The English Language Teaching Situation in Palestine

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Abstract The modern-day areas of Palestine corresponding to the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip represent some interesting and dynamic sociolinguistic realities. First, although these are areas in which colloquial Arabic has traditionally been spoken by a majority of the population, several other languages have been in use in educational domains especially Classical Arabic, Turkish, and French among Christians. However, the British Mandate period saw the establishment of English as an important language of political, economic, and cultural power within Palestine. Yet with the establishment of the State of Israel in areas that were once part of British Mandate Palestine, a new language was introduced to the area, Modern Israeli Hebrew. Still, English has endured, partly as a colonial leftover, but also increasingly as a window onto the world for Palestinians. The present chapter explores the enduring yet changing role that English has played and continues to play in the educational system of Palestine. The chapter concludes with evaluations of current English teaching and educational policy in Palestine and provides suggestions for enhancing this policy in order to promote economic development and growth while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Keywords Palestine • English language • EFL • TEFL • ELT • Curriculum • Teacher Training

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1 Introduction

Palestine[1] has a complex history due to several different geopolitical, cultural, and religious factors. First, as a literal crossroads between East and West, its whole long history has been one of conquest and conflict between Eastern empires (e.g. the (Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Phoenicians, Ummayyads) arching westward and Western empires (e.g. Egyptians, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, French, Turkish, and British) arching eastward. Next, as the cradle of Judaeo-Christian monotheism and status as a land of prophets within Islam, its spiritual legacy, while indubitably glorious, has placed it within a tug of war struggle between the three major monotheistic religions. Finally, Palestine's importance as a strategic gateway to Western Asia and the Arabian peninsula in the dying days of the Ottoman empire put it on a crash course with British colonial aspirations in the region. But what has all this to do with language in general and English in particular? Everything. For without a proper understanding of how Palestine's unique and tumultuous history has coloured its equally complex and challenging present, it is near impossible to make sense of its current linguistic situation and its relationship with English. To this end, this chapter will provide a brief overview of the linguistic history of Palestine, leading to a discussion of the current status of English in both Palestinian society and education. Next, some key studies that highlight recent initiatives to enhance English language teaching (ELT) in the area will be presented. Finally, the chapter concludes with a set of policy recommendations for further development of ELT in ways that support Palestinian desires for autonomy and cultural authenticity.

1.1 Palestine: A Brief Linguistic History from Persians to Ottomans

Historically, Palestine has been home to many languages. Due to its frequent conquest by neighbouring powers, Palestine has a long history of diglossia in which local languages have been spoken alongside more prestigious languages of government and civilization and lingua francas. A full discussion of this varied linguistic history is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is worth mentioning that throughout most of Palestine's history up until and including the present, its elites and upwardly mobile inhabitants have had to become bilingual if not multilingual. Thus, in the Hellenistic period, Greek became a language of prestige for well-to-do

[1] It should be mentioned here that "Palestine" will be used in two senses in this chapter. Initially, it will refer to historical Palestine, which largely corresponds to the present-day territory of the State of Israel along with the Gaza strip and the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Later, when discussing the more recent history of the area especially after the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel, Palestine will be taken to refer only to the Gaza strip and West Bank areas commonly known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) since East Jerusalem was annexed by Israel in 1982.

inhabitants of Palestine, spoken alongside their native Aramaic, which was introduced to the area by the Persians. Palestinian Jews would also have learned Hebrew as a liturgical language. Later, the Romans introduced Latin to the region. When the Arab armies of the Caliph Omar invaded in the late seventh century, the Classical Arabic of the Qur'an became the prestige language used in government, written communication, and in religious education in the newly established Muslim community. Over time, Arabic, adapted and nativized as a Palestinian Vernacular, came to replace the native Syriac-Aramaic of Palestine to the extent that even the Christians and Jews of the area adopted it as their first language (Amara 2003, p. 219). Thus, the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities of Palestine shared Palestinian Arabic as a spoken language and had Greek and/or Syriac-Aramaic, Hebrew, and Classical Arabic as their liturgical languages respectively. In addition, Armenian was spoken by the Armenian Christian minority in the area.

The invasion of the Western European Catholic crusaders in the twelfth century re-introduced Latin alongside French, Italian, German, and early forms of English, the main languages spoken by the hotchpotch occupying armies (Amara 2003, p. 219). And although the crusader occupation was short-lived, the linguistic legacy was the establishment of Western European Catholic schools among Christians, creating a niche for Western languages namely Latin, French, and Italian as languages of Western culture and affinity. Meanwhile, the incorporation of Palestine into the Ottoman Empire added a new linguistic element- Turkish. As Turks administered the area, Turkish became the language of government and the upper elites. The official status of Turkish lasted until the end of World War I, when the British Mandatory period began.

1.2 Palestine Under the British

By the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire, known as the sick man of Europe, was near collapse. Thus, the conditions were ripe for the British Empire to extend and consolidate its interests in the Middle East. On the one hand, the Suez Canal in Egypt provided a vital transit route for British owned goods to and from their East Indian and Far Eastern colonies. To protect this trade route, and counterbalance French interests in the region, Britain turned its sights on Palestine. In return, Britain agreed with France that Lebanon and Syria would become part of a French Mandate in the Levant. Another incentive for the British to take control of Palestine with its ports was to have easy access to petroleum transported overland from Iraq. Having found willing political partners in the Kingdoms of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the Trucial States, and Iraq, British suzerainty over most of the Middle East was almost total.

Linguistically, the establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine in 1922 heralded the rise of the English language in Palestine. Hebrew, which was in the process of being revived among European Jewish settlers, was also becoming increasingly important as the settlers became more numerous. Already, in the late

Ottoman period, British missionary schools (Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Quakers) had introduced English as a language of instruction among certain sections of Palestinian society among other foreign missions such as those from Germany, Russia, France, and Italy (see Amara 2003; Marten 2006). Now, with full British administration of Palestine, English was declared an official language of Palestine alongside Arabic, and Hebrew, which had become the preferred mode of communication among Jewish settlers (Amara 2003, p. 219). Amara also notes that there were separate schools for Arabs and Jews and that Jewish settlers, as the newcomers to Palestine, were obliged to learn Arabic whereas the Arabs did not have to learn Hebrew (ibid.).

