develop their language abilities through the use of varied modes and technologies" MoE, 1999, pp 9-10). Thus, the Ministry stresses the

need to focus on all language skills to achieve communicative competence in English. To investigate whether this need is observed by the EFL teachers during implementation of the Ministry's curriculum, they were asked to rank order the relative importance of each language skill. Table 9 reports the results.

Table 9: Ranking Frequency of EFL Skills

| Skill | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Listening | 70 | 74.1 | 12 | 13.2 | 10 | 10.6 | 2 | 2.1 |
| Speaking | 30 | 32.1 | 51 | 54.2 | 9 | 9.5 | 4 | 4.2 |
| Reading | 19 | 20.2 | 25 | 26.6 | 40 | 42.6 | 10 | 10.6 |
| Writing | 15 | 16 | 19 | 20 | 45 | 47 | 16 | 17 |

Table 9 shows that listening was ranked the most important communication skill (74.1 percent) and speaking was ranked second in importance (32.1). These findings reflect that the EFL teachers are not following the Ministry's recommendations mentioned above. This undermines the Ministry's goal of communicative competence in English as a foreign language. The surprising thing is that reading and the writing were ranked the least important.

## Conclusions and recommendations

In this study, the researcher studied the EFL current practices by Palestinian EFL teachers of the tenth grades in Gaza Strip in relation to the MoE's EFL curriculum goal. To do this, a questionnaire was designed to elicit the beliefs and the resources which the EFL teachers of the tenth grade in Gaza Strip follow in relation to the EFL program they are implementing.

This study was meant to investigate the gap between the MoE's goal for the EFL program in Palestinian secondary schools, and to discover the reasons that let to what Thabit 2007 stated as, "Despite the significance of EL in Palestinian society …, a remarkable weakness on the part of school students in different language skills is painfully apparent." For this, four research questions were formulated to provide the MoE and the EFL teachers with data that may be useful in improving the EFL program in secondary schools.

With regard to the types of English used in the tenth grade classrooms, it was reported in Table 1 that the tenth grade EFL teachers' emphasis was on general English (63.8 percent), and on general and scientific English (57.4 percent). The surprising thing is that commercial English was not given ample attention, especially after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the creation of many commercial ties with other countries. Although the results are not surprising, they do not serve the MoEs' goal of developing communicative competence. Therefore, the MoE should ascertain that the EFL curriculum at this grade level include all types of English to prepare the learners for all types of jobs.

The study also reveals that teaching literature is completely neglected; for (4.3 percent) of the EFL teachers reported to have been teaching literature. This suggests that the Palestinian EFL learners are not culturally stimulated and that their understanding of the target language culture is weak; therefore, it does not fulfill the MoE's goal for enhancing cultural understanding of Palestinian EFL learners of English speaking communities. This situation should draw the MoE's attention to the necessity for designing enrichment workshops to maintain the EFL teachers' professional development. This upgrading of the teachers' teaching skills will be a positive step in meeting the MoE's goal, (Hamouda, 1999). To accomplish such an improvement in the EFL curriculum, changes are required to be made in the EFL teacher preparation colleges. This necessitates the establishment of good cooperation and coordination between the MoE and the local universities. However, before this can be attained, Palestinian EFL teachers may need to get involved in study groups in the mechanism suggested by Matlin and Short (1991), "for the teachers, the study group is an opportunity to think through their own beliefs, share ideas, challenge current instructional practices, blend theory and practice, identify professional needs-as well as develop literacy innovation for their classrooms" (p. 68). This will also be in line with Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin's (1995) professional development model of study groups which provide "occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners" (p. 597). Thus, EFL teachers who engage in such activities for the purpose of curriculum development will be more successful and active

in achieving the MoE's goal of developing communicative English skills of the Palestinian EFL learners.

As for testing activities conducted by the Palestinian tenth grade EFL teachers, the data revealed that (83 percent of the teachers used material-based tests, while (69 percent) used competence-based tests which should have been the most widely used testing method because they match the MoE's goal of developing communicative English skills. The data also show that (66.2 percent) tested speaking more frequently than other skills. It must be noted in this respect that the four skills should be developed side by side to enable the learners to integrate them to develop heir communicative skills in English. Therefore, the four skills should all be tested 'very often'.

