

Congruity or Disparity: Teachers' Assessment of the New Palestinian English Language School Curriculum

TESOL Journal
Vol. 2, pp. 189-206
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Abstract

Ongoing assessment of a language curriculum ensures its workability and sustainability and keeps the process of learning on the right track. This study aims at assessing the congruity of the new Palestinian English Language School Curriculum, which has been recently introduced, with the requirements and aspects of the most recent language teaching method i.e. the Communicative Approach. It aims at investigating the teachers' views of the various skills embodied in the contents of this curriculum, and attempts to find out whether the requirements and aspects of the communicative curriculum are taken into consideration. For this purpose a questionnaire was prepared, administered and distributed among hundred and twenty seven English language teachers representing the total population of teachers in Nablus district. The study reveals a number of encouraging results such as the reading materials in the new curriculum are interesting and appealing to the new generation and the reading component is relevant to the students' cultural background. It also revealed a big number of findings that need to be seriously looked into in the process of future evaluation and amendments of the curriculum. Finally, based on these results, a number of recommendations are provided.

Keywords: congruity, disparity, implementation, evaluation, training, communicative

Introduction and Theoretical Background

The New Palestinian English Language School Curriculum was first introduced in the year 2001. The previous English language curriculum was introduced during the Jordan era and continued to be used till the mid nineties when the Palestinian Authority came into power following the Oslo Agreement between the Palestinians and Israel. The Palestinian Authority decided to replace the old curriculum and introduce what is called now the (New Palestinian English Language School Curriculum) based on the latest language teaching and learning approach- the Communicative Approach, hence CA. The old curriculum continued to be used for over three decades. It was based on a conglomeration of old methods of teaching such as, the Direct Method, the Grammar Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method. A team of professionals was designated to take the responsibility in collaboration with Macmillan's. A major decision was taken to start teaching English at the government schools right from the first grade. Previously English was introduced only from the fifth grade till the high secondary which means that

the students studied English for only eight years while now they will be enjoying a privilege of four extra years.

The new curriculum has been in use now for almost eight years which means that it has been tried long enough by the teachers to be able to judge it and tell its advantages as well as the shortcomings.

Objectives of the Study

For many years the Palestinian educational system was a replica of its Jordanian counterpart. The English language school curriculum adopted what was called the Petra series for decades. When the Palestinian Authority introduced the new English curriculum, they claimed that it was entirely based on the Communicative Approach. Since then, school teachers have been complaining about a number of aspects embodied in the textbooks, indicating that these aspects are not congruent with the requirements of the so called Communicative Approach. So, the researcher decided to resort to the teachers to investigate the presence of these aspects and to pinpoint any discrepancy between what is stated as objectives for that curriculum and what is really embodied in the textbooks.

This study aims at investigating the Palestinian school teachers' attitude towards the New English Language Curriculum that has been introduced recently as a substitute to the old one. It aims to find out whether this curriculum complies with the requirements of the CA, as it was intended to be. It will also attempt to explore the feasibility of the implementation of this ambitious project in the Palestinian schools. Moreover, this study will look into all the aspects of the CA, and try to find out to what extent these aspects are present in the curriculum. Finally, this study will investigate whether all the prerequisites for the implementation of this curriculum were taken into account and whether any initial preparations necessary for that purpose were done before it was introduced.

Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Does the New Palestinian English Language School Curriculum comply with the requirements of the CA?
2. Is there any significant difference in the teachers' attitude towards the compliance of the New Palestinian English Language School Curriculum with the requirements of the CA due to the qualification variable?
3. Is there any significant difference in the teachers' attitude towards the compliance of the New Palestinian English Language School Curriculum with the requirements of the CA due to the years of experience variable?
4. Is there any significant difference in the teachers' attitude towards the compliance of the New Palestinian English Language School Curriculum with the requirements of the CA due to the gender variable?

