New Approaches to Teaching Critical Thinking Skills through a New EFL Curriculum

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Abstract: *This study aims at investigating new approaches to teaching critical thinking skills through a new EFL curriculum for Palestinian EFL learners. The ultimate aim of the study hopes to provide the Palestinian teachers, students, policymakers and curricula designers some guidelines for integrating critical thinking skills into EFL curricula. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena, qualitative and quantitative methods were used. This mixed approach is used to assure validity depending on different data collection sources. The researcher used a 32-item questionnaire adapted from (Saeed et al., 2012 & Rezaei et al., 2011) that addresses EFL teachers. The content analysis method was also used through which 79 English language supervisors' reports were systematically analyzed. The findings of the study showed that most of their EFL students do not recognize critical thinking skills. Analysis of the reports showed that most periods delivered to EFL students don not enhance critical thinking skills. Based on the results of the questionnaire and the content analysis of the report, the researcher presented some activities, guidelines, and strategies to be utilized by EFL teachers regarding course content, methods of teaching, classroom management, and EFL students' assessment.*

Keywords: *Authentic assessment, information gap, critical thinking, critical thinkers.*

Introduction

Nowadays it becomes so important to equip EFL learners with critical thinking skills. In fact, there are different factors that positively or negatively affect language learners' critical thinking skills. The most important aspects that should be taken into account while incorporating critical thinking skills into EFL curricula are the content, methods of teaching, assessment methods or tools and classroom management. In an EFL environment, EFL learners need Critical Thinking Skills (CTS) to go deep and read themes or concepts beyond the literal meanings. For instance, to get Palestinian students engaged in writing argumentative essays, expressing their ideas with multiple pieces of evidence and proofs, and supporting or justifying their views challenging others' positions, critical thinking skills should be an integral part of the curriculum taught at Palestinian schools. CTS tend to equip EFL learners with tools that may help them to solve the problems and generate the most effective ways to deal with these problems autonomously. They also enrich students' learning experience and make language learning deeper and more meaningful. In this study, the researcher believes that an

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EFL curriculum that highlights the use of critical thinking skills in the teaching and learning process is demanded to develop EFL learners' levels in English language skills.

This study aims at providing the Palestinian teachers, students, policymakers and curricula designers some solid guidelines for integrating critical thinking skills into EFL curricula. Therefore, the researcher will adopt a triangulation approach to collect data that is supposed to provide a complete picture of teaching and learning English for Palestine at Palestinian schools. After reflecting on the nature of E4P and its content, the researchers will develop guidelines for teachers and curriculum designers pertaining to content, classroom management, assessment and methods of teaching.

Literature review

Theoretical background

In terms of critical thinking skills, Starkey (2004) defined the problem as a dilemma, a question or a situation that calls for a solution. So, anyone who faces a difficulty or a problem must take action or make a decision that brings about a resolution of the problem. Critical thinking has different definitions adopted by different academicians. However, all definitions have much in common. For example, Branch (2011) defined it as the individuals' ability to think and make correct decisions independently. From a cognitive psychological perspective, Sternberg (1986) defined CT as "the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts" (p. 3). To Ennis (1993) CT is "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 180). Mcpeck (1981) defined it as "the propensity and skill to engage in an activity with reflective skepticism" (p. 8). Paul has expressed the meaning of CT in multiple ways, one of which is "critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it.

Among the characteristics of critical thinkers, they are *"purposeful, self-regulatory, self-rectifying, habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking precise results* "(Facione, 1990, P.8)

Pertinent studies

Marashi H. & Hosseini R. (2019) examined the comparative impacts of convergent and divergent tasks while employing critical thinking techniques on EFL learners' writing. 60 male and female learners from one of Tehran's language schools were chosen as a sample. The sample was divided into two experimental groups (Divergent X Convergent). The teacher started by teaching critical thinking (CT) techniques to both groups: reasoning, classifying and analyzing, problem-solving, and decision-making. After making the students familiar with CT techniques, the teacher/researcher began the treatment on the two different types of tasks, i.e., divergent and convergent tasks. Results showed that neither group outperformed the other significantly. Researchers attributed this result to the fact that critical thinking instruction was more of an influential factor compared to the variability of convergent and divergent tasks, thereby consolidating further the notion that critical thinking instruction is a highly influential factor in ELT.

Solihati N. & Hikmat A. (2018) investigated the implementation of critical thinking skills manifested in the Indonesian language textbooks used by senior high school students in Indonesia. The researcher used the content analysis approach to find out whether the tasks enhance and promote Learners' critical thinking skills or not. Findings showed a sound shortage in critical thinking skills in the textbook and that the critical thinking task was not varied.

Sumarni et al. (2018) conducted a study that aimed to develop assessment instruments to measure critical thinking skills. They concluded their study by proposing assessment tools that are valid, reliable and practical.

Harizaj M. & Hajrulla V. (2017) conducted a study based on observations in EFL classes. The results of these observations showed that developing critical thinking skills help learners to enhance their communication, enlarge their vocabulary, and help them to learn how to use language for different purposes in a variety of contexts.