As for the teaching methods and approaches used by the Palestinian eighth grade EFL teachers, the data show that (77.6 percent) of the surveyed teachers used the communicative language approach, while (61 percent) used the direct method. Using these methods put the EFL teachers in a position that serves the MoE's goal of developing communicative skills in EFL learners. However, some teachers still use the audio-lingual and grammar translation methods' which are proved ineffective in teaching English as a foreign language. Therefore, in-service professional development workshops will be necessary to train teachers in using the proper methodology to implement the EFL curriculum.

Anther issue investigated in relation to teaching methodology was the use of materials and teaching tools. The data show that, apart from using the chalkboard, only (18 percent) of teachers use audio-visual aids in their teaching. It should be stated in this respect that the use of authentic materials provide the EFL learners in Palestine with the opportunity to hear the language from the native speakers. Therefore, it is essential to use audio-visual aids to assist EFL learners to understand the culture the social setting of the target language. In this way, it is important that teaching equipment such as (VCRs, televisions, tape recorders, film projectors, overhead, computers and LCDs) as well as authentic materials such as (newspapers, tapes, cassettes, documentary films, and videotapes) be provided to schools, (Horiba, 1996; Finocchario. and Brumfit, 1983; and Stevick, 1982). This will help the learners understand the culture of the English speaking communities, as well as develop their communicative skills.

As for the ranking of the four skills by the teachers, the data show that 'listening' and 'speaking' were more highly ranked than the other two skills. However, as discussed earlier, the four skills should be integrated in the EFL classes. The current focus on two skills, and the little attention given to the other two undermines the MoE's goal of developing communicative English skills of EFL learners. Therefore, the four skills should be given equal attention; for it is more important to teach the four language skills jointly. As a teacher of English for over 29 years in Palestine, the research reports that EFL is taught with a lot of emphasis on reading comprehension and grammar. This is mainly because of the current English education system in which teachers are required to teach English with a lot of knowledge of grammar, using textbooks full of reading materials. Through personal contacts with EFL teachers, many of them believe it is quite difficult to teach four language skills using such textbooks, but the researcher thinks that it depends on the EFL teachers' efforts to make use of reading materials effectively with teaching four language skills combined in mind. Once again, professional development may be needed to bring about instructional change in the EFL program in Palestine.

Based on this investigation, it is clear that the methods and practices involved in implementing the EFL curriculum in the eighth grade classrooms do not meet the MoE's goal of communicative competence among EFL learners in Palestine. The results of this study suggest further research projects that can build on the current findings so as to allocate all the necessary tools and methods to assist in achieving the MoE's goal of developing communicative English competence. Therefore, the following suggestions will be useful to future research targeting the Palestinian secondary school EFL curriculum.

1. A study should be conducted to investigate how Palestinian EFL teachers perceive the communicative language teaching approach.
2. A study that employs classroom observation should be carried out to determine the nature of the content, in respect to communicative skills development and cultural orientation of Palestinian secondary school EFL learners.

3. A study should be carried out to measure the Palestinian secondary school EFL learners' attitudes towards English. This study will provide the practitioners with a clear understanding of the learners' motivations and interests in learning English as a foreign language.

4. Finally, in-service training to maintain staff development should be convened as early as possible, and an ongoing evaluation should go side by side with this training to measure the impact of such training on teaching efficiency.

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# *Appendix 1*

Questionnaire
### I. Demographic Information:

*Dear teacher,*
> *I would like to assure you that your identity will never be disclosed to any one else. It will remain strictly confidential.* Please circle or underline, or write out the correct answer or answers in each case where a choice is given.

1. **a)** Name of the teacher:_____
   **b)** Sex: Male:_____     Female:_____
2. Please circle the highest level of education that you have earned:
   **a)** Ph.D. /Ed.D       **b)** M.A.       **c)** B.A.       d) Diploma
3. Where did you earn your degree?
   Please circle your answer.
   **a)** The Islamic University of Gaza       **e)** Birzeit University
   **b)** Al-Azhar University – Gaza   **f)** Bethlehem University
   **c)** Al-Aqsa University                       **g)** Al-Najah University
   **d)** Al-Quds Open University           **h)** Egyptian Universities
   **i)** Jordanian universities
   **j)** Other (please specify) _____
4. What is your EFL(English as a foreign Language) specialization?
   *Please circle your answer.*
**a)** English Linguistics
**b)** English Literature
**c)** English Pedagogy
5. Have you ever lived or worked in an English speaking country in order to speak or understand English better? *Please circle your answer.*
   **a)** Yes       **b)** No       **c)** If yes, for how long?
   _____month(s)
   _____   year(s)
   ### II. School Information
   Please, give the name of the school where you work.
   School Name: _____