The New Palestinian English Curriculum has been recently introduced as a trial version of a Communicative Approach-based curriculum. One of the most important components of a curriculum is the teacher, and teachers' opinion in anything that concerns the process of teaching is very vital to the

success of this process. The teachers are constantly in direct contact with the textbooks, deal with the material, teach it to their students, use it for testing them, plan the lessons, evaluate their students' performance and supervise and monitor their progress. Thus, investigating their attitude towards the curriculum is a highly significant measure. It is important for forming a clear picture of the whole educational process. They are the most qualified people to judge and evaluate, to decide what is right and what is inappropriate, what is effective and what is irrelevant, what contributes to the success of the educational process and what debilitates them. Through their experience, they are capable of pinpointing the shortcomings of an educational program, evaluating its elements of strength and those of weaknesses. This research may prove significant in the sense that it will shed light on all these aspects and draw the attention of those in charge to any pitfalls in the curriculum so that they can decide whether to continue with it or terminate it, or amend and correct any defects in the system. Other non-English speaking countries and agencies, dealing with the same kind of educational venture, or intending to introduce any change into their programs, can benefit from the outcomes of such evaluation and investigation in their English language programs, especially those that deal with English as second or foreign language. Such a study is very essential to the evaluation of a curriculum that has just been introduced and it is part of the indispensable and necessary ongoing process of evaluation that should accompany any language program. The results of such an investigation can be used by the Ministry of Education as guidelines for any future amendments and for rectifying any mishaps or pitfalls in the curriculum as a whole. Textbook writers can benefit from the teachers' observations and take them into consideration in their future tasks and in the revision of the present ones.

Review of Literature

The whole issue here revolves around the congruity of the New Palestinian English School Curriculum with the requirements of the most recent and most popular and widely used method of teaching English as a foreign or second language, that is, the CA. It is worth discussing the various aspects of this approach and to try to clarify to what extent these aspects and characteristics are taken into account when this curriculum was planned, prepared and implemented.

The Communicative Approach

Galloway (1993) maintains that the CA could be the product of educators and linguists who had grown dissatisfied with the audio lingual and grammar-translation methods of foreign language instruction. They felt that students were not learning enough realistic, whole language. They did not know how to communicate using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions; in brief they were at a loss to communicate in the culture of the language studied.

The basic principles underlying the CA are: first, it assumes that language acquisition depends not only on "exposure to environmental stimulation but also on specific innate propensities of the organism" (Hwang, 1970). Second, communicative competence, as spelt out by Widdowson (1984), implies knowledge of the grammatical system of the language as well as performance.

Third, it gives priority to the semantic content of language learning. Fourth, this approach provides communicative functions. These functions reflect more closely real life use of the language as they are connected with real situations and with students' needs and interests. Fifth, this approach shifts the focus from the teachers to the learner. (Al-Mutawa and Kailani, 1996, p. 7).

The CA has gained popularity because it is based on a continuous process of communication. In this approach, the communicative needs of the teachers are the basis on which various linguistic, thematic, or functional elements are selected. The role of the teacher here is a facilitator (Dubin and Olshtain, 1997, p. 31).

The CA aims at equipping the learner with communicative competence. For the learner, to acquire communicative competence in a second language means the acquisition of knowledge relating to linguistic form, to sociocultural appropriateness, and to native preferences for certain forms rather than others. Hamdallah (1999, p. 288) maintains that the CA emphasizes language learning through interaction, language use not usage, peer and group activities, and learning both the grammatical forms and their functions.

Littlewood (1981) states that one of the most prominent features of the communicative language teaching approach is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language. In reaction to the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, the communicative language teaching approach emphasizes the communicative activities that involve the real use of language in daily life situations.

Nunan (1993, p. 59) defines a communicative task as a "piece of a classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on meaning rather than form". Long and Crooks (1992:27-56) maintain that the idea is to get something done via the language, to read a text and do something with the information in conjunction with other skills: listening, speaking, or reading. Galloway (1993) maintains that the communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. The real-life simulations change from day to day. Students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics.

The emphasis on the importance of the communicative method in language teaching paved the way for communicative curriculum design. In spite of the differences of opinions in the definition of curriculum, there has been a consensus, among the advocates of the CA to curriculum design, about its characteristics. They all agree that the CA should embody a number of aspects which have to be taken into consideration, before, during and after the implementation of the curriculum.