The implications of the British Mandate for the status of English were numerous. First, it replaced Turkish as the *de facto* language of government. Second, in light of the large waves of Jewish immigration from Eastern and Central Europe, English, viewed as a neutral language, soon became a lingua franca between the numerous European Jewish settlers and the original inhabitants who invariably spoke Palestinian Arabic as a mother tongue (Amara 2003, p. 220). Thus, in terms of language education, English became a popular second language studied in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim schools in the area. This position continued right up until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

1.3 1948 to 1967

Once the State of Israel was established across most of historical Palestine, the British Mandate effectively ended. The remaining parts of historical Palestine, namely the Gaza Strip, the West Bank of the River Jordan and East Jerusalem were entrusted by the British to their allies Egypt and Jordan respectively (Amara 2003, p. 220). As such, Gaza and the West Bank and East Jerusalem were obliged to adopt the English language policies of Egypt and Jordan respectively. In both areas, English was promoted as a language of science and trade and was taught as a subject from Grade 5 onward as the only foreign language in public schools alongside Modern Standard Arabic, the official language of both countries. Outside of the state-run schools, private Christian-run mission schools continued to teach a variety of languages: French, English, Italian, German, or Russian.

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 resulted in one of the largest refugee crises in modern history with some 750,000 Palestinian Arabs being uprooted from their homes now within the borders of the fledgling Israeli state (Manna' 2013). In order to cater to the humanitarian needs of these refugees, who ended up settling in numerous camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, the UN set up the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In the 1960s, UNRWA established its first schools in the refugee camps (UNRWA 2016). These schools continue to this day and currently account for 24 % of all schools in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Dajani and McLaughlin 2009).

1.4 1967 to 1993

After the 6-Day War in which Israel captured the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, these areas of Palestine came to be known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). The administration of these areas fell under the Israeli government. Yet, interestingly, the English language curricula from the Egyptian and Jordanian period were kept in place. Thus, Gaza continued to use the Egyptian curriculum for English while Jordan supplied the West Bank's English curriculum (Amara 2003, p. 220). Only East Jerusalem came under Israeli educational policy. The net effect of this situation was to perpetuate the use of teaching and methodologies that were not necessarily aligned with the needs of the Palestinians.

Meanwhile, as Palestinians began to chafe under some 20 years of Israeli occupation by the mid 1980s, a resistance movement, the first national *Intifada* (uprising), began in December 1987, demanding Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian territories. The ensuing bloodshed on both sides of the conflict forced Israeli and Palestinian parties to negotiate a peace treaty. This culminated in the Oslo Peace Accords agreed between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993, paving the way for limited autonomy and Palestinian Arab administration of Gaza and the West Bank for the first time in modern history.

1.5 The 1993 Oslo Accords and Their Implications for ELT in Palestine

A major effect of the Oslo Accords was to hand over limited power for self-government to the Palestinians. Thus, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established and charged with regulating the day-to-day affairs of the OPT covering both Gaza and the West Bank, with East Jerusalem remaining firmly under Israeli control.

In terms of educational policy in general and ELT policy in particular, the greatest impact for Palestine of the Oslo Accords was the green light given to establish a national curriculum independent of both Egypt and Jordan. Thus, in the years following 1993, great effort was made to develop an educational curriculum that would be suitable to the needs of Palestinians living within the OPT (Dajani and McLaughlin 2009, p. 44).

Writing in the post-Oslo period, Amara (2003) notes that English is the most widely known and used foreign language in Gaza and the West Bank, having greatly increased in use even after the departure of the British from the area. Indeed, Amara states that "Knowledge of English is a powerful status symbol and class marker" in Palestine (2003, p. 221). Clearly, recognition of the importance of English in, and for, Palestine was to have an impact on the newly developed Palestinian ELT curriculum. In order to make this new curriculum as effective as possible, the Palestinian

MOEHE decided to collaborate with MacMillan Education to develop the *English for Palestine* (EP) textbook series, which debuted in 2000 (Dajani and McLaughlin 2009, p. 29). This resulted in a specific curriculum for the OPT being gradually implemented between 2000 and 2006 (Dajani and McLaughlin 2009, p. 27), which is still in effect to this day.

Dajani and McLaughlin point out that public schools make up 70 % of all the schools in Gaza and the West Bank. The second largest educational provider in Palestine is UNRWA, which administers 24 % of all schools in the PA. Finally, charities and religious schools account for the remaining 6 % (Dajani and McLaughlin 2009, p. 44). This indicates that government schools have become relatively more numerous, increasing from 64 to 70 % of all schools in Gaza and the West Bank. It appears that this growth has been at the expense of private schools, which made up 13 % of all Palestinian schools only a decade earlier as reported by Sabri (1997, p. 101).[2]

Amara (2003) looks at changes in foreign language education policies a few years after the PA had assumed the administration of the OPT. His research takes a language planning perspective and looks not only at the grade school system but also at universities. Amara observes that since English is used extensively in tertiary education in Palestine, the MoEHE had opted to start teaching English to first graders as mentioned above (Dajani and McLaughlin 2009, pp. 39–42). Thus, the next section of the chapter will review several studies of English at the elementary level and upwards.