Area: _____

School denomination:    **a)** Public    **b)** Private

## III. Teaching Experience

1. How long have you been teaching EFL classes?
    **a)** _____ month(s)
    **b)** _____ year(s)
2. What secondary EFL grade level or levels have you been teaching?
    *Please circle your answer.*
    **a)** 10$^{th}$ grade
    **b)** 11$^{th}$ grade
    **c)** 12$^{th}$ grade
3. Have you ever taught EFL in higher education?
    *Please circle your answer.*
    **a)** Yes    **b)** No.  **If yes, where**?_____
4. What textbook or textbooks do you use?
    *Please circle your answer.*
    **a)**
    **b)**
    **c)**
    **d)** Others (please specify) _____
5. Please place a **rank order** 1,2,3,or 4 (1 the most important and 4 the least important) beside the four skills to show what you think is their relative importance.
    a) Speaking                c) Reading
    b) Listening               d) Writing

6. Is the focus of your EFL teaching activities on (*Please circle your answer.*)
   a) General / school English only
   b) Commercial English
   c) Technical English
   d) Scientific English
   e) Academic English
   f) English Literature
   g) General English and Commercial English
   h) General English and Technical English
   i) General English and Scientific English
   j) General English and Academic English
   k) ESP only
   l) General English, Commercial English, Technical English, Scientific English, and Academic English

7. Do you teach English literature? *Please circle your answer.*
   **a)** Yes        **b)** No

8. If yes, what kind of English literature do you teach? *Please circle your answer.*
   a) Arabic literature translated into English.
   b) British Literature
   c) American Literature

9. Do you integrate the teaching of literature, General English, and ESP? *Please circle your answer.*
   a) All the time              c) Rarely
   b) Some of the time          d) Never

10. Do you integrate the teaching of general English and literature?
    *Please circle your answer.*
    a) All the time              c) Rarely
    b) Some of the time          d) Never

11. Do you teach General English and literature as separate subject areas? *Please circle your answer.*
    a) All the time              c) Rarely
    b) Some of the time          d) Never

12. Do you use stories to teach general English? *Please circle your answer.*
    a) All the time        c) Rarely
    b) Some of the time    d) Never

13. Do you use stories to teach ESP? *Please circle your answer.*
    a) All the time        c) Rarely
    b) Some of the time    d) Never

14. Are you teaching materials representative of (*Please circle your answer*)
    a) Palestinian lifestyle?    c) European lifestyle?
    b) Arab lifestyle?        d) American lifestyle?

## IV. Pupil Evaluations

1. How often do you test for Speaking Skills?
    a) Very often      c) Sometime
    b) Often         d) Never

2. How often do you test for Listening Skills?
    a) Very often      c) Sometime
    b) Often         d) Never

3. How often do you test for Reading Skills?
    a) Very often      c) Sometime
    b) Often         d) Never

4. How often do you test for Writing Skills?
    a) Very often      c) Sometime
    b) Often         d) Never

5. Do your EFL tests include (*Please circle your answer*)
    a) General English?
    b) General English and Commercial English?
    c) General English and Scientific English?
    d) General English and Technical English?
    e) General English and Academic English?
    f) General English and ESP?

6. Do your EFL tests include (*Please circle your answer*)
    a) Commercial English only?
    b) Scientific English only?
    c) Technical English only?
    d) Commercial, Scientific, Technical, and academic English

only?

## V.  Teaching strategies, Materials and Types of Tests

1.  Which methods of teaching EFL do you use (*Please circle your answer*)?
   a) Grammar Translation
   b) Direct Method
   c) Audio-Lingual Method
   d) Total Physical Response
   e) The Natural Approach
   f)  Whole Language
   g) Cognitive – Code Method
   h) Functional - Notional Approach
   i) Communicative Language Teaching Approach
   j) Other (please, specify) _____

2.  Your teaching materials include (*Please circle your answer*)?
   a) Chalk and blackboard
   b) Textbook(s)
   c) Audio-visual aids
   d) Visual aids
   e) Other (please, specify) _____

3.  Are your tests (*Please circle your answer*)?
   a) Material based
   b) Competence -based
   c) Participatory
   d) Other (please, specify) _____

**Thank you very much.**
*Your time and effort in responding to this questionnaire is greatly appreciated and will add to a better understanding or the way in which English is taught in Gaza Strip area.  The results of this study will be sent to your school for you to read.*