Manel & Ahdi Hassan (2019) Learners are aware that exclusive use of English is beneficial, but it is necessary to investigate their attitudes toward the use of English. Learners think that L1 has to be used in the classroom from time to time to meet their needs especially with the new reform that makes learners at the center of the learning process and actively engaged in classroom activities.

Margana M. (2017) had a study aiming at developing English textbooks oriented to the enhancement of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) for students of vocational high schools in Yogyakarta. It is based on the evidence that the existing textbooks for secondary school levels give weight for memorizing and comprehending that target micro-language skills.

Thus, students graduate with poor linguistic competencies and rare HOTS. A questionnaire distributed to 320 students, interviews of 14 teachers and documentation were used to collect data. Results showed teachers and students' inclination to having textbooks rich with HOTS that may bring about creativity and critical thinkers.

Al azri R. (2017) conducted a study entitled "Using Creative Thinking by the Teachers of Grades 1-10 from the Educational Supervisors View in Al-Dahira Governorate Schools." The study aimed at determining to what extent teachers of 1-10 grades use creative thinking skills as perceived by educational supervisors. A 47- item questionnaire was administered to 88 educational supervisors. The items of the questionnaire cover for creative thinking skills: flexibility, sensitivity, originality, and fluency. The results of the study showed that teachers use creative thinking skills in a medium degree with no statistically significant difference that can be attributed to major or gender.

Cairan Zhao C. et. al. (2016) have a paper that focuses on three sets of research-supported teaching strategies which are useful in promoting CT and applicable to EFL classrooms. The main domains were explicit instruction, teacher questioning, as well as active and cooperative learning strategies in addition to discussing the common features of effective CT instruction, which aims to illuminate instructional strategies for CT at a macro level.

Aaron Orszag (2015) examined the competence of Finnish university students' in critical thinking skills upon the completion of English courses. It also investigated the correlation between students' self-reported critical thinking ability and other variables (gender, age, years spent in university, and the importance attributed to critical thinking). A questionnaire was used to collect data by distributing it to 24 students. The results indicated that students were aware of their ability in using critical thinking skills. Nevertheless, they showed their willingness to know more about the constituents of these critical thinking skills. The students also emphasized the importance of reading and being involved in social interaction as important factors for enhancing and promoting their critical thinking skills. The results also indicated that using dialogic teaching methods and strategies, which utilize the power of meaningful talk, can contribute to the development of students' critical thinking ability.

Asgharheidari F. & Tahriri A.(2015) had a study that aimed at exploring EFL teachers' attitudes toward critical thinking (CT) instruction. 30 EFL teachers were selected for data collection. The survey included items on teachers' beliefs towards teaching critical thinking skills. Results indicated that EFL teachers have a clear idea toward the concept of critical thinking skills and that they are aware of the importance of incorporating these skills into the EFL curriculum. They also expressed their willingness to have training sessions on how to teach these skills.

Kesht A. & Seif A. (2013) did a study that investigated the extent to which the reading exercises in E4P 8th grade include Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Content analysis and interviews were adopted to collect data. Results showed that the textbook is mostly encompassed of analysis skill (51.92%), the synthesis skill (41.35%), and the evaluation skill (6.73%). In light of these data, the researchers recommend modifying the reading exercises by providing them with more enrichment material that includes HOTS. English language supervisors are also recommended to hold more workshops to train English language teachers on how to enhance such skills in students' mentalities.

Having worked for 24 years as an EFL teacher, head teacher, educational supervisor and lecturer in many Palestinian educational institutions, the researcher can claim that the English language curricula haven't triggered successful EFL learning in Palestine. EFL learners at Palestine start learning the English language from the first grade at the age of six. When those students graduate from the 12th grade, most of them score significant weakness in all skills of the English Language, mainly in the productive ones. Some of them can't even give a complete meaningful sentence after 12 years of learning the English Language. Before 2000, the Jordanian curriculum "PETRA" was used at Palestinian schools. But after 2000, the Palestinian Authority launched the first national curriculum that had more focus on the productive skills. These curricula recommend using more innovative ways of teaching that are mainly based on the audio-lingual, total physical response and the communicative approach. This new curriculum also highlights different ways of assessment and classroom management. However, what has been happening in the field is different from what is supposed to be practiced. Large classes with students of mixed abilities in addition to novice or unwilling teachers resulted in weaker learners. Moreover, the techniques used by EFL teachers while teaching, assessing and managing their classes are traditional ones that foster inculcation and rote learning rather than providing learners with critical thinking skills to enhance self-dependency. Therefore, the researcher thinks that the Palestinian EFL curriculum should be equipped with content that is rich with critical thinking skills in addition to adopting different authentic assessment tools and interactive classroom management strategies in addition to the appropriate methods of teaching that create critical thinkers. Having a curriculum with the necessary critical skills may improve the EFL learners' level in the English Language. As seen in the previous

studies, incorporating critical thinking skills into English for Palestine curriculum becomes of supreme importance. Many of the aforementioned studies targeted not only the content but also assessment tools. What distinguishes this study from the aforementioned ones is that it has a more comprehensive vision of English language teaching. The current study sees the teaching and learning process as an indivisible unit. The researcher thinks that integrating critical thinking skills into the content should be taken for granted, but this will be of no value if methods of teaching, assessment tools, and classroom management are not taken into account. To guarantee fruitful results, critical thinking skills should be manifested through the four previous domains in any successful teaching and learning process.