2 Teaching English as a Foreign Language Issues & Challenges in Palestine

2.1 Issues & Challenges at the Public Schools Grades 1–12 Level

As alluded to above, one of the most pivotal educational policy changes regarding English since the PA came to power in the mid-1990s was the decision to start teaching English from the first grade (age 6) as a core subject instead of from the fifth grade (age 11) as had been the situation previously (Nicolai 2007, p. 20). This change in policy appears to have been motivated by an awareness on the part of the Palestinian educational authorities of the importance of English in a society that

[2] Given that such private schools tended to be Church-run or otherwise Christian charity-affiliated (Dajani and McLaughlin 2009, p. 44), this significant drop in percentage might reflect the considerable and ongoing emigration of Christian Palestinians from PA-controlled areas (see Weiner 2005, p. 6). Such an exodus would almost certainly result in a negative impact on the Palestinian economy, further exacerbating challenges to providing quality education across all schools in the area.

values education as critical to the future success of its people (Dajani and McLaughlin 2009). In this regard, Dajani and McLaughlin note that

> Curriculum developers, policy makers, teachers and parents would like Palestinian children to learn English from early stages since the English Language is the language of science and technology, a fundamental tool for pursuing higher education, and a means for communicating with a wider community (2009, p. 44).

Despite such widespread recognition of the importance of English, several recent studies have highlighted challenges both within the education system and outside of it that hinder the teaching of English in Palestine.

As mentioned before, students in Palestine used to start learning English at the age of 11 (at the fifth grade level). Later, under the PA, the Palestinian MoEHE mandated that students should start learning English at the first grade level. Many educators and researchers questioned the benefits of such a change in policy. For instance Shehadeh and Dwaik (2013) questioned the axiom that "earlier is better" in ELT and suggested that, instead of spending valuable money and effort on ELT in the earlier grades, thus spreading resources too thinly across too many grades, the educational authorities should consider reverting to teaching English from Grade 5 onward and focus on improving the quality of instruction and materials from that grade onward. Consequently, there is no consensus among Palestinian educators and researchers when to start introducing EFL in Palestinian public schools. This will definitely have a negative effect on the quality of English teaching particularly if the majority of Palestinian EFL teachers disagree with such a policy.

According to Shehadeh and Dwaik (2013), the quality of English instruction is also affected by the large class sizes, few periods of instruction per week, lack of access to technology as another impediment to learning English, and teaching English in a cultural vacuum, which makes it seem irrelevant and unappealing to students. Further, Shehadeh and Dwaik note that because of the diglossic nature of Arabic, young students who have to learn English have often not even developed critical thinking skills in Standard Arabic before studying English, further hampering their development in English. There can be no doubt that such factors, especially large class sizes, pose serious challenges to ELT within Palestinian public schools.

As mentioned above, large class sizes create significant learning challenges. With an average of 40 students per class, the opportunity for teachers to provide individualized feedback and attention is virtually non-existent. Also, there is very little opportunity for students to actually practice the language. Further, a lack of educational materials and resources and the instability of the Internet are other factors that impact negatively on English language teaching and learning in Palestinian public schools (Dajani and McLaughlin 2009).

Teaching English through the medium of Arabic, the students' native language, is also a serious impediment to improving students' English skills. Abdelrazeq, one of the present authors, is a practicum supervisor in Palestine who has observed a very large number of pre-service and in-service teachers. Abdelrazeq reports his utter shock at how often Palestinian EFL teachers use Arabic during English lessons. From

the authors' personal perspective and experience, the reasons behind such a heavy reliance on Arabic as a medium for teaching English are twofold: First, most teachers have not received adequate teacher training and development to support teaching English through the medium of English. Second, and perhaps more troubling, is that these educators, who are not native speakers of English themselves, never received adequate opportunities to practice and speak in English while they were learning it. Put bluntly, based on extensive observation by the authors, a significant number of EFL teachers in Palestine appear to have limited proficiency in English.

Corroborating this observation, Dajani and McLaughlin (2009) note that speaking skills are taught either inadequately or not at all. The activities prescribed in the textbooks used to teach the English skills (listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) do not stimulate and challenge students to think critically and creatively. Focusing on a Grade 3 textbook, these researchers detected a very limited range of activity types in order to stimulate young learners. They observe that listen and point, listen and say, count and say, and point and say are the main activities, leaving little room for the cognitive development of the students. Indeed, Dajani and McLaughlin argue that an emphasis on mere repetition of patterns is meaningless.

Still highlighting challenges in oral production, effective teaching of pronunciation is a major issue. Clearly, a foreign language learner who has not developed sufficient accuracy in pronunciation cannot be said to speak the target language proficiently. Yet Al-Najjar (2012), who investigated the teaching of pronunciation using the EP curriculum at the Grade 10 level, concluded that teachers at this level are poorly equipped to teach pronunciation effectively and that appropriate curricular materials are lacking. He recommends that instructors be better trained to teach pronunciation and that pronunciation be taught throughout the grade levels using learning domains that integrate pronunciation with the other units in the EP curriculum (2012).

Using effective language teaching methodologies and differentiation of instruction where teachers are able to use a variety of teaching strategies is also a great challenge. Teachers abide by textbook activities to such an extent that students end up performing the activities at the end of each reading passage in a routine and unchallenging way. Following the same routine for every unit in the textbook certainly does little to intrigue, motivate, and engage students in the learning process. For instance, focusing on Grade 10, Al Mazloum and Qeshta (2007) noted a dearth of group work and cooperative learning methods among teachers at this grade level. They recommended in-service workshops be provided to equip these teachers with the ability to use such strategies in order to better cope with large class sizes.

Teaching to the test is yet another challenge that limits teachers' ability to vary their methods of instruction. This situation is exacerbated by the time pressures placed on teachers to finish the units in the textbook in order to assist their students to pass exams. Indeed, Fennell (2007) observed that the English periods are dedicated to passing exams, largely in parallel with the *Tawjihi* (lit. 'orientation') exam (see Sect. 3 below), which focuses on grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing as distinct, unrelated components of language proficiency. Within this context, Fennell also observed an overtly grammar-centered approach to learning the lan-

guage that also prioritizes meeting curricular goals within limited time constraints over adopting communicative approaches. Such a lack of variety of teaching strategies, coupled with an overemphasis on grammar while using a single textbook, clearly hinders Palestinian EFL learners from developing a satisfactory level of English proficiency even after graduating from high school.

