

The Practice of Teaching English to Young Learners in the Palestinian Context: A Multidimensional Analysis

Adnan Shehadeh
Language Center
Palestine Polytechnic University, Palestine

Raghad Dwaik
English Department
Hebron University, Palestine

Abstract

The new Palestinian Curriculum, launched in 1994, incorporates English as a foreign language as a basic component of the syllabus starting from the first grade, thus, fitting within the context of similar national and international endeavors which stress Early Start English Programs. Researchers of this paper highlight the Palestinian National Curriculum Committee's (PNCC) statement of objectives, which stresses bilingualism and intercultural communication, and take this statement as a starting point to present a comprehensive discussion of the serious obstacles encountered by Palestinian teachers as they struggle to implement an early start English syllabus.

Forty Palestinian English teachers participated in the completion of a structured interview that investigated the reality of English learning in the classroom. Results of the structured interview highlight a number of challenges encountered by teachers such as large classes, insufficient number of weekly class periods, negative transfer due to the special nature of the first language (L1), lack of teacher training that specifically targets young learner (YL) teachers, as well as the noticeable marginalization of the target culture content and related skills. Such challenges obviously stand in the way of fully realizing the earlier stated curriculum objectives as outlined by the PNCC.

KeyWords: Teaching English to Young Learners, TEYL in the Arab World, Early Start English Programs, Age in EFL, Palestinian young learners of EFL

Introduction and Background

The Palestinian National Curriculum Committee decided to introduce a new Palestinian curriculum in the year 1994. The syllabus started to be implemented in reality in the fall of 2000. Under the umbrella of the new curriculum, EFL was introduced from the first grade partly out of deep belief in the importance of English as a language of wider communication. Based on the curriculum guidelines produced by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, it is believed that the new Early start English syllabus will help Palestinian learners achieve the following objectives (First Palestinian Curriculum Plan, 1998):

1. Develop their ability to communicate with the global community regarding issues of personal and national concern.
2. Gain better access to technology since English has become the main language of communication in modern technological devices and software.
3. Build stronger motivation and develop a positive attitude towards English as a language of wider communication.
4. Gain longer exposure to a foreign language that would be an asset for them as they access university education which is mainly conducted in English.
5. Gain access to the wealth of academic materials published in journals worldwide.
6. Gain access to a global culture through the World Wide Web.

In addition to this general focus on English as a language of global communication, the PNCC statement of general goals for the English Language Curriculum contains three objectives that specially focus on the learning of the culture associated with this language. Specifically, the new syllabus should help the students achieve the following goals:

- a. Develop intercultural understanding and appreciation.
- b. Foster understanding and develop cultural sensitivity to the target language culture and other cultural backgrounds, and thereby, strengthen the learners' appreciation of their own culture.
- c. Develop students' respect for others, i.e, having a sense of the worth of others, especially those with social, cultural, and family backgrounds different to their own, and by encouraging them to reject sexual, racial, and ethnic stereotypes. These general goals are translated into a number of specific objectives (see appendix A).

Despite the rosy picture these objectives reflect, teachers complain about everyday challenges they face as they try to implement the new curriculum. Teachers struggle with large classes, lack of technological devices, insufficient training as well as the dilemma of creating and maintaining motivation when the tasks used in the classrooms are traditional for the most part. Teachers in the Palestinian context also struggle with the diglossic nature of the learners' first language (Arabic) which has a colloquial form that students are exposed to from birth till school age and a standard or a high form that they start learning when they join the formal educational system in the first grade. Another serious challenge faced by Palestinian English learners is the absence of a rich cultural dimension that may help in developing a positive attitude towards the target culture and in increasing the students' integrative motivation in the long run. This absence of a strong cultural dimension stands in sharp contrast with the huge focus that culture receives in the PNCC syllabus goals as stated earlier.