Objectives of the study

This study aims at describing the reality of teaching and learning English for Palestine and then proposing guidelines for using critical thinking skills in the content, methods of teaching, classroom management, and assessment methods or tools. To meet these two objectives, the researchers tried to answer the following questions.

    a. To what extent critical thinking skills are recognized by EFL students as perceived by their teachers?

    b. To what extent are Palestinian EFL teachers aware of critical thinking skills and for incorporating these skills into the ELT curriculum?

    c. To what extent do each of the four domains in the analyzed supervisors' reports enhance critical thinking skills?

    d. What critical thinking skills should be incorporated into the content of an EFL curriculum for EFL learners in Palestine?

    e. What methods of teaching should EFL teachers adopt to enhance critical thinking skills for EFL learners in Palestine?

    f. What new approaches should be adopted in classroom management by EFL teachers to enhance critical thinking for EFL learners in Palestine?

    g. What assessment methods/tools should EFL teachers adopt to enhance critical thinking skills for EFL learners in Palestine?

Significance of the study

Advancement of any society has become the result of the educational system implemented in it. A curriculum that has a content deprived of the critical thinking skills our learners need to successfully manage difficulties they face in their daily life, should be replaced by a new one that is rich with the skills needed to help learners solve their problems depending on themselves, not on others. Such a curriculum necessitates a dramatic change in content, methods of teaching, classroom management, and assessment tools. Incorporating critical thinking skills into the curriculum may result in EFL learners who are more able to stand firm in the face of difficulties and solve their problems depending on themselves rather than seeking help from others. The integration of critical thinking skills into the Palestinian curricula is of paramount importance for the following reasons. First, when EFL learners take charge of their learning process, they will be more able to monitor and self-assess their progress. Second, these skills will expand learners' experiences and help them to have meaningful learning instead of rote learning. Learners themselves will be so motivated that will result in improving their levels and become critical thinkers. Third, the Palestinian Ministry of Education may benefit from the suggested guidelines appear in the results of the study to enhance incorporating critical thinking skills into content, class management, methods of teaching and assessment. Therefore, the ministry may carry out a drastic change pertaining to the aforementioned domains. Fourth, EFL teachers may also benefit from these guidelines by using them while teaching their students. Finally, the results of this study may help EFL learners themselves to widen their knowledge and be more aware of the importance of critical thinking skills in their daily life.

Instrumentation

  To develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena, qualitative and quantitative methods were used. This mixed approach is used to assure validity depending on the different data collection sources. The researcher used a 32-item questionnaire adapted from (Saeed et al., 2012 & Rezaei et al., 2011) that addresses EFL teachers, and the content analysis of 79 classroom observation conducted by English Language supervisors during the scholastic year 2018/2019. The questionnaire has two sections. The first part includes 25 items about EFL learners' awareness of critical thinking skills as perceived by their teachers, and the second section (7 items) requires teachers to reflect on the importance of integrating CTS into Palestinian curricula in addition to their awareness of these skills.

The methodology of the study

The researcher used the mixed approach in this study (i.e., qualitative and quantitative methods). The first section of the study will reflect on the content of English for Palestine, teaching practices in the field, classroom management, and the assessment methods or tools. This reflection is based on content analysis to 79 classroom observations conducted by several English language supervisors in the academic year 2018/2019. The analysis of classroom observations classified each report under four entries: the content, methods of teaching, classroom management, assessment methods and levels of thinking applied by teachers

in these lessons. Levels of thinking were categorized according to Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain. To get more data pertaining to learners' awareness and practice of critical thinking skills, a 35-item questionnaire was distributed to 35 English teachers to reflect on EFL learners' awareness of critical thinking skills as perceived by their teachers. Another 7 items in the same questionnaire target teachers' awareness of the importance of critical thinking skills in English language teaching and their stance from incorporating critical thinking skills into the content of the EFL curriculum. The second section answers the other four questions of the study by providing suggestions and guidelines pertaining to including the critical thinking skills in the content, methods of teaching, classroom management, and assessment methods or tools.

Results of the study

Results were ordered according to the questions of the study.

Question One: To what extent critical thinking skills are recognized by EFL Students as Perceived by Their teachers?