An additional challenge in the Palestinian EFL context is the policy of using EP as the sole textbook for each grade level. Indeed, fixating on a single textbook series severely restricts students from accessing an adequate and engaging range of target language learning materials, hampering students' learning across all English skill areas. In this connection, Yamchi (2006) laments the educational administration's preoccupation with covering all aspects of the textbook. Exacerbating this problem, Yamchi observes a serious lack of extra materials and teaching-support equipment. Thus, access to other books, articles, the internet, and production aides such as photocopiers and a printers are other obstacles to enhancing the curriculum.

The incongruence between the MoEHE English curriculum goals and those of EP, its chosen textbook, is another serious challenge. Dajani and McLaughlin (2009), for instance, observed that there was a clear disconnect between curricular goals for Grade 3 English and the textbook used for that grade. Also, within the materials themselves, they found a very restricted range of activity types in order to stimulate young learners. Such a situation not only negatively impacts students' engagement and motivation to learn English, but also affects their learning in the next grade level. Put simply, the lack of harmony between the textbook used and the curriculum goals for each grade level leaves students unprepared for the textbook material in the next grade. This results in a situation in which each grade level has become a separate entity by itself that is not connected to the subsequent grade level in terms of what learners are required to learn.

Ensuring a strong curricular connection between grade levels while enriching textbooks with relevant and interesting tasks are crucial elements in helping students to improve their English skills. In support of this observation, Rabba (2012) found in his study that the addition of supplementary texts above and beyond the authorized EP textbook was beneficial in keeping students' interest just as curricular variety was vital to successful teaching. This strict adherence to the textbook comes from the pressure placed on teachers to finish the units in the book on time. Such a deplorable situation is further compounded by a lack of workplace morale and motivation for teachers to do any extra work. According to Yamchi (2006), Palestinian teachers' lack of motivation is caused, to a great extent, by the meager wages that they earn. Indeed, the relatively low status of teachers in Palestine combined with the inadequate compensation and benefits that they receive discourage many bright students from considering teaching as a profession. For instance, within the English diploma programs at some of the universities in Palestine, most English majors, who are considered some of the top performers on the Tawjihi exam (91.5/100) seem to pursue an English diploma as a back up option. Regrettably, virtually none of these high academic achievers seriously consider the teaching profession as a first choice for their future careers.

All of these issues adversely impact the quality of English language teaching in Palestine. Consequently, students graduate from high school with such poor English skills that they are not ready for the English courses that they have to take at university. Enriching the textbooks by incorporating other stimulating materials is a vital first step in enhancing classroom learning. Next, harmonizing the goals embedded in the textbooks and any additional materials with those of the English curriculum is a critical next step in order to help learners meet curricular expectations. Needless to say, every teacher must be given a copy of the MoEHE's English curriculum given that, lamentably, a large number of EFL teachers in Palestine do not seem to have a copy of this document. Worse yet, some teachers do not even know of its existence (Personal Communication 2016).

Lack of knowledge and awareness about the curriculum in a textbook-driven learning environment where little enrichment exists has a profoundly negative effect on students' English levels. This, coupled with the imperative to move students through the system so that they can get out of school and into the workforce quickly, only makes matters worse. According to Yamchi (2006), students can only be failed a maximum of two times, resulting in mixed ability classes where teachers struggle to teach effectively across wide levels of proficiency. In an English class of 30 students at the intermediate or high school level, it is not strange to find students who are unable to read or write properly. At the intermediate level, it is not uncommon to encounter students who are unable to write the English alphabet correctly. Consequently, even after graduation from high school, a large number of students are unable to communicate effectively in writing or speaking.

In addition to the aforementioned English language teaching issues, the context in which students live also makes it even more challenging to teach and focus not only English, but on learning in general as one of the present authors, who currently lives in the OPT, witnesses firsthand. Thus, we concur with Yamchi (2006), Nicolai (2007) and Fennell (2009) who have all pointed out the consequences of living under the Israeli occupation; frequent road closures and checkpoints, strikes, demonstrations, funerals, and military incursions all amount to making ELT or any other educational undertaking, for that matter, extremely challenging. Life under the occupation is neither predictable nor normal in any sense. Teachers at the public schools and instructors at the university level try hard to take into consideration the context in which they work and live. They do their utmost to adapt to the current circumstances and lead a normal life. However, no matter how hard they try to cope, the deplorable living conditions have an unmistakable impact on Palestinian students' engagement, motivation and willingness to learn English or any other subject.

Despite such great obstacles, staying engaged and motivated to learn might be achieved through online study when students are unable to physically attend school for any of the reasons cited above. For instance, Shraim and Khlaif (2010) look at how the use of IT can overcome some of the contextual challenges discussed above in Palestine. While not replacing face-to-face learning altogether, Shraim and Khlaif note the value of e-learning as supplementary to more traditional learning environments. However, they also note that an admitted drawback, of course, is that Internet

and/or power is not always available or reliable, especially in rural areas. Further, due to the ongoing potential for conflict, internet access cannot always be guaranteed.

Putting these logistical challenges to one side, let us return to ways of improving the teaching of English at the school level. In this regard, Aqel (2009) conducted a comprehensive study of ELT curriculum and teaching practices among 11th graders. As a result, Aqel recommends the following: (1) reduction of curricular units to allow for deeper mastery of content (2) revision of EP textbooks on a frequent basis (3) consultation with teachers on modifications to the textbook (4) inclusion of a greater variety of literary genres (5) using a variety of materials for mixed level classes (6) focusing on fluency (7) encouraging independent learning (8) integrating more technology into the classroom and (9) including a greater variety of writing tasks and types. Having reviewed the major challenges that Palestinian ELT professional face with the government schools, a discussion of ELT at the post-secondary is now in order.