Needs Analysis

Bloor (1984) maintains that a needs analysis may be "target-centered", which looks at the learners' future role and attempts to specify what language skills or linguistic knowledge the learner needs in order to perform the role adequately. It may, alternately, be "learner-centered", which examines what the learner can do at the commencement of the course, what problems s/he may have or what skills he may possess. He further points out that in order to specify an adequate teaching syllabus, it is almost certainly desirable to operate both

“target-centered” and “learner-centered” needs analysis.

An interest in learners’ needs analysis and assessment reflects a participatory approach to education, “based on the belief that learners, their characteristics, backgrounds, and needs should be the center of instruction” (Fingeret and Jurmo, 1989, p. 5). Auerbach (1994) and Holt (1994) state that needs analysis and assessment for use with learners of English is a tool that specifically examines what kinds of English, native language, and literacy skills the learner already believes he or she has; the literacy contexts in which the learner lives or works; what the learner wants and needs to know to function in those contexts; what the learner expects to know from the program.

Needs assessment is a continual process and takes place throughout the instructional program (Savage, 1993), thus influencing student placement, materials selection, curriculum design, and teaching approaches (Wrigley and Guth, 1992).

At the beginning of the program, needs assessment might be used to determine appropriate program types and course content; during the program, it assures that learner and program goals are being met and allows for necessary program changing; at the end of the program, it can be used for planning the learner’s and the program’s future directions (Santopietro and Van Duzer, 1997). The needs analysis and assessment process can be used as the basis for developing curricula and classroom practice that are responsive to these needs (Grant and Shank, 1993).

Nunan (1994, p. 43) argues that needs analysis is a set of procedures for specifying the parameters of a course of study. Such parameters include the criteria and rationale for grouping learners, the selection and sequencing of course content, methodology, course length, and intensity and duration.

Goals and Objectives

Another important aspect of the communicative curriculum, which is closely related to needs analysis, is defining the goals and the objectives of the educational program. Almutawa and Kailani (1996, p. 5) specify a number of “general goals” and “specific objectives” that Arab students are expected to achieve after eight years of English schooling. They point out that these goals and objectives generally correspond to English language teaching aims in other Arab countries where English is also taught as a first foreign language. Cummingsworth (1984) calls for relating the teaching materials to the learners’ goals and objectives. He suggests that the objectives should be decided first, in line with the overall aim of the teaching program, and then, materials should be sought which can be related to these objectives.

Suitable Methodology

The third aspect of the communicative curriculum is the choice of appropriate methodology. Stryker and Leaver (1997) maintain that instruction that emphasizes purposeful comprehension and communicative production yields superior receptive and expressive accuracy, complexity and fluency. Clipperton (1994, p. 736) argues that solution to the shortcomings in the students’ productive skills seems to lie in the use of methodologies that apply techniques to practice language forms with a CA.

Richards (1987, p. 11) points out that the goal of many language teachers is to find the right method, and improvements in language teaching will come about as a result of improvements in the quality of methods and that, ultimately an effective language teaching method will be developed.

Ellis (1992) states that because “we do not have an adequate methodology for describing, analyzing or evaluating the interaction which takes place in the second language classroom, we are not able to make the second language learning and teaching processes transparent or demonstrate how second language learning takes place through the interaction.” Seedhouse (1995, p. 1) argues that a unique methodology, which would be able to link pedagogical purposes to linguistic forms and patterns of interaction, needs to be developed. Such a methodology, he adds, should also be able to depict how pedagogical purposes and contexts vary between lessons and within lessons, and how varieties of communication are created as a result.

Proper Planning

The fourth aspect of communicative curriculum is curriculum planning. Hass (1980, p. 31) defines curriculum planning as “the process of gathering, sorting, balancing, and synthesizing relevant information from many sources in order to design those experiences that will assist learners in attaining the goals of the curriculum”.

For Oliva (1982, p. 32), curriculum planning is the preliminary phase of curriculum development when the curriculum workers make decisions and take actions to establish the plan which teachers and students will carry out.