To answer this question, the researcher calculated the percentages of each of the likert levels for each item. Table (1) below shows these percentages. As seen in table (1) above 65.7% of teachers believe that their students have a strong intention to recognize the importance of good thinking. Only 42.9% of the teachers agree that their students can identify problems and focus on relevant topics and issues while another 40% were undecided. 45.7% of teachers were undecided whether they can distinguish between valid and invalid inferences or not. 48.6% of teachers agreed that students can suspend judgments and decisions in the absence of sufficient evidence, but 17.1% disagreed and 34.3% were undecided. 51.4% & 17.1% of the teachers were undecided and disagreed respectively on the item " *They can anticipate the consequences of alternative actions*" though 31.4% showed their agreement. 57.1% agreed that their students can accurately

explain their decisions but 22.9% & 2.9% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. 57.2% of teachers were undecided and disagreed that students can

consider alternative explanations for any state of affairs. 57.1% of the respondents were undecided and disagreed that students can curb their emotional reactions to others' arguments. "*They develop and present reasoned and persuasive arguments*" scored 57.1% of the respondents' undecidedness and disagreement. Responding to the item, "My students distinguish credible from non-credible sources of information" 68.5% of teachers were undecided, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The item "*They differentiate evidence from opinion, common sense and anecdotes*" scored 61% of undecidedness, disagreement or strong disagreement. 71.5% of the teachers believe that their students can distinguish opinions from facts. "*My students can draw inferences*" scored 57.2% of the respondents who were either undecided or disagreed. 54.3% of teachers think that their EFL students formulate and ask appropriate questions. 57.1% of the teachers agreed and strongly agreed that students can gather data from multiple sources relevant to a problem to be solved or a decision to be made. 57.1% were either undecided or disagree on the item "*They identify their preconceptions about important issues*". The item "*They can listen attentively to others and provide them with appropriate feedback*" has a 54.3% agreement by respondents. 54.3% of the teachers either agreed or disagreed on the item "*They have a keen sense of curiosity*". "*They have a strong proclivity to validate statements*" has 77.1% of undecidedness and disagreement. 47.7% of teachers do not think that their students are open to criticisms while 51.5% believe the opposite. 57.2% of teachers were undecided, disagree or strongly disagree on the item *" They are malleable*". The item "*They can self-assess themselves*" scored 51.5% of respondents' agreement or disagreement.

Table (1): Percentages of participants' responses to the first section of the questionnaire

Section one: The Critical Thinking Skills recognized by EFL Students as Perceived by their teachers

No.	Item	SA	A	U	DA	SD
1.	My students have a strong intention to recognize the importance of good thinking	2.9	65.7	11.4	17.1	2.9.
2.	My students can identify problems and focus on relevant topics and issues.	0	42.9	40	17.1	0
3.	They can distinguish between valid and invalid inferences	0	31.4	45.7	17.1	5.7
4.	They suspend judgments and decisions in the absence of sufficient evidence	0	48.6	34.3	17.1	0
5.	They can anticipate the consequences of alternative actions	0	31.4	51.4	17.1	0
6.	They can accurately explain their decisions	8.6	57.1	8.6	22.9	2.9
7.	They consider alternative explanations for any state of affairs	2.9	40.0	28.6	28.6	0
8.	They can curb their emotional reactions to others' arguments	0	48.6	28.6	20.0	2.9
9.	They are able to determine the truth or falsity of assumptions	5.7	34.3	34.3	25.7	0
10.	They develop and present reasoned and persuasive arguments	2.9	40.0	31.4	25.7	0
11.	They distinguish between primary and secondary sources of information	0	60.0	20.0	14.3	5.7
12.	My students distinguish credible from non-credible sources of information	0	31.4	37.1	25.7	5.7
13.	They differentiate evidence from opinion, common sense and anecdotes	0	40.0	48.6	5.7	5.7
14.	They distinguish opinions from facts	5.7	65.7	14.3	11.4	2.9
15.	My students can draw inferences	5.7	37.1	42.9	14.3	0
16.	My EFL Students formulate and ask appropriate questions	5.7	48.6	20.0	22.9	2.9
17.	They gather data from multiple sources relevant to a problem to be solved or a decision to be made	5.7	51.4	26.7	14.3	2.9
18.	They identify their preconceptions about important issues	5.7	37.1	40.0	17.1	0
19.	They can listen attentively to others and provide them with appropriate feedback	0	54.3	22.9	20.0	2.9
20.	They can assess and evaluate statements	8.6	34.3	28.6	28.6	0
21.	They have a keen sense of curiosity	2.9	51.4	25.7	20.0	0
22.	They have a strong proclivity to validate statements	0	22.9	60.0	17.1	0
23.	My students are open to criticisms	8.6	42.9	25.7	20.0	2.9
24	They are malleable	8.6	34.3	40.0	14.3	2.9
25.	They can self-assess themselves	8.6	42.9	22.9	25.7	0

Question Two: To what extent are Palestinian EFL teachers aware of critical thinking skills and for incorporating these skills into the ELT curriculum?

The second section of the questionnaire answers question two as seen in table (2) below.

Having a look at table (2), one can see that 82.8% of teachers believe that "*Palestinian EFL teachers need more training about how to teach critical thinking skills*". 80% of them either agreed or strongly agreed that "*Teaching critical thinking skills is an important part of my job as a language teacher*". 85.7% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that "*It is necessary to incorporate critical thinking into the ELT curriculum*". "*Critical thinking is especially important in English language teaching classes.*" Scored 77.2% of agreement and strong agreement. 65.7% of teachers agreed that they build critical thinking explanations and exercises into most of my English lessons. 62.8% of teachers said that they have a clear understanding of what critical thinking actually involves. 60% of teachers believe that it is the primary job of the EFL teacher to teach critical thinking in the classroom.