Factors Involved in an Early Start Decision:

Although the issue of the optimal age for language learning has not been settled yet, the theoretical work of some researchers shows that the first grade, i.e, age 6-7 is generally a good time to start learning a foreign language (Krashen, 1973; Lenneberg, (1967); Long,1988; Piaget, 1973; Stern, 1969). However, the decision of endorsing an early start foreign language program should not be based only on considerations of age related issues. In addition to the characteristics of the particular age group, a number of other factors come into play and influence the outcomes of early start programs. Phillipson (1992) argues that extensive research conducted on early foreign language instruction in western countries in the 1960s and 1970s shows that many conditions need to be fulfilled for any conclusions about the starting age for language learning to be valid. Early start immersion programs for instance have been reported to be highly successful in the Canadian context. Swain and Lapkin (1982) argue that the success of these programs is due to many variables including the safe position of the mother tongue, the availability of qualified bilingual teachers, and the strong societal motivation transmitted through the parents. Phillipson contrasts the success of these programs with the failure of some ESL instruction for immigrant children which generally aims at building monolingual proficiency thus ignoring the students' cultural and linguistic heritage (Shutnabb-Kangas, 1984a, 1988). One should also keep in mind that some western experiences such as that of Sweden which started a foreign language instruction program two years earlier than usual did not yield better results (Holmstrand, 1980).

Such contradictory results indicate that a host of various factors are involved in any decision to start foreign/second languages earlier in school. Phillipson (1992) suggests grouping these factors in a typology that covers sets of variables covering the organization of learning, learner-related affective factors, and linguistic, cognitive, pedagogical and social aspects in relation to both the L1 and the L2 . Phillipson further argues that underdeveloped countries which have opted for an early start in foreign language instruction either as a school subject or as medium of instruction have faced disappointing results due to ignoring the host of factors involved. The practice of the early introduction of a foreign language program has resulted in reinforcing English at the expense of other languages including the mother tongue. He further argues that "[...] pupils with a solid grounding in their mother tongue or a related language, who have learnt to use this language as an instrument for analytical thought, may be better at learning English at a later stage" (p. 202-03).

A similar view to that of Phillipson is adopted by UNESCO who, on the basis of an early global survey of bilingual education and multilingualism, clearly recommends giving primary importance to the mother tongue in the early stages of schooling.

This recommendation is highly relevant in the case of the Arabic language where students find themselves face to face with a new form of their mother tongue as soon as they enter the formal educational system. Facing this new system along with the demands of a newly introduced foreign language may place a high cognitive demand on the young learners, thus, making their transition from home to school less smooth than desired by a global educational organization such as the UNESCO which tends to attach special importance to the relationship between native language, cultural heritage and the learner's identity.

On educational ground we recommend that the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible. In particular, pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue, because they understand it best and because to begin their school life in the mother tongue will make the break between home and school as small as possible" (UNESCO 1953:47).

Early start programs also entail important implications in terms of motivation and attitude which are associated with culture learning and which influence proficiency in direct and subtle ways. Researchers in the area of culture and the role that culture knowledge plays in the overall language proficiency have adopted various positions. Valdes (1990) has argued for "the inevitability of teaching and learning culture in a foreign language course". Luce and Smith (1987) have indicated that culture and communication cannot be separated because culture informs who talks to whom, about what, and how communication proceeds...Culture, in other words, is the "foundation of communication" (Samovar et al., 1981, p.24). Other researchers in the field of culture have argued that despite the fact that culture seems to override all kinds of communication, language syllabi need to incorporate an overt cultural component due to the following reasons:

1. The relationship between culture and language learning and the influence of this relationship on the nature of each is a key argument that was used in the literature to highlight the importance of culture, however assuming that those who are learning the language in our classes are also learning the cultural knowledge and skills undermines the complexity of culture, language learning, and the communication process (Kramsch, Cain and Murphy-Lejeune, 1996)
2. Cultural elements need to be intentionally incorporated in the language syllabus in order to avoid the pitfall of stereotyping (Nemni, 1992).
3. Teachers cannot be held accountable for the cultural competence of their students unless the textbooks they teach contain an explicit cultural component in the form of content and skills.

Methodology

Population and sample

The population of this study consists of all Palestinian teachers currently teaching grades 1-4. Teachers of this early primary stage were selected because the new Palestinian curriculum is still in its trial or pilot form and feedback from teachers is essential for any future modifications. The sample of the study consisted of 40 language teachers working in Hebron District in the Palestinian West Bank.

Approximately 70% of the participating teachers teach in the city while the other 30% teach in schools located in rural areas. The majority of participants (85%) hold BA degrees from local Palestinian universities. About 10% hold Diploma (Two year community college degree) and 5% hold MAs from local Palestinian Universities.