Beane, Toepfer, Jr. & Alessi, Jr., (1986, p. 56) state six general principles that curriculum planning involves: first, curriculum planning is concerned with the experiences of learners and its ultimate purpose is to describe or refine the learning opportunities available to students. Second, curriculum planning involves decisions about both content and process. The interrelationship between content and process accentuates the need to consider curriculum and instruction, not as distinct entities, but rather as interdependent concepts in the planning process. Third, curriculum planning involves decisions about a variety of issues and topics. It focuses on the various components of teaching-learning situations, including the selection of organizing centers or themes, and the identification of objectives, content, activities, resources, and measuring devices for teaching learning situations. In addition, curriculum planning involves decisions about some combinations of areas and issues since it is difficult to consider anyone in isolation. Fourth, curriculum planning involves many groups. It should be recognized that worthwhile contributions can be made by a number of groups and plans are often enriched as a result of varied participation. Participants in curriculum planning may include, teachers, students, administrators, coordinators, scholars, and state education personnel. It must be also recognized that the key participant in curriculum planning is the teacher who will ultimately be responsible for putting the plans into action. Fifth, curriculum planning takes place at many levels from the national to the classroom. Finally, curriculum planning is a continuous process. These include the identification of broad purposes, the definition of organizing centers, the selection of specific activities, and evaluation of programs, including recommendation for their improvement. They further maintain that planning a

curriculum without knowledge is likely to limit opportunities for learning. Without systematic curriculum planning, learning experiences may well be unconnected, disjointed, fragmented, and aimless. Careful curriculum planning is necessary to develop and maintain a continuous flow of educative experiences. It is an essential ingredient in the continuing search for excellence in education.

Implementation of the curriculum

Following the curriculum planning, the fifth aspect of the CA is the program implementation. Implementation is the employment of effective methods, techniques, and strategies to ensure the appropriate and practical use of the planned curriculum. Implementation involves the teacher, the student, and the administrator, each of them playing a role to ensure that what has been specified at the planning stage is achieved. Implementation is the monitoring of the process of program execution to ensure a full understanding and achievement of the goals and objectives set from the beginning. Cho (1998) argues that in order to ensure the appropriate implementation of a language program, there should be proper employment of effective methods and strategies.

It should be emphasized that the place where the implementation of an educational program happens is mainly in the classroom. It is the place where interaction occurs, where achievement can be felt, and where evaluation takes place. Thus, it is worthwhile to focus the attention on the three participants in the program implementation—the teacher, the student, and the administrator.

Brown (1995) emphasizes the central role the teachers and administrators played in the planning and implementation process. The administrators' role is often a political one. They are the policy makers and the program organizers. It is their responsibility to ensure the success of the educational program. Brindley (1997) says that teachers are finding themselves in the position of having to develop tools and procedures for monitoring, recording, and assessing learners' progress and achievement in the classroom. Harmer (1991, p. 235) states that the role of the teacher is a controller, assessor, organizer, prompter, participant, source, tutor, and investigator.

Dickinson (1993, p. 88) points out that "the teacher is not only involved in teaching but his work extends to more than that. He is often involved in pedagogical planning; that is, determining aims and objectives and selecting materials. He has several managerial and organizational responsibilities. In addition, the teacher has an important role in counseling and supporting the learner".

According to Ashworth (1992, p. 68) control over language teaching lies with those who have the power to decide *who* will teach *which* language to *whom*, *when*, *where*, and for *how long*. The three major components in any language-teaching classroom are students, teachers, and curriculum. Teachers and administrators are usually in control of the organization of classes and methods of instruction. She continues to say that certain students' characteristics can be changed for the better, some can be exploited for the students' advantage, some can be strengthened, but all must be taken into account remembering that students are more than the sum of their characteristics.

Program Resources

The sixth aspect of the communicative-approach-based curriculum is the program resources. In order to implement curriculum plans effectively, teachers and learners need to have a variety of resources available to them. Resources needed to support curriculum plans should be acquired when requested. In language teaching in general and in ESL/EFL teaching environment in particular, teaching resources such as media and materials are extremely necessary for facilitating effective language teaching. Ready-made teaching materials can be used as well, and if necessary, be made by the teachers and the students.