Table (2): Percentages of participants' responses to the second section of the questionnaire

Question Three: To what extent do each of the four domains in the supervisors' reports enhances critical thinking skills?

To answer this question the researcher summarized all activities listed in the reports regarding the four domains (*the content, methods of teaching, classroom management and assessment tools or methods*). Table (3) below shows the frequency of the critical thinking skills depicted in each of the four domains elicited from teachers' periods supervised by English Language supervisors.

As seen in table (3), the degree of enhancing critical thinking skills through the content, methods of teaching, assessment and classroom management is **low**. Regarding the content, there are 8 periods that include an activity or activities that foster critical thinking skills. They basically appear in the 5th & 6th grades. Out of 79 periods, there are only 17 methods or techniques that enhance

No.	Item	SA	A	U	DA	SD
1.	Palestinian EFL teachers need more training about how to teach critical thinking skills	31.4	51.4	8.6	5.7	2.9
2.	Teaching critical thinking skills is an important part of my job as a language teacher	22.9	57.1	8.6	8.6	2.9
3.	It is necessary to incorporate critical thinking into the ELT curriculum	25.7	60.0	5.7	5.7	2.9
4.	Critical thinking is especially important in English language teaching classes.	34.3	42.9	11.4	5.7	5.7
5.	I build critical thinking explanations and exercises into most of my English lessons	20.0	45.7	22.9	11.4	0
6.	I have a clear understanding of what critical thinking actually involves.	11.4	51.4	31.4	5.7	11.4
7.	It is the primary job of the EFL teacher to teach critical thinking in the classroom	20.0	40.0	31.4	8.6	0

critical thinking skills used by teachers while delivering their lessons. Some of that requires writing a letter, a composition or a reading comprehension passage. It is worth mentioning that most of these good lessons were delivered by female teachers. This was not a surprise to me, as I noticed this fact during my work as an English language supervisor for 10 years. Assessment is another crucial domain that teachers should emphasize as it contributes to creating critical thinkers. Having a look at table (3) above, only 15 periods include an assessment that strengthens critical thinking skills. Through the analysis of the observation reports, the researcher found that most teachers use formative and summative evaluation, but the problem is in the questions asked by the teachers during this evaluation stage. Number 15 above refers to the divergent questions used by teachers during periods. Convergent questions that focus on "what, when, where, etc." Over dominated the total number of questions used in classes. With respect to classroom management, there

are 16 techniques that advance critical thinking skills. The researcher classified pairings, groupings, brainstorming, and interaction among the ones that enhance critical thinking. Furthermore, most of the patterns of interaction were one-way direction (T-S) or (S-T) interaction. This implies that teacher talking time overwhelmed the scene. Bloom's taxonomy of the levels of thinking was taken into account to investigate the level of thinking the questions or the activities assigned by the teacher address. The above table shows that only in three periods, we have either questions and /or activities that address the high levels of thinking. According to Bloom, the cognitive domain has six levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Rarely implemented, the highest thinking level appeared in these lessons was the synthesis level of thinking. This means that the sixth level, evaluation, had not been addressed in any of the 79 periods.

Table 3 frequency of the critical thinking skills depicted in each of the four domains

Grades	Reports #	Content	Methods of teaching	Assessment	Classroom management	Level of thinking
1st	6	0	2	0	0	0
2nd	3	0	3	0	0	0
3rd	7	0	0	1	3	0
4th	6	0	2	3	3	0
5th	6	3	1	2	2	0
6th	6	3	2	0	3	1
7th	5	0	1	0	0	0
8th	15	1	2	2	1	0
9th	10	0	1	2	0	1
10th	7	1	1	2	2	0
11th	6	0	1	2	2	0
12th	2	0	1	1	0	1
Total	79	8	17	15	16	3

Question Four: What critical thinking skills should be incorporated into the content of an EFL curriculum for EFL learners in Palestine?

Textbooks play a crucial role in the process of teaching and learning. In many situations, they serve as the main source of learners input and the learning practices occur in classrooms (Jack C. Richards, 2001). Jack's statement reflects the reality of the Palestinian curriculum since both teachers and learners refer to it as the only source of knowledge. Students are also tested in the content they have covered during the lessons delivered throughout a specific period of time. As textbooks play a major role, curriculum designers should place a huge concern of the content of these textbooks. Despite the advancement of the new technologies, textbooks remain to occupy a pivotal role in language teaching as it provides both teachers and learners with a useful resource they mainly depend on. Good textbooks integrate critical thinking skills in

content, texts, activities, and tasks that address all levels and sometimes challenge learners' capacities and abilities. To guarantee the integration of critical thinking skills, syllabus designers should include the following in the content:

1. ***Activities and tasks that improve debating***: Debates can stimulate learners' keenness to critically reflect on topics from different angles. The debate can perpetuate the intended learning outcomes when the curriculum encompasses real ones. These debates should include topics that are controversial, relevant to learners' level, interesting and inspiring. Moreover, to have a sound and active participation and involvement from the students' side, learners should be informed about the debate beforehand allocating sufficient time to accomplish the task to give them an opportunity to express themselves critically and spontaneously. When learners have enough time they can mull over the topic from multiple angles.