2.2 English Language Teaching Challenges at the University Level

All Palestinian Universities place a great emphasis on developing their students' English Language proficiency in all language skill areas. After graduating high school, most of these students enter Palestinian universities. Their English proficiency is mediocre at best except among a minority of students who graduate from private schools where the medium of instruction is English. Consequently, the majority of Palestinian students do not proficient enough in the English language to succeed at university, where a sound knowledge of English is imperative. Indeed, at the university level, all academic programs require students to read material in English. This is because most of the readings and textbooks are written in English. This lack of proficiency in English comes as no surprise given the various issues and challenges that have been discussed above. Yet despite this deplorable situation, to date, there has not been much quality research done on the English language teaching challenges at the university level.

As mentioned, students at the undergraduate and graduate levels face enormous challenges when required to read materials and textbooks in English. Despite this, many university professors continue to assign readings in English at both undergraduate and graduate levels. As a result, students have no choice but to get outside help in translating such material. Sometimes they pay large sums of money for these translations, which are usually poorly done. And even when Arabic translations of English language textbooks are available and are provided by some professors to their students, these translations are also substandard. In light of the above, it is of paramount importance to improve university students' English language skills before and during their studies at the university.

While any enhancements to pre-university ELT will take time to yield results at the university level, given the present situation in which high school graduates do not have the requisite English skills upon entering university, post-secondary institutions should plan for some remedial courses or specific programs to improve students' English skills. Currently, most universities oblige their students to take two English courses, regardless of their major, as part of their undergraduate degree requirements. For instance, at one Palestinian university, all students must take ENG 141 and ENG 231. ENG 141 course focuses on reading while ENG 231 focuses on writing. Even though each course concentrates on a specific skill, the other skills are also integrated into the instructional process. However, clearly, a couple of courses are not enough to improve students' English proficiency. Thus, there is a critical need for more courses and programs to assist students to improve their English skills particularly those whose academic programs require intensive and high level reading in English.

Developing an intensive English program where university students spend a semester or two learning English would be a worthwhile and important initiative that should be taken into serious consideration. Some Palestinian educators even recommend developing English for academic purposes (EAP) or English for specific purpose (ESP) programs. To illustrate, Qaddomi (2013) calls upon ELT professionals and administrators working at Palestinian universities, who wish to serve the needs of their students, to develop such career-specific skill-related EFL curricula sooner rather than later. Thus, according to students' needs, tailored programs could be developed. For instance, in Qaddomi's own study, students reported the need to learn and improve their English to assist them with their jobs.

English programs could be designed to offer a variety of courses where each course or group of courses focuses on specific English skills depending on students' needs. Therefore, an EFL needs assessment should be conducted for specific groups of university students. For instance, Abu Alyan (2013), who investigated students' oral communication and pronunciation issues among University EFL students at a large university in Gaza, recommends providing learners with authentic EFL listening materials and speaking opportunities. Other researchers such as Abu Shawish and Abdelraheem (2010) investigated writing challenges among EFL majors at Gaza University. They suggest incorporating a greater variety of writing activities that build on students' prior knowledge and experiences. In contrast, Saleem (2010) based on his own research among university students, argues for the implementation of an intensive reading program not only at the university level, but also across the Palestinian education system as a whole. What all these studies indicate is that a needs-based approach to ELT program design would be most appropriate.

In addition to developing English programs that focus on specific purposes and courses that cater to specific English skills, there is a vital need to enhance instructional strategies at the university level. A large number of instructors still use the traditional way of lecturing without engaging students in the learning process. A shift from teacher-centered teaching approaches to student-centered ones could assist in better engaging students in the learning process. To illustrate, Farrah (2011) found that collaborative learning activities were very effective in teaching English

and were rated highly by students. Yet improving instructional strategies alone is not enough; using interesting, context-related and nationally-relevant material is also crucial. For instance, Nasser and Wong (2013) discovered that de-contextualized and de-nationalized content embedded in EFL teaching materials impairs the overall effectiveness of ELT in Palestine. They attribute the use of such de-nationalized content as part of an effort to downplay Palestinian nationalism. However, such de-nationalized material only serves to alienate both the teachers and students who have to use it.

Pedagogical challenges aside, the harsh circumstances under which the Palestinian people live negatively impacts the education system at all levels i.e. at the public schools and universities alike. In the OPT, armed conflict, death, injury, social and economic distress, and a lack of freedom all have serious consequences for the education system. Thus, Nasser and Wong (2013) stated that key challenges to EFL in Palestine are related primarily to the Israeli occupation. Citing just one such challenge, these researchers observe that road blockades and checkpoints, a function of the chronic militarism in the area, exact an enormous toll on students' and teachers' ability to reach schools regularly.

2.3 Palestinian English as a Foreign Language Curriculum

For ELT in Palestine, teachers from Grade 1–12 use textbooks. These textbooks are selected by the MoEHE and the teachers have no say whatsoever in the selection process. In fact, teachers often complain about the content and density of the material that needs to be covered during the school year. The English textbooks and the teachers' manuals are the only documents that teachers are given to teach English at all grade levels. Before 1993 the situation was not much different; Palestinian EFL teachers used textbooks selected by the Jordanian and Egyptian education authorities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip respectively. Teachers in West Bank used to use the Jordanian English textbooks while English teachers in the Gaza Strip used the Egyptian English textbooks.

As discussed above, the current Grade 1–12 education system in Palestine is textbook-driven. This raises the significant and critical question: Is there an English as a Foreign Language Palestinian Curriculum? There appears to be widespread confusion; For many Palestinian EFL teachers, the textbook *is* the curriculum. This is because they are not provided with a document that specifies the general and specific expectations that they are required to achieve by the end of each grade level. An effective English curriculum would specify what students are expected to achieve at the end of each grade level through Grades 1–12 in areas such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and socio-cultural competence and media literacy.

In the absence of such a curriculum document, Palestinian EFL teachers are left with a textbook that prescribes not only the way they must teach, but also the material that they are required to teach. Usually, an English textbook has 12 units on a

variety to topics. A typical unit has two reading lessons on a related topic such as business. The activities in each unit focus on reading, vocabulary development, listening, speaking, writing, and grammar. From our observations and after speaking with a large number of Palestinian teachers, we have come to understand that virtually all of them prioritize teaching vocabulary and grammar over all other areas. Consequently, listening, speaking, and writing, if taught at all, are not taught properly. This is why Palestinian students graduate from high school with a relatively solid knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. In comparison, their listening, speaking, and writing skills are very weak.