Teacher Preparation

The seventh aspect of the communicative-approach-based curriculum is the teacher training and development. The foreign language teaching profession today is faced with increasing demands and a shortage of qualified teachers. At the same time a rapidly increasing student population and the development of international standards for foreign language learning are placing a number of new demands on foreign language teachers. Curtain and Pesola (1994, p. 241) suggest that foreign language teachers today “require a combination of competencies and background that may be unprecedented in the preparation of language teachers” and that strong professional development is critical.

Thus a foreign language teacher requires, to comprehend contemporary media in the foreign language, the ability to use language in real-life context, a high level of language proficiency in all of the modalities of the target language—speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Phillips, 1991). According to Peyton (1997) foreign language teachers must maintain proficiency in the target language and stay up to date in current issues related to the target culture. Regardless of the skills and knowledge that foreign language teachers possess, maintenance and improvement must be an ongoing process.

Wang and Cheng (2005) state that teachers' involvement as well as change in teachers are both indispensable to the success of curriculum reform.

Brindley (1997) maintains that teachers are finding themselves in a position of having to develop tools and procedures for monitoring, recording, and assessing learners' progress and achievement in the classroom on a more systematic and formal basis. Brindley points out that language teachers need a wide range of skills which include: First, observing, interpreting, and documenting learners' use of language; second, designing classroom tests and tasks; third, analyzing results; fourth, providing diagnostic feedback to learners and finally, evaluate the quality of tests and the quality of learners' language performance. He continues to say that since teachers are the people who are responsible for such tasks, it is important to ensure that they have the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to conduct high quality assessment through appropriately-targeted professional development.

Kitao and Kitao (1997) state that the role of the language teacher is to help learners to learn and teachers should be trained to check to see whether all the elements of the learning process are working well for learners and to adapt them if they are not. Moreover, he has to follow the curriculum and provide, make, or choose materials, adapt them, monitor the progress and needs of the

students and finally evaluate them.

Dubin and Olshtain (1997, p. 31) state that the teacher population is the most significant factor in determining the success of a new syllabus or material. Therefore, the following factors need to be considered when evaluating teachers: First, the teacher's command of the target language; second, the teacher's training, background, level of higher education, exposure to ideas concerning the nature of language and language learning, teaching experience, and third, the teacher's attitude towards changes in the program. Dubin and Olshtain further argue that teachers who received traditional training and who have worked with rather conservative materials may not be equipped professionally or emotionally to handle modern teaching materials with a considerable amount of decision making to the teacher.

Doherty, Mangubhai, and Shearer (1996) point out that teachers should possess skills to observe, interpret, document, design, analyze, and evaluate the qualities of the tests and the learners' language performance.

Evaluation

The last and the most important aspect of the communicative-approach-based curriculum is evaluation. Brown (1989:223) defines evaluation as "the systematic collection and analysis of relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of the curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants' attitudes within a context of particular institutions involved".

According to Weir and Roberts (1994, p. 4) the purpose of evaluation is to collect information systematically in order to indicate the worth or merit of a program or project. Beretta (1992, p. 144) states three reasons for evaluation; first to find whether the program was feasible; second whether the program was productive; and last whether the program was appealing.

Nunan (1994, p. 116) claims that no curriculum model would be complete without an evaluation component. While it is universally recognized as an essential part of any educational endeavor, it is the component about which most classroom practitioners generally claim the least knowledge, and is the one area of the curriculum about which many teachers express a lack of confidence. He continues to say that evaluation is not simply a process of obtaining information, but it is also a decision-making process. Furthermore, he says that any element of the curriculum process may be evaluated, as any may affect the learning progress. The principal purpose for evaluating the planned curriculum is to determine the efficacy of the planning procedures employed, and also to assess whether the content and objectives are appropriate.

For Lynch (1996, p. 9) "Program evaluation can play an essential role in the development of applied linguistics as a field of research".