2. ***Mass media Investigation***: To create critical thinkers, the content of the EFL textbook should include topics taken from magazines, newspapers, televisions, YouTube channels, etc. Via investigating and analyzing media, students not only be introduced to academic language but also to terminology that is relevant to sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, sociopolitical and many other authentic topics so close to students' life. As Palestinians, incorporating topics from media into the curricula will raise students' awareness of issues like occupation, quality, discrimination, tyranny, biasness, marginalization, boycotting, normalization, coexistence, etc.

3. ***Problem-solving tasks and activities***: To strengthen critical thinking skills among EFL learners, curricula should include activities and tasks that face learner with a dilemma or a problem to be resolved. Students should be given enough time to find solutions for problems providing that they present genuine, reliable and inspiring answers that convince partners, audience or teachers. This should be accomplished through dividing the class into pairs or groups in which they describe the content, identify the problem, discuss the problem, provide multiple answers or solutions, select the most appropriate options or alternatives and lastly evaluate or reflect on the whole process. Furthermore, teachers should present their students with problems to be solved, but they should take many points into account. First, they should start small choosing min-problems with questions related to the problem. Second, teachers should begin with manageable problems for the students. Third, any selected problem should interest students and motivate them to resolve it. Fourth, an outline for problem-solving strategy is necessary to be handed to students as it helps them to be systematic throughout all stages of the process. Fifth, before students deliver their preferred solutions, teachers should urge them to examine the evidence, consider alternative viewpoints, and the consequences of the possible solutions. Sixth, in case of having controversial issues, teachers should state some principles to be adhered to by all participants in each group. The main guideline principle should be the respect of the right of others to present different views especially when we have a disagreement.

4. ***Many reading comprehension texts.*** The more the students read the more vocabulary items they will learn. These items are learned in the context, not in separate lists. Moreover, these reading texts should cover different themes and address different reading strategies to equip students with these strategies as they deal with these texts. Even the questions that appear in these lessons as pre, while or after questions should conform to linguistic criteria to guarantee meaningful and sound learning. For example, Starkey (2004) stated that the critical reading section should cover many critical thinking skills such as:

   a. *Inference*. Students should acquire the skills of getting the information, understanding what it suggests, and finally draw conclusions based on evidence.

   b. *Persuasion Techniques*. To answer some questions, students need to evaluate arguments. To do so, they need to recognize the rhetorical devices usually used in persuasive writing.

   c. *Reasoning*. In these lessons, students need to know how logically one argues. As they progress, they will be able to create their own arguments.

   d. *Logical Fallacies*: This skill enables learners to distinguish between valid and invalid arguments.

   e. *Judgment Calls*. This inference skill is in demand when learners have some evidence or proof, but not so reliable to depend on so that one can take a solid or clear-cut decision. Therefore, students need here to judge and reflect on their answers.

5. The content should include more *writing tasks* and activities. (Matthews, Ruth, and Joe Lally (2010) assured that

> "*Writing, thinking, and reasoning are inseparable. If students reach university, they will be expected to demonstrate critical thinking whenever they write academic essays or reports within their chosen discipline. Assignments that require drafting and redrafting help focus thinking and sharpen thinking and reasoning within the subject*" (P. 53).

In fact, there are many writing activities that may develop students' thinking such as subject-focused critical thinking portfolio, summary writing, emailing, memories, posters, etc.

6. More focus should also be placed on *speaking activities* that enhance many of the aforementioned skills. Higher communicative competence can be achieved through some practical activities such as:

   a. *Information-Gap Activities*: In these activities, students work in pairs to share knowledge with each other. Student A has some information that students B doesn't. This activity forces them to share knowledge through negotiating meaning to bridge the gap for the sake of accomplishing the mission.

   b. *Role-play activities*: Students work in pairs, they play roles (example: situations from real life: in an airport, in a hospital, in a doctor's office, in an airport, in the library, in a shop, in a university campus, etc.). Students have to write a dialogue on the topic given. The language practiced may vary according to the aim. Students may practice the comparative of adjectives, adverbs of frequency, etc. The teacher uses flashcards, divides students into pairs, assign roles like student A and student B, etc.

   c. *Simulation Activities:* Simulation games embody roles; Jones (1980) defined simulation as a "reality of function in a simulated and structured environment" (p.5). He added that a simulation has three characteristics:
      - A reality of function which means that participants in the simulation must step inside the role they have accepted and act accordingly.
      - A simulated environment where there is no contact with the real world.
      - A structured environment where the participants have all the facts and information provided for them.