The general and specific expectations for each of these skill areas, which each teacher must teach by the end of the grade level that s/he teaches, are not clear. Also, the density and the amount of the material that Palestinian EFL teachers are required to cover make it very challenging for them to adequately teach the other skills such as listening, speaking, and writing. Beyond the absence of a guiding English curriculum document, it is worth noting that the vast majority of Palestinian EFL teachers are English majors who do not even possess a diploma in teaching. As a result, in 2014, the MoEHE started to mandate that all new teachers possess a diploma in education in addition to their undergraduate degrees. In the meantime, while in-service professional development opportunities exist, the quality of such development is still questionable. Thus, the actual training of Palestinian EFL teachers is another issue that impacts the effectiveness of their teaching. We will expand on this issue in the next section.

3 Assessment and Evaluation Practices in TEFL in Palestine

Using a variety of student-specific assessment and instructional approaches will assist teachers in meeting the learning needs of each student in their classrooms. A teacher will be able to adapt both teaching and assessment strategies to individual student's needs, if the teacher has received appropriate and up-to-date training in both areas. As mentioned above in this chapter, the majority of Palestinian in-service EFL teachers lack the required teacher preparation and in-service professional development to achieve these goals. Consequently, their knowledge of a variety of assessment strategies is limited. So what are the current assessment and evaluation practices among today's in-service Palestinian teachers?

In terms of assessment, in the observation of the authors, Palestinian EFL Teachers appear to rely almost entirely on summative evaluation techniques. Summative assessment tests are administered at the end of each unit or on a monthly basis. The main purpose of these tests is to gauge students' grasp of the material taught. In addition to summative assessment, formative assessment is also used, though to a much lesser degree. Formative assessment is used to provide students with feedback for improvement. From our observations and after talking to many in-service teachers, we have come to believe that most teachers wish they had more time to use formative assessment techniques. However, this is almost impossible because these instructors are under great pressure to cover the mandated textbook units within the allotted time frame. Adding to this pressure is the fact that,

during their annual performance appraisals, the teachers' instructional supervisor can raise an issue if the teachers are not covering the textbook material quickly enough, especially if they have not taught all the units that they are expected to by the time the appraisal period begins.

Besides summative and formative assessment, proficiency tests and portfolios are also used, though to a far lesser degree. Indeed, due to the limited scope of assessment at present, the MoEHE is trying to train teachers to incorporate different types of assessment and evaluation practices. In terms of the actual development of these assessment tools, it is the teachers themselves who must develop them, often without adequate training or support. Such tests usually focus on grammar, vocabulary, and reading. Still, other language skills such as speaking, listening and writing are also assessed sporadically through specific activities designed to allow students to practice these skills such as conversational speaking, listening to conversations and/or stories, and writing essays or business letters. At the present time, however, due to several factors, speaking, listening, and writing skills are not prioritized in the curriculum and so they are neither taught nor assessed sufficiently.

In an exam-based educational environment such as Palestine, teaching to the test is a serious issue. It is no exaggeration to say that the Palestinian education system is test-driven. The ultimate symbol of this is the Tawjihi exam that all students graduating from high school must take in their final year. The results of this exam, through which students are evaluated across all subject areas during a 2-week period, determine a student's future. Indeed, according to their exam scores, students are able to choose the university and the specialization that they would like to pursue. Given the incredibly high stakes of such an exam, all teachers, particularly at the high school level, wind up teaching to the test; their main concern is to help their students score the highest possible grade on this exam.

The backwash effect of this situation is that EFL teaching and learning are dominated by the Tawjihi exam and the items that are expected to appear on it. Consequently, at the end of each unit, students are faced with simple fill-in-the blank type questions, vocabulary exercises, grammar exercises, and reading comprehension tasks, with virtually no focus on speaking, listening, or writing. The net result of this is that, in order to avoid surprises for their students, teachers stick to exam-format activities in teaching each unit in the textbook. Put simply, the format of the English lesson is determined by the format of the exam. To address this lamentable state of affairs and thus minimize the backwash effect, teachers would do well to create more balance in their classes. For instance, they could prepare the students to expect certain test types and test items in the context of a general discussion of exam-writing skills, rather than focusing single-mindedly on exam practice. For the sake of developing real fluency in English, teachers must leave the test behind from time to time in order to avoid creating monotonous lessons that are not conducive to learning English. Yet, leaving behind the test is easier said than done. It requires teachers who are both flexible and resourceful because a lack of teaching skills is part of the reason that many instructors focus on the test. This leads us to our next area of focus, EFL teacher training in Palestine, which we will examine in depth below.

4 Palestinian EFL Teacher Training and Development

Palestinian teacher training is quite unique and exceptional compared to teacher training trends as observed by one of the authors in other contexts. Normally, educational authorities require that prospective teachers possess a diploma in education in addition to their undergraduate degrees. However, in Palestine, the situation was markedly different at least up until 2014; from 1967 to 2014, the requirement for becoming a teacher was simply to obtain an undergraduate degree in one's own specialization. Further, a large number of Palestinian teachers do not even have a BA in English; they only hold a 2-year college degree in English. For instance, before 2014, Palestinian EFL teachers were required to have either a BA in English language and linguistics/literature from an accredited Arab university or else just a 2-year college degree in English. However, such easy to achieve requirements are no longer acceptable as the MoEHE has made myriad changes to align with international standards in teacher certification, education, and training as witnessed personally by one of the current authors through his collaborations on MOEHE projects.

As of 2014, according to the new Teacher Education Strategy, all prospective teachers are required to have a diploma in education in addition to their BA in English. This change, though long in the making, has come about as a result of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) after the Oslo Peace agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel. In 1993, when the PA took over the West Bank and Gaza it established several ministries. One of these ministries was the MoEHE. Thus, for the first time since 1967 the Palestinians exercised control over their education system. Since the establishment of the MoEHE, several changes and initiatives have been introduced to upgrade the Palestinian education system to international standards with the financial support of many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the World Bank. One of these initiatives is to improve teacher education preparation programs in Palestine, as we shall see below.