Instruments: Participating teachers sat for a lengthy structured interview containing 17 items pertaining to the following issues:

I. Teaching learning environment: This section includes the following issues:

- a. **Age related problems:** this item probes the challenges involved in teaching this particular age group due to their age

- b. **Nature of L1:** this tackles special problems related to the nature of L1 in this case Arabic as covered in items 4, and 5 of the questionnaire.
 - c. **Classroom circumstances:** this refers to the number of classes per week, number of students in the classroom, availability of resources especially audiovisual aids and technological devices – covered in question 2 and 3- (see appendix A).
 - d. **Suitability of the Communicative Syllabus:** this refers to the teachers' perception of the suitability of the educational bases of the communicative syllabus for the Palestinian cultural context (question. 12)
 - e. **Teacher Training:** this refers to the amount and type of training received by teachers of this stage –covered in question 9 (See appendix A).
 - f. **Long term effect:** this refers to the possible long term influence of early start in terms of attitude and motivation –covered in questions 6, 7 and 8- (see appendix A).
- II. The Cultural Component: This section includes the following issues:**
- g. **Importance of culture learning:** this covers the teachers' perception of the general importance of culture learning (e.g. development of positive attitude and higher motivation and whether certain cultures require more attention than others in the Palestinian classroom. (questions 10, 16)
 - h. **Adequacy of culture information and skills:** this section covers the teachers' perception of the adequacy of culture related information and skills currently available in the syllabus (question 11)
 - i. **Quantity and quality of training:** this refers to the amount and nature of culture-related training received by teachers (question.14).
 - j. **Methods and techniques:** this refers to the methodology used in presenting cultural information and the reasons behind the avoidance of culture teaching in the language classroom (questions. 13& 15, 17)

The first five issues were selected because of the importance they are given in the literature pertaining to teaching English to young learners in other contexts reviewed in the introduction to this paper (Butler, 2009; Enever, 2009; Johnstone, 2009). The remaining four items were highlighted because of the special attention culture receives in the PNCC statement of objectives. Culture teaching is seen as an important means to enhancing motivation and promoting a positive attitude towards English and English speaking cultures as highlighted in the introduction to this paper.

Interview questions were phrased in Arabic (native language) and the participants were given the chance to write their responses in the same language(Arabic).

Results and Discussion

The researchers noticed that teachers participating in the interview were highly motivated to communicate their perceptions and viewpoints with regard to the early start English curriculum. The researchers summarized the participants' responses towards general classroom issues under the five categories listed in a, b, c, d and e above. Additionally, special focus was laid upon perception of the importance of culture and culture learning as outlined in the issues, f, g, h and i above.

The Teaching Learning Environment *Age-related problems*

By young learners the researchers mean students in the early elementary stage, particularly those in grades 1-4. The age of these students ranges from six to ten. As it has been mentioned in the introduction, prior to the year 2000, similar students would not have started learning English till they were officially in the fifth grade.

In their response to question 1 teachers focused on the problems involved in teaching this particular age group due to their special characteristics and learning style. Most teachers (75%) mentioned that the curriculum is so dense that the teacher can hardly provide additional opportunities for practice besides the content of the textbook itself. Teachers focused on the relative difficulties involved in explaining new concepts to young learners especially that these learners do not have the cognitive maturity of their older counterparts. In her analysis of the Turkish context, where teachers face analogous difficulties, Inal (2009) suggested that utilizing a multiple intelligences perspective and hands on experiences as well as using riddles, songs, games and craft activities could help young learners get engaged, thus overcoming the problems associated with boredom and distraction generally experienced in large classes.

Some participants in this study (47%) also added that they cannot send students with home assignments too often because most parents do not know English and the children themselves are too young to handle a language homework assignment on their own. From the perspective of teachers, this lack of additional practice leads to leaving the weaker or slower students behind. In their response to this question, some teachers also focused on the difficulty of doing much in a certain class period because children at this age have a "short attention span", cannot "stay focused for a lengthy time period", and they "get bored easily". Teachers face special discipline problems with young learners. Many teachers (82%) focused on the difficulty they face in trying to keep the classroom quiet. One teacher said: "I can't proceed in the material because with young learners I need to introduce the material, practice the language, teach them how to pronounce, how to hold the pencil and also I have to keep them quiet which is very difficult when you have forty students in a small classroom ." Some teachers (35%) also mentioned that it is very difficult to get down to the students' level. In the words of one teacher "the kids do not understand my vocabulary, sentences or questions". Other teachers (10%) mentioned that it is difficult to convince the learners of the real value and importance of learning English in an EFL context that does not offer practical opportunities for using the language.