Results and discussion of the Findings

Table 1
Sample distribution of the participants according to their qualifications, experience, and gender variables.

Percentage %	Frequency	Level	Variable
15.7	20	M.A and above	Qualification
37.2	93	B.A	
11.0	14	Diploma	
12.6	16	Below 5 years	Experience
41.7	53	5-10 years	
45.7	58	Above 10 years	
54.3	69	Male	Gender
45.7	58	Female	

The results presented in table no. 1 show that the number of teachers who participated in this study is 127 out of whom 20 are M.A holders, 93 B.A holders and 14 with two-year diploma degrees. Regarding their experience the majority have had above 10 years of experience. As far as their gender the table shows that 69 of them are males and 58 are females.

Table 2
Means, percentages and degrees of response to the items related to the emphasis on the oral skills.

Degree	Percentage %	Means	Item	No.
High	77.6	3.88	I feel that there is enough emphasis on the practice of the listening skill in the new English curriculum	1
High	74.0	3.70	I feel that there is enough emphasis on the practice of the speaking skill in the new English curriculum	2
High	73.2	3.66	I feel that the various skills are proportionately distributed	3
Moderate	68.8	3.44	I feel that the new curriculum contributes well to the students' knowledge, performance and standard in English	4
Moderate	69.6	3.48	I feel that the curriculum promotes the students' critical thinking skills	5
Moderate	64.2	3.21	The new curriculum encourages students to develop their own learning strategies and independence in learning	6
High	71.2	3.56	Total	

Note. Maximum response is (5) points

The results presented in table no. 2 reveal that there is enough emphasis

on the practice of both the listening as well as the speaking skills. The degree of response to items 4 and 5 is moderate. This implies that the participants feel that the new curriculum doesn't contribute well enough to the development of the students' knowledge, performance and standard in English; doesn't promote the students' critical thinking skills. Finally the degree of response to item no. 6 indicates the new curriculum doesn't encourage the students to develop their own learning strategies and independence in learning. Thus, it doesn't enhance their learning autonomy which is considered very effective in learning as stated by Sert (2006), who says that increased awareness of autonomous learning and its benefits will enhance the students' own self-governing capacity which may in turn, contribute to higher achievement and motivation. Defel (2007) says that autonomous learning is more effective than non-autonomous learning. In other words, the development of autonomy implies better language learning.

Table 3

Means, percentages and degrees of response to the items related to the contents of the written skills.

Degree	Percentage %	Means	Item	No.
Moderate	61.6	3.08	The new English curriculum has enough reading material	7
High	79.4	3.97	I find the reading material in the new curriculum interesting and appealing to the new generation	8
High	74.4	3.72	I find the reading component relevant to the students cultural background	9
Moderate	69.6	3.48	The writing part is given enough attention in the curriculum	10
Low	55.4	2.77	The students find the material in the new curriculum easy to handle and understand	11
High	71.8	3.59	The material presented in the textbooks is authentic and related to the students' real life situations	12
Very High	81.6	4.08	I feel that the new curriculum is bulky and not easy to finish in the time allocated for that	13
High	73.4	3.67	Total	

The results presented in table no. 3 reveal that the reading material in the new curriculum is not adequate. On the other hand, the participants state that the reading material is interesting and appealing to the new generation. In addition, they feel that the reading component is relevant to the students' cultural background. In response to item no. 10, the participants reveal that the writing part is not given enough attention. Moreover the results show that the students do not find the material in the new curriculum easy to handle and understand, but it is authentic and related to the students' real life situations.

Perez (2004) claims that the opportunity for communication in authentic situations and settings is a major factor for language acquisition. In response to

item no. 13, the participants show that the new curriculum is bulky and not easy to complete in the time allocated for that.

Table 4

Means, percentages and degrees of response to the items related to the methodology.