   d. *Jigsaw activities:* It is a cooperative learning technique where students work in groups to learn from each other. The jigsaw method was developed by psychologist Elliot Aronson in the 1970s. Studies have shown that this promotes better learning, improves student motivation, and increases the enjoyment of the learning experience. Teachers should prepare assignments in advance and divide their students into groups of fives or sixes assigning a leader for each group. Then, they divide the assignment up into sections that equal the number of students in each group giving each student in each group one segment of this topic to learn. Teachers should allocate sufficient time for each group to learn part of the topic. Next, students take turns to share what they have learned. Finally, each group member gets back to his original group teaching them what he has learned. In English for Palestine, there are few jigsaw activities. These activities should be increased in the curriculum as it provides students with a chance to collaborate with each other, share opinions, and discuss topics.

   e. *Surveys:* Surveys are good tools that encourage students to communicate with other people and to write creatively. Students can write a report on a survey that they have prepared. Topics may vary such as weakness in the English language, students' motivation, environmental issues, climate changes, pollution, etc. Students work together and share information to complete the task.

   f. *Interviews:* Activities should be incorporated into the E4P curriculum that asks students to conduct interviews with different people targeting varied topics. Students prepare a set of questions for their mates on the given topic or about a topic of their own interest. Students prepare questions at home as homework and then use them in class through presentations.

   g. *Observations*: Students can improve their critical thinking skills through being able to distinguish between important points and that of less importance. They also learn how to listen and focus attentively jotting down all notes needed. Once they get back to classes, they need to deliver presentations talking about their experiences.

Question Five: What methods of teaching should EFL teachers adopt to enhance critical thinking skills for EFL learners in Palestine?

Methods of English language teaching have a pivotal influence on critical skills learning. Mayfield (2001) elucidate that students' awareness of critical thinking is raised through engaging them explicitly in critical thinking activities mainly conversing with others to contemplate upon their own thinking and be conscious of their thinking processes through questioning every issue. But it is regrettable to say the most EFL teachers still follow traditional ways of teaching in the Palestinian schools. Some of them still influenced by the way they were taught by, while others refrain from trying any genuine approach or strategy as they have been accustomed to specific fossilized approaches throughout their experience. Pertaining to this point, I can claim that we have teachers with 25 years of experience who keep repeating ways of teaching of the first year. So, one can refer to such teachers by say "Teachers with teaching experience repeated for 25 times during 25 years". The one-year experience teachers form real obstacles in the face of genuine and innovative teaching approaches. It is the role of educators to equip students with the strategies and skills they need to think critically in order to cope with the problems and obstacles they face anywhere. According to Janelle Cox (2019), a number of techniques and strategies can be used by teachers that may lead to critical thinking learning.

1. *Brainstorming:* It is the first step before doing anything. One of the most effective strategies of creating critical thinkers is to brainstorm before you start any activity regardless of the subject. For example "What do you think our lesson will be about? What do you expect to learn upon the completion of this lesson? Reflect on the pictures above the reading passage? Why..? How…? Etc.

2. *Classification and categorization*: This helps students be more organized as they need to identify items and sort them in categories. This strategy helps students to scaffold knowledge in the brain in a systematic and well-organized way. It also prolongs retention duration and facilitates the retrieval of the information when needed. Moreover, this strategy fosters self-inquiry as students start asking what object should go where, when, why and how.

3. *Comparing and contrasting*: This strategy enhances thorough investigation of the items addressed since students need to learn all features relevant to each item to compare and contrast between them. For example, teachers can ask their students to compare and contrast between national and international cultures, customs, habits, etc. Students can be asked to compare and contrast between the previous lesson and the new one or between the weather in Palestine and that in Canada etc.

4. *Making connections*: When teachers urge their students to connect what they learn to their daily life, this is known as a transfer. During this process, students transfer information and knowledge they learned inside classes to be applied and used in real life to overcome obstacles and difficulties.

5. *Groupings and pairings*: Benjamin Franklin once said: "*Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.*" one of the best ways to get EFL learners to think is to engage them in group work. Grouping is a good opportunity for peers to communicate with each other away from the formal setting as the case with teachers. They can be problem solvers upon the completion of the activity as they exchange a variety of skills. It is also a chance for shy or reluctant students to participate.

6. *Team-building exercises:* What distinguishes team-building exercises is that having no wrong or right answer. It is a matter of opinions, views, attitudes, and beliefs. This kind of exercise teaches students many of the argumentative skills; they learn how to respect and accept others' opposite views. I think accepting others as they are without prejudice or stereotyped ideas are one of the main steps towards creating critical thinkers. Open-minded students always have the tendency to advance and develop their level in all aspects of life. Moreover, these exercises give students a room to practice the language in authentic contexts that are so close to real-life situations in which they strengthen their relationships with other team members as they struggle to prove one's point of views.

7. *Picture strip story*: It is one of the techniques suggested by Diane Larsen-Freeman (2008) in the communicative approach. This technique requires dividing the class into groups. A member of the group holds the first picture of the story asking his partners to guess or predict what the second picture looks like. He continues displaying pictures one by one till all get the complete story, not before prediction and thinking critically. In such a technique an information gap always exists since the rest of the group doesn't know anything about the concealed pictures. This exercise also fosters problem-solving skills because it includes the three features of truly communicative activity. When the information gap does exist and the students who receive feedback from their classmate have a varied choice of answers, predictions, interpretations, etc., such activity is classified as a truly

communicative one. The more students communicate with each other exchanging views and ideas, the better critical thinkers will be.