L1 related problems

In their response to questions 4 and 5 which focus on special difficulties that may be involved in teaching Palestinian students because of the nature of their L1 (Arabic), teachers focused mainly on issues related to pronunciation. Most teachers (92%) mentioned that some of the English phonemes that do not exist in Arabic such as /p/ and /v/ cannot be easily learned by young learners and that they keep mixing them with other close phonemes such as /b/ and /f/. Another problem mentioned by teachers (43%) is that of listening activities. Teachers have reported that most learners cannot understand listening assignments when played from the tape due to the special features of the speakers' accent which may be different from that of the teacher who is a nonnative speaker of the English language. Some teachers reported that they try to overcome the problem by reading the listening passage from the teacher's book. In the words of one teacher: "students cannot solve the listening questions unless I myself read the passage from the teacher's book: they say my language is easier than that of the speaker on the tape". Teachers also mentioned

that students suffer from many instances of L1 interference. Several teachers (13%) reported that when they ask students to write on the board a certain letter from the English language, learners sometimes write the Arabic version of the same letter, e.g., one student wrote ت on the board instead of "t". One should remember though that these young learners are also struggling with their native alphabet because they are learning it at the same time and the Arabic language has three graphemes for most letters, so letters assume different shapes depending on their position in the word. A letter like cihw ه corresponds to the English T has the following graphemes:

مدرسة	فتة	بيوت	بات	تاب
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Teachers also reported that older students, i.e, those in third and fourth grades open their books from right to left and write words from right to left in English classes and sometimes from left to right in Arabic classes.

Classroom Circumstances

Questions two and three covered issues related to the general classroom environment such as class size, number of students, number of class periods and availability of technological resources (see appendix B). Most teachers (98%) agreed that three classes per week are neither enough to cover the material nor do they allow for additional practice which is sometimes needed when the unit contains dense information or when some students who are characterized by slower learning rate seem to be falling behind. Almost all teachers (99%) agreed that the amount of time available does not allow for any additional practice or enrichment, an additional reason for making teachers stick to the content of the book in teaching. One teacher who has fifteen years of experience stressed the fact that he could never finish any of the textbook units on time. He always lags behind because, in his opinion, the activities seem to assume that classes contain smaller learner groups and thus, faster progression in covering the material is expected. Teachers also mentioned that students are not very efficient at this stage and a long time is wasted in getting everybody on track for any given activity, e.g., listening to tape while the books are open on the questions or going to the workbook smoothly, etc.

Most participants (96%) agreed that the large number of students in the classroom (40+) creates discipline challenges for teachers. In the words of one teacher, "It is difficult to teach the students a new alphabet when I am trying to keep forty something students quiet and seated in their places especially in the first few weeks of the first grade". The large number of students does not provide them with enough opportunities to practice the language, in other words, not everybody gets the chance to talk when the class period is limited to a total of forty minutes. Enever and Moon (2009) argue that class size varies from country to another and within the country itself. Smaller class sizes (15 students) are found in the European context. In Asia and Africa the class size may rise to 50 students. These authors argue that the larger the class is the less willing teachers would be to use activity based, interactive methods, thus, compromising the ultimate level of proficiency those learners would reach in the target language.

As for the availability of technological devices and audiovisual aids, most teachers (93%) mentioned that the only audiovisual aids available are the flashcards and traditional tape recorders. Few teachers complained that even a simple piece of equipment such as a tape

recorder is not available and the teacher often ends up reading the listening assignment from the teacher's book.

The suitability of the communicative syllabus for the Palestinian educational context

Participants' responses to question twelve reflect some of their classroom practices. Most teachers have argued that the principles of the communicative syllabus are neither adopted nor practiced in Palestinian classrooms due to the dense textbooks and other classroom circumstances. Large classes limit the students' opportunity to participate and share in decision making. Palestinian teachers believe that it is essential for them to assume an authoritarian role in the classroom so as to maintain discipline in such large classes. They even argue that it is sometimes challenging to make the students respect each others' opinions. Some teachers have argued that in order for the students to take part in decision making, they have to display a high level of proficiency. A weak student, in their opinion, cannot be an active participant in the educational process and he/she has to be guided by the experienced teacher.