Degree	Percentage %	Means	Item	No.
High	74.2	3.71	The textbooks have good grammar presentations and practice	14
Moderate	60.6	3.03	The textbooks have good vocabulary explanation and practice	15
High	72.4	3.62	The writing part is presented appropriately and gradually	16
High	78.6	3.93	The teachers' book clarifies thoroughly the methods to handle the material	17
Low	57.6	2.88	The school is equipped with enough and suitable audio-visual aids to teach the various skills	18
High	72.6	3.63	Total	

The results in this table indicate that the participants are, to a far extent, satisfied with the grammar, and writing presentations and practice in the textbooks. On the other hand, they feel that the textbooks don't have good vocabulary explanations and practice. The response to item no. 17 shows that the teacher's book clarifies thoroughly the methods to handle the material. Finally, the majority have indicated that the schools are not well equipped with suitable audio-visual teaching aids to help teach the various skills.

Table 5

Means, percentages and degrees of the response to the items related to the teacher training.

Degree	Percentage %	Means	Item	No.
Moderate	67.4	3.37	I feel that the teachers are capable of handling the writing part properly	19
Moderate	60.2	3.01	The teachers received enough training on how to handle the new English curriculum	20
High	76.6	3.83	I enjoy teaching the new English curriculum	21
Moderate	69.8	3.49	I feel that the teachers are qualified to handle the listening and reading parts properly	22
Moderate	68.6	3.43	Total	

In response to item no. 19 the participants indicate that they are not fully qualified and capable of handling the writing component properly. They also reveal that they didn't receive enough training on how to handle the

material in the new textbooks. In spite of that, their response to item no. 21 is highly positive and they indicate that they enjoy teaching the new curriculum.

Table 6

Means, percentages and degrees of response to the items related to planning and evaluation.

Degree	Percentage %	Means	Item	No.
High	75.0	3.75	The objectives of the curriculum are stated clearly and in advance	23
Moderate	67.4	3.37	I feel the curriculum is based on proper market needs analysis and assessment	24
Moderate	68.0	3.40	The new English curriculum has proper evaluation of the methods of teaching	25
Moderate	60.6	3.03	Since the introduction of the new curriculum evaluation of the textbooks is carried out regularly	26
Moderate	65.8	3.29	The curriculum provides proper methods to assess the students' performance and achievement	27
Moderate	67.4	3.37	Total	

In response to item no. 23, 75.0% of the participants indicated that the objectives of the curriculum are clearly stated and in advance. Stating the objectives in advance is one of the prerequisites and main aspects of a well-planned curriculum. The degree of response to item 24 is moderate where 67.4% of the participants feel that the curriculum was based on proper needs analysis and assessment of the market and real life demand. Responding to item 25, 68% of the participants stated that the new curriculum has proper evaluation of the methods of teaching and 66.6% only stated that evaluation of the textbooks is carried out regularly and 65.8 % only stated that the curriculum provides proper methods to assess the students' performance. Evaluation of the methodology, the textbook materials, the students' achievement and the teachers' performance is an inseparable and indispensable part of a successful curriculum.

Table 7

Ranking of domains contributing to the congruity or disparity between the contents of the curriculum and the requirements of the CA.

Degree	Percentage %	Means	Domain	Rank
High	71.2	3.56	Methodology	3
High	73.4	3.67	Emphasis on the oral skills	1
High	72.6	3.63	Contents of the written skills	2
Moderate	68.6	3.43	Teacher training	4
Moderate	67.4	3.37	Planning and evaluation	5
High	70.6	3.53	Total	

The results presented in the table above show that the degree of response to the

items in the various domains is high for domains 1, 2, and 3 but the degree is moderate for domains 4 and 5.

Table 8

Means of congruity or disparity between teachers' assessment of the new Palestinian English Curriculum and the requirements of the CA.

Std.	Means	Level	Variable
.53	3.37	M.A and above	Qualification
.49	3.56	B.A	
.44	3.60	Diploma	
.30	3.37	Less than 5 years	Experience
.46	3.51	5-10 years	
.56	3.59	More than 10 years	
.47	3.53	Male	Gender
.52	3.54	Female	

Table 9

Results of ANOVA according to the qualification and experience variables.