4.1 Pre-service Palestinian Teacher Preparation Programs

In order to meet the new teacher preparation requirements, Palestinian universities began developing teacher education preparation programs that lead to a diploma (certificate) in teaching. The Diploma Program consists of 30 credit hours taught in 10 three-credit-hour courses, covering a wide range of areas. To complete a single three-credit-hour course, students meet in class for 48 regular hours during a 16-week-long semester. The following courses are required: philosophical and social foundations in Education, teaching in heterogeneous classes, educational psychology, ethical issues in the teaching profession, Teaching English as a foreign Language I, Teaching English as a Foreign language II, two teaching practicum

courses, and two additional elective courses. Among the electives, students could choose either the Critical Thinking course, the Integrating Information Technology in Education course, or any other two courses from a list developed specifically for teachers.

4.2 In-Service Palestinian EFL Teacher Continuous Professional Development

As mentioned above, the current workforce of in-service Palestinian teachers do not possess a diploma in education in addition to their undergraduate degrees. During their careers, some of them may attend some professional development workshops on various topics such as instructional strategies, assessment strategies, and classroom management. However, the quality of such training workshops varies from satisfactory to poor (personal communication with teachers, 2016). Practicing teachers are selected to attend training sessions based on their annual performance appraisals. Basically, the instructional supervisor decides who needs professional development in which areas based on classroom observations of the teachers' teaching and thus chooses the teachers who will participate in these training workshops. Similarly, the instructional supervisors also select exemplary teachers to conduct some training sessions for their colleagues. The instructional supervisors nominate these teacher trainers from the pool of teachers that they must evaluate. Yet not all training is carried out by the selected candidates. The instructional supervisors also conduct some training sessions themselves. Regardless of who conducts the training workshops, based on the authors' personal communications with a number of currently serving EFL teachers, the quality of the training is mediocre at best. These same teachers report that they and their colleagues are not motivated to participate in these sessions due to several issues; their lack of confidence in the abilities of the trainers, the lack of relevance of the chosen training topics, and the poor timing of the training sessions (personal communication with teachers, 2016).

In addition to the local professional development that some EFL teachers receive from the MoEHE, the British Council and AMIDEAST provide some in-service training to Palestinian EFL teachers. Such training is conducted in collaboration and coordination with the MoEHE. For example, each year the British Council sponsors a group of EFL teachers to attend the annual International Association of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) convention in England. The British Council also conducts training sessions in Palestine for some Palestinian EFL teachers. Usually, they invite trainers from the UK to conduct the training. While these efforts are no doubt appreciated by many, according to Shinn (2012), having too many sponsors for training and development of Palestinian teachers can actually impede teacher development. Thus, Shinn believes that more local autonomy among Palestinian educational administrators would allow them to better cater to their own teachers' needs. Clearly, though, local autonomy must go hand-in-hand with con-

ducting needs analyses among Palestinian EFL teachers in order to address the issues that lead to an overall lack of motivation to attend such training as discussed above.

As mentioned earlier, in the wake of the Oslo Accords, the PA has been trying to upgrade all of its teachers' credentials and equip them with an adequate training to improve their skills. One of these initiatives was the Teacher Education Improvement Project II (TIEP II) financed by the World Bank. The goals of TEIP II project include: (1) Upgrading the competencies and instructional skills of grade 1–4 in-service Palestinian teachers who do not have the required qualifications specified by the MoEHE under the new Standards for the Teaching Profession; (2) Assisting teachers, who are identified as being under-qualified, to pursue and meet the graduation requirements for the Palestinian teaching certificate, which is now required to be able to teach at Palestinian Public Schools; (3) Helping the teachers to become life-long learners by providing them with a comprehensive teacher education program that fosters critical thinking and learning how to learn; and (4) Encouraging and preparing all teachers to pursue a graduate degree in education after successfully obtaining teacher certification and upgrading their teaching skills.

To accomplish these goals, four training modules were developed: *Module I: Curriculum and Instruction*, *Module II: Recent Teaching and Learning Methods*, *Module III: Assessment and Evaluation*, and *Module IV: Creating Healthy, Effective and Engaging Schools*. These modules are offered sequentially during two back-to-back semesters so that the training can be completed within one academic year. Thus, Modules I and II are offered in the first semester of the school year and Modules III and IV are offered in the second semester of the same school year. The length of each semester is 16 weeks and trainees meet once a week from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Each module's session is 3-hours long. Abdel Razeq, one of the present authors, has first-hand knowledge of these training modules as a teacher trainer who developed the modules and participated in conducting the training.

Some of the topics included in Module I are: methods of curriculum integration, instructional design, differentiation of instruction and introduction to recent teaching methods such as project based teaching, inquiry, group work, case-based inquiry, planning for inclusion, developing effective Annual Learning Plans (ALPs), developing effective unit and lesson plans, etc. In Module II, the trainers focus on topics such as selecting, adapting and using teaching and learning materials based on students needs and learning styles, creating and designing instructional aids, selecting and adapting learning materials according to students' needs and learning styles, and using analysis and reflection for improving instruction.

Module III Focuses on developing and designing assessment and evaluation instruments, identifying and analyzing students' thinking, types of assessment, differentiation of assessment, alternative assessment and use of rubrics, use of Information Technology (IT) in the learning and assessment process, providing feedback, methods of tracking students progress and reporting to parents, and self-evaluation as a

process for improving instruction and student achievement. In Module IV, the trainers concentrate on communicating and cooperating with parents and guardians to create effective and healthy schools for enhancing students' academic and social performance, school policies and rules, school codes of conduct, methods of enforcing and implementing school policies, creating safe and motivating classroom environments, modeling and sustaining the school mission and vision, strategies for building healthy relationships with students and staff, strategies for students engagement (cognitively, emotionally, and physically), cooperating with parents and guardians as sources of information for assisting students, methods of instilling good morals and values in the students' character, the teacher as a role model, and how to use real life events to bring the curriculum to life. The authors concede that training these in-service teachers was challenging. We will outline the key challenges encountered during the training followed by recommendations for their improvement.