Teacher training

The last two questions probed the issue of teacher training and whether teachers underwent special training geared towards teaching young learners. All participating teachers emphasized the fact that they did not get special training with regard to young learner issues and that all training focused on dealing with the various components of the new textbook English for Palestine which is currently implemented at all school levels. As for pre-service training teachers have not taken any college level methodology course that focuses on dealing with this special age group. Participants also reported that often female teachers (they usually outnumber their male counterparts) who have recently graduated from college are the ones placed as English teachers at the elementary stage at both boys and girls schools because –in the view of their supervisors- they lack the experience needed for dealing with older children and adolescents. This clearly means that aside from lacking training in teaching young learners, these new graduates lack any training related to teaching in general and are ironically placed in some of the most challenging circumstances in the system.

This situation is similar to the one described by Hill (1999) who reported that the majority of young learner teachers in the Italian context cited lack of training opportunities and little access to teaching materials and aids as the central concerns of young learner teachers. Similarly, several researchers argue that a huge gap exists between the number of qualified EFL teachers available and the growing demand for them in many countries around the world (Chodijah, 2008; Kgwadi, 2008; and Enever et al, 2008). This huge gap has led to reliance upon newly graduates, secondary school teachers and teachers of other subjects, all of whom are not sufficiently trained to do the job of young learner teaching.

Long term effect

Most young learner teachers (97%) have agreed that learning English from an early age has a number of advantages such as providing learners with the opportunity to access the World Wide Web. Lengthy exposure to English, most of them believe, would lead to higher proficiency in English, which is the language of teaching in most disciplines at the college level. This view is consistent with the European Union policy which has mandated an Early Start for the first foreign language under the assumption that an early start would guarantee equal opportunity for all (Enever et. al, 2009). Previous results of empirical

research, however, have undermined the role an early start plays in the ultimate attainment the learner achieves (Brustall, 1975; Harley, 1986; Singleton, 1989). Results of a similar study in the Palestinian context has clearly shown an advantage for late rather than Early starters in the areas of English reading comprehension and vocabulary achievement (Dwaik and Shehadeh, 2010). Singleton (1989) further argues that unlike natural settings school circumstances do not provide children with the amount of exposure needed for the early start advantage to appear.

After investigating some learner and classroom related variables that are believed to influence the execution of an early start program, the researchers probe in the next section a number of variables related to the teaching and perception of second language culture which is highly emphasized in the statement of curriculum goals highlighted earlier in this article.

The Cultural Component

The Importance of Culture Learning

In responding to questions ten and seventeen, 90% of the participants underscored the importance of culture learning, however upon analyzing their responses further the researchers found that their ideas fall under one of the following three categories:

1. Culture learning is essential for successful language learning and the issue of which culture to teach is irrelevant because all cultures are valuable (approximately 20% of participants)
2. Target culture learning is dangerous and it should be avoided. Attention in the classroom should be given to native culture norms and practices. Additionally, the syllabus is so dense that focus on additional issues (e.g. culture) may be time consuming (40%).
3. Some teachers focused on the value of incorporating information related to either the American culture because it is the one leading the globalization process (10%), or the British Culture because Britain is home to "authentic language use" and "representative cultural practices" (30%).

In their responses to question 17, which probes the possible influence of the students' attitude towards the target culture on their success in language acquisition, 80% argued that it would be impossible to learn a language without having a positive attitude towards the culture of its speakers. 20% of participants, however, argued that there are many examples of people who could master the target language despite their negative attitude towards its speakers. Those participants seem to believe that having a positive attitude towards the target culture entails relinquishing or looking down upon the learners' own native culture.

The adequacy of culture related information and skills currently available in the syllabus

In their response to question 11, one fifth (20%) of the study participants indicated that they believe that the cultural information contained in the syllabus is more than enough and that class time is barely sufficient for covering the essential elements of the syllabus. A very small percentage (3%) even believe that the English syllabus is loaded with target culture norms and skills which radically deviate from the students' Arab Islamic norms and values. On the other hand, 80% believe that the cultural information is not sufficient. They also argue that there is more focus on native culture than there is on any of the target cultures. Some teachers perceive this as a positive step taking into account the large number of students and the insufficient class periods (3-4 per week) which makes it

impossible to cover additional information pertaining to the target culture. Some teachers suggested adding other cultural elements related to social and political aspects as well as family entertainment, films and real life situations.