Sig.	Fr	Means	Df	Sum	Source	Variable
.255	1.38	0.33	2	0.67	Between groups	Qualification
		0.24	124	30.43	Within groups	
			126	31.10	Total	
0.28	1.26	0.31	2	0.622	Between groups	Experience
		0.24	124	30.48	Within groups	
			126	31.10	Total	
.940	.006	1.39	1	1.39	Between groups	Gender
		.249	125	31.10	Within groups	
			126	31.10	Total	

The results presented in table 9 show that there are no significant differences at $p = .05$ in relation to the congruity or disparity between the teachers' assessment of the contents of the new Palestinian English Curriculum and the requirements of the CA according to the qualification, experience and gender variables.

Conclusion

After this thorough discussion of the aspects underlying the CA and the discussion of the findings revealed as a result of the teachers' responses to the items on the questionnaire, it is obvious that the new English language curriculum conforms in principle to only some of the aspects of the CA. It is quite clear that the curriculum was introduced hastily without taking into consideration that such a curriculum needs a lot of preparation, appropriate equipment, proper and adequate teacher training to handle the various skills

and activities. Moreover, the results show that the new curriculum does not contribute much to the students' knowledge, performance and standard in English. The material is bulky and not easy to cover in the time allocated for that. In addition, the participants felt that the new curriculum does not promote the students' critical thinking skills nor does it encourage the students to develop their own learning strategies and independence in learning. On the other hand, there are some encouraging results, such as firstly, the teachers find the curriculum interesting and appealing to the new generation. Secondly, the reading component is relevant to the students' cultural background. Thirdly, the material presented in the new curriculum is authentic and related to the students' real life experience. Fourthly, it has good grammar exercises and the teachers expressed satisfaction with the writing component and they stated they enjoy teaching the new curriculum.

Recommendations

After this thorough discussion of the various aspects of the CA and the findings revealed in this study, the following recommendations can be provided:

1. Based on the results revealed in item no. 1 of the questionnaire, the participants stated that there is enough emphasis on the listening skill in the curriculum. On the other hand, the majority of the participants indicated that there are not enough audio-visual aids to teach the various skills, especially the listening. So, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education should have, from the beginning, taken this fact into account and tried to provide schools with enough necessary equipment to help make the educational process easier and to aspire for a better outcome in this respect.
2. If the Ministry of Education, in the first place, was aware of the fact that they cannot afford to provide all schools with such expensive audio-visual equipment, then they should have instructed the writers of the curriculum not to place so much emphasis on the listening activities and replace them with activities that do not require such equipment and at the same time, foster the listening through hand-made aids or simple cassette recorders, posters, stickers and so on.
3. It is recommended that, if any amendment is planned in the near future, activities and exercises that promote the students' critical thinking and creative thinking skills be embodied in the textbooks.
4. The curriculum should contain material, activities and tasks that enhance the students' independence and autonomy in learning and make them take more responsibility for their own learning activities.
5. The curriculum should embody more reading tasks and more material that fosters the reading habit.
6. There is not enough emphasis on the writing component. It is recommended that writing should be given more attention and be taught in a correct systematic way.

7. The curriculum, as stated by the participants is quite bulky and ambitious and not easy to cover in the allotted time. Thus, it is recommended that the curriculum be reviewed and certain activities which can be dispensed with should be removed from the syllabus.
8. It is recommended that less emphasis should be placed on teaching grammar in the explicit and conventional way. Instead, grammar should be taught implicitly and within contexts taken from real situations.
9. It is recommended that vocabulary exercises be directed towards teaching vocabulary for fluency and usage purposes and not in the conventional old translation method with lists of words and their meanings in Arabic given to the students to memorize.
10. Grammar and vocabulary exercises could be merged together for the maximum benefit of using words in grammatically sound sentences and contexts.
11. In response to item no. 11 in the questionnaire, only 55.6% of the participants indicated that the contents in the curriculum are easy for the students to handle and understand. When a revision is made of this curriculum, the committee and the curriculum writer should revise the areas of difficulties and try to find a solution for this issue if they find that it poses a problem for the students and affects their level of achievement and performance.
12. It is recommended that the teachers should be given enough training on how to handle the various skills and how to do the various activities to ensure maximum benefit and smooth teaching process.

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