4.3 In-Service Teacher Training: Challenges

During the project, the trainers faced several challenges that affected the training. Bearing in mind that the trainees were typically mid- to late career adults, many of whom had been teaching for a long time (some had even been teaching for more than 20 years), a fair number of the trainees believed that it was too late for them to enroll in such an upgrading program due to their considerable age and experience. Others shared that they felt that their previous teaching experience was somehow being discounted. Still others felt affronted by the initiative and saw no need for such training. Thus, overall, the trainees' enthusiasm and morale constituted a serious challenge. This was evidenced by irregular attendance on the part of the trainees and their lackluster participation during the training sessions.

Because the training was held at weekends (during their days off), the majority of the trainees resented this and thought that the training should have been held during school days and that they should have been relieved from their teaching duties in order to participate in the training. Indeed, such an approach might have encouraged more in-service teachers to participate in the program. All of the trainees reported that having to come on their day off from school was highly disruptive because, as adults, they all had families and other social responsibilities.

Implementing technology in the training sessions was another challenge that the trainers encountered. On the one hand, schools lacked the appropriate technology to assist teachers in their instruction and performing other duties. On the other, most participating teachers also lacked the appropriate technological skills required to use whatever technology was available. Even outside of the actual physical school setting, communicating online and sharing documents were very challenging during the training. Having identified these various challenges, we now turn our focus to addressing these.

4.4 In-Service Teacher Training: Recommendations

Based on experience gained from coordinating TIEP II project and other in-service teacher training and professional development initiatives, a number of valuable lessons were learned. In order for the in-service teacher training and development to be effective, we recommend the following:

- Recruit only teachers who are willingly and interested to participate in the training.
- Conduct needs assessments. All training and professional development sessions must be based on teacher input. In-service teachers must be consulted on the topics chosen and given the choice to choose the training sessions that they would like to participate in. One size fits all professional development is a waste of time and very ineffective.
- Offer the training during the school days and relieve the teachers from their teaching duties so that they will be able to participate in the training.
- Compensate teachers for transportation costs immediately. Late compensation affects their motivation and attendance.
- Communicate the purpose and the benefits of the training clearly. Let the teachers know about the training initiative and how they will benefit from it.
- Promote the training effectively: Make as many teachers as possible aware of the training and encourage all of them to take advantage of it.
- Translate the training into tangible results: Based on the training they have received, assist the teachers to conduct some action research projects to address the challenging situations they encounter in their classrooms in order to improve student learning.
- Celebrate trainee participation: To keep the momentum going and to improve enthusiasm and motivation, the MoEHE should hold a graduation ceremony at the end of the training for each group.
- Keep the teaching dialogue alive: Opportunities for ongoing dialogue and information sharing among the teachers, instructional supervisors and principals pertaining to recent teaching methodologies and instructional techniques must be provided and encouraged.
- Involve administrators and supervisors: Principals and instructional supervisors should attend training sessions whenever possible, particularly, the learning circles where trainees share their knowledge and application of the new skills in the classrooms.
- Maintain an “Open Door” policy: Invite other teachers, particularly lead teachers, who are not participating in the program, to attend some sessions. Also, offering professional development on similar topics outlined in the training modules will bring these same in-service teachers up to the appropriate level to help them cooperate and implement the new knowledge and skills acquired.
- Promote IT skills: Continue to use information technology in facilitating the training modules and encourage the trainees to use it in their daily teaching and planning activities.

- Make the most of Learning Circles: Expand the use of learning circles during the training where all trainees will be able to share their application of the new skills and practices acquired and show their effect on student learning.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Clearly, Palestine presents a very complex ELT context. Its history right up to the present has been one of foreign intervention and control. As a result, Palestinians are actually more in need of a sound education as a means to improving their own economic and socio-political situation. And since English is esteemed by Palestinians to be a crucial part of their education, great emphasis must be placed on its effective acquisition. However, to date, logistical challenges in the form of poor and antiquated pedagogical training, administrative pressures to "teach to the test", and demographic realities such as oversized classes have all conspired to create less than favourable conditions for learning English. When the contextual factors of conflict are included, it is a wonder that Palestinian students are able to gain an education at all.

In light of such daunting challenges, ELT stakeholders in Palestine need to come together to the extent possible in order to take stock of the situation. The MoEHE now has a rather large body of research to provide it paths forward. In this regard, the key recommendations that can be made are the following:

1. Enhance and expand both pre-service and in-service EFL teacher training, focusing on student-centered and constructivist pedagogies.
2. Revise EP curricular materials in consultation with EFL teachers to make them more culturally relevant and authentic to Palestinian teachers and students
3. Overhaul the Tawjihi exam to reflect more global and authentic use of English in order to stimulate positive testing washback
4. Provide access to technology for the EFL classroom

Clearly, since the funds required to make such changes to the educational system of Palestinian are limited, donors should refocus their funding to comply with the recommendations above, especially if they are serious about contributing to the future socio-economic development of Palestine in a globalized world where mastery of English is of vital importance.

In the end, it appears that more grassroots and local level involvement offers hope to ameliorate the situation. As noted in the QCERD initiative discussed above, teacher development is a key instrument in the process. In this connection, donors such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the US Agency for International Development would do well to invest their time and effort in promoting such local initiatives to achieve their stated aims of enhancing education in general in the OPT. In so doing, they will have gone some way toward improving the teaching of English in Palestine as well. This, in turn will have the knock-on effect of contributing to economic development in an area that is dire need of such growth. And by supporting and empowering teachers locally, not only will English be taught more

efficiently, but it will also be taught in harmony with prevailing cultural and social values, resulting in greater appreciation for English on the part of teachers and students alike.

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