Quantity and quality of culture-related training received by teachers

Participants in the study indicated that they did not have the opportunity to participate in training workshops related to culture content and presentation methods and techniques. The workshops and training courses they have been to did not include any materials or sessions that cover this aspect. Participants who explained the reason for the lack of training programs said they have never been invited to participate in training programs that included culture teaching as a basic component. The Ministry, they indicated, is directly involved in the design and administration of in-service teacher training, a fact that reveals a huge gap between the Ministry's statement of goals and objectives on the one hand and the actual realization of these goals by teacher trainers on the other hand. This may explain why very few teachers incorporate target culture elements in classroom activities despite their deep awareness of the importance of cultural competence for the development of proficiency in the target culture.

In her exploration of the Turkish context, Inal (2009) argues that lack of training or guidance related to teaching culture has left most teachers under-equipped to incorporate culture learning within the context of language learning. As for which culture to teach, participants in her study seemed to focus on native speaker cultures or the cultures of core English speaking countries such as the United States and Britain.

Methods and techniques used in presenting cultural information and reasons behind the avoidance of culture teaching in the language classroom

When asked about the methods and techniques used for presenting cultural information (questions 13, 15 and 17), most teachers (91%) indicated that they use the cultural concept as a point of departure for presenting related notions and functions, e.g., dinner time is used to teach the students "telling time" in the target language. Some focused on the importance of activating background knowledge and relating new information to the students' native culture by adopting a comparative approach. It was clear, however, that teachers adopt a solely informational approach to the teaching and learning of culture. Some teachers even argued that they would use the newly introduced cultural concept to solicit students' opinions about it, a practice that may result in trapping students in their own cultural norms instead of motivating them and enhancing a positive perception and attitude towards the target culture. Researchers have also noticed that pair and group work are missing in the teachers' reports about their classroom practices.

As for the reasons behind avoiding the teaching of culture, most teachers (91%) agreed that the main reason behind this avoidance is the lack of information about the target culture(s) as well as the lack of clarity as to the appropriate methodology and techniques that may be utilized. Some also argued that culture is a thorny issue especially when the target culture norms contradict those dominant in the native culture. This situation of teaching culture is very gloomy taking into account the great attention such a component receives in the general and specific objectives of the Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines. It also reminds us with the importance of teacher training in general and its critical importance when we consider the issue of culture.

Conclusion, Recommendations and Implications

Learning English at an early age in the Palestinian context entails many challenges for both teachers and students. The ambitious objectives stated by the Palestinian Curriculum Center stand in sharp contrast with the reality on the ground, a situation experienced in many other parts of the world where early start programs have been launched with some pre-planning yet with plenty of aspirations and hope. Large classes, the diglossic nature of L1, lack of appropriate and specific teacher training, and the teachers' perception of communicative language teaching and intercultural understanding are all issues that need to be further addressed by researchers and pondered upon more carefully by educators and decision makers in contexts with parallel socioeconomic and educational circumstances. Additionally, young learner teachers should be encouraged to conduct action research and other forms of teacher generated research so as to tackle specific issues in the classroom and to complement results reached by other researchers around the globe.

The researchers recommend that Ministries of Education in Palestine and in other Arab contexts conduct special training workshops for young learner teachers to ensure equipping such teachers with proper methodologies to handle this special age group in terms of the features and needs of their age, their ability to adapt to classroom circumstances and their competence in L1. Moreover classroom size and the number of English periods per week need to be re-evaluated by decision makers to make sure the reality on the ground does not hinder the achievement of the stated objectives.

Finally, Early start English programs need to undergo continuous evaluation to rephrase objectives, improve classroom practices and exchange experiences across similar contexts around the world.

About the Authors:

Adnan Shehadeh, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of English, a teacher trainer and education developer within the context of Palestinian schools and universities. He is the coordinator of the Language Center at Palestine Polytechnic University, Hebron, and Palestine. His areas of interest include EFL reading comprehension and Language Acquisition in peripheral settings.

Raghad Dwaik, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of English and a certified examiner of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Her areas of interest include testing and evaluation, vocabulary development and teaching English to Young Learners. She is the co-author of two articles on Teaching English to Young Learners and the role of motivation in language learning.

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Appendix A

1. Developing a positive attitude towards the target language, and the importance of leaning it.
2. Developing empathy toward the target language.
3. Recognizing typical behaviors in common everyday situations in the target culture.
4. Recognizing cultures of the target language and their contributions to society.
5. Fostering respect for self and others and building relationships.
6. Providing opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of social and political conflicts in a variety of contexts and how to respond to them positively and creatively.

7. Develop a knowledge, appreciation and understanding of interdependence, continuity, and change in the social and cultural process as it relates to individuals, families, local communities , and other wider world.
8. Build understanding of, and sensitivity towards, own and other cultural traditions.
9. Develop an appreciation of shared and distinct characteristics of Palestinian and other cultures.
10. Encourage students to actively participate in ad make recognizable and appreciable contributions in the quest to build, reinforce, and refine human civilization.

Appendix B
Interview Question

(The Teaching/Learning Environment)

Dear Participant,

The interview questions that follow have been designed by a Palestinian curriculum development team to solicit teacher feedback with regard to the teaching/learning environment(s) supporting the new curriculum. Please provide enough reasons, explanations, illustrations, and examples to make your views clear to the curriculum designers. Any responses you provide will be kept confidential and will be used anonymously for research purposes only. Your help is greatly appreciated.

I Personal Data

Gender	M											F
Grades taught (<i>circle all applicable</i>)	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
Education	Diploma			BA			MA					
School location	City			Village			Ref. Camp					
Years of experience	1-5			6-10			10+					

II The Teaching/learning environment

1. Based on your experience as a teacher of English to young learners (grades 1-4), what are some of the problems you face when dealing with this age group (possibly as compared with older learners)?
2. Do you think classroom circumstances are conducive to teaching young learners (technology, class size, visual aids, etc.)? How important are these factors in determining the overall achievement of young learners?
3. Are three English sessions per week enough for covering the required materials?
Why/why not?
4. Do Palestinian students face special difficulties in learning English because their first language is Arabic? How? Give specific examples.
5. How is the early teaching of English influencing the students' achievement in their first language (Arabic)? Remember that Arab students start learning a new form of Arabic (standard) as they enter school.
6. Does the early teaching of English provide students with better opportunities to utilize modern technology such as computers and the World Wide Web? Do you consider this to be a positive or a negative influence?
7. How is the teaching of English influencing the students' attitude towards their native language (Arabic)?
8. Do you think that early English teaching will help in increasing the students' motivation towards learning English? How?
9. Have you received any training regarding methods, techniques, principles of teaching English to young learners? If yes, give an overview of the content of these workshops or training sessions.

III The Cultural Component

10. Is it important for young learners to become familiar with the target culture(s) (the culture of English speaking countries and communities)? If so, which culture (e.g. American, British, Canadian, other...) should they be familiarized with? Why
11. Does the syllabus contain enough information/practice regarding the target culture(s)? What aspects (social, political, family, film, entertainment, etc.) do you think should be added?
12. The communicative approach was born in a historical period (1960s) that witnessed the flourishing of democratic values in Western cultures, specifically in the American culture. Do you believe that tenets, practices, and techniques borrowed from that framework work effectively in a more authority- oriented setting such as the Arab culture, e.g., learner -centered teaching, shared authority/ decision making, role play and group work.
13. What kinds of difficulties do you face in teaching the target culture?

14. Have you participated in training workshops that deal with culture teaching? If not, please indicate reasons. If yes, give a quick overview of their content.
15. How do you introduce a concept such as "dinnertime", "coeducation," (as it shows in pictures throughout the textbooks), "Christmas", or "circus" for instance? You can pick one of these concepts and talk about it.
16. If the students have a positive attitude towards the target culture, will they attain higher levels of proficiency in the target language? Please explain your response.
17. Previous research has shown that language teachers avoid teaching cultural items either because: 1. they think cultural information is superfluous and it can be acquired "later" after the essential grammar and vocabulary had been mastered, or 2. because they do not know enough about the target culture to be able to teach it, or 3. because culture teaching involves dealing with the students' attitudes "a somewhat threatening, hazy, and unquantifiable area" Galloway (1985). Which among these three reasons applies in your case and in the case of teachers you know? Are there other reasons?