8. In addition to information-gap activities, Diane Larsen-Freeman (2008) stated that opinion-gap activities and a reasoning-gap activity are another two types of tasks. *Opinion-gap* activities require students to provide their feelings, thoughts, attitudes, proclivities, likes, dislikes, etc. to accomplish a task. *Reasoning-gap* activities require extracting or concluding some new information from the information they have already been supplied with. To find this new information, students need to use inference skills.

During the implementation of all aforementioned techniques, the main advice that is of paramount importance is that teachers shouldn't always jump in to help. They have to allocate time for each activity and wait till students consume it. During the allocated time teachers should go around offering help upon the request or when he thinks that he should do so. Teachers need to assist the students in figuring out the best potential solutions to the problem they face.

Question Six: What new approaches should be adopted in classroom management by EFL teachers to enhance critical thinking for EFL learners in Palestine?

The classroom is the center of every student's learning journey. Innovative classrooms offer an atmosphere where EFL learners are more likely to express their thoughts and ideas, think outside the box, address problems with genuine answers and most significantly – learn faster and more efficiently.

Classroom management significantly participates in enhancing learners' critical thinking skills. Elder and Paul (2003) pointed out that having active questioners inside classes is of supreme importance in teaching critical thinking skills. Classroom management should include questions that urge students to deal with a dilemma from various different aspects and levels, such as inquiring into the purpose, interpretation, assumption, and implication of an issue. They also emphasized the fact that deep questions drive learners' thought beyond the surface ones.

Teachers need to develop their students' habit of questioning and inquiring. Socratic questioning boosts students' development and clarification of their thinking. Questioning allows students to learn new material connecting it to previous ones and foreseeing future events or expectations based on data currently available.

Homogeneous and *heterogeneous* groups are to be used in classes as they enhance critical thinking skills. The teacher himself is to decide whether to divide the class into homogeneous groups or heterogeneous ones. This depends on the tasks or the activities and the objectives of the lesson. The majority of Palestinian classes are of mixed ability learners. If the purpose of the teacher is to assign different activities for different groups, the homogeneous groups are the solution. But if he intends to let able students teach their less able peers, heterogeneous groups is the answer.

Peer teaching and *peer-editing* is a good chance for shy students to fearlessly communicate with their peers without barriers. It is also an opportunity for the successful ones to practice their skills by helping their classmates. *Grouping* may lessen some peer's struggle with other peers who excel them. Creativity is empowered through groups for students who have mastered the content, help their peers to comprehend and understand the material covered in previous classes.

Dividing classes into groups is not an arbitrary process organized by teachers. Teachers should not only assign a role for each member in the group, but they also provide each one with the description of his role. These specified roles force lazy, shy or dependent learners to share knowledge with peers from the one hand, and stop dominant learners from controlling the scene giving no chance for other peers to participate from the other hand .

Pairing is also a good technique that may enhance critical thinking skills. Good classroom manager knows well when to use open pairs or closed ones. Working in pairs fosters exchanging and discussing ideas especially in debates. Teachers can shift to open pairs when he wants to let the rest of the class learn from the pair as a model especially when they are distinguished students debating or defending a genuine topic. In order to keep the creativity flowing smoothly, teachers should keep their classroom physical *environment* (*layout*) adaptable and allow it to be easily reorganized. While conducting tasks and activities, teachers need to create a sense of humor to create a positive atmosphere that flourishes creativity.

When students show progress, teachers should reward them as an incentive. Therefore, good responses or behaviors are likely to be repeated in the future. Students are also motivated when teachers allow them to participate in identifying the goals they are to achieve. This will give them a clearer vision for where they want their learning to take them. They naturally become more motivated to find genuine solutions to achieve goals. When achievements are reached, teachers should celebrate this with their students.

Teachers should also use different *audio-visual aids*. Displaying activities via audio-visual aids makes learning meaningful and inspiring, and students absorb knowledge deeply that help to store information in the long term memory. Through these aids, teachers have to encourage debates and discussion. Using creative and *meaningful discussions* and *debates* provide students with a plethora of ideas, opinions, feelings, attitudes and even resolutions depicted by their talks, arguments or presentations.

These debates and discussions are supposed to produce critical thinkers for many reasons. First, they urge students to critically think about the problem or the topic addressed. Second, it teaches them the skill of listening as students are challenged here to critically listen to peers because they need to respond to the counterpart debates of their peers. Third, this technique provides room for students to challenge each other creatively and intelligently providing their views and ideas .

To successfully teach critical thinking skills to students, teachers should *model* these skills in classes before initiating tasks or activities. During this modeling, teachers have to explain the reasoning, providing alternatives and evidence for a claim, categorizing and then evaluating the options, choosing the most appropriate one based on logic evidence, not biasness, and describing and explaining puzzled and confusing issues. In 11th & 12th grades, the textbooks include some *literature* that teachers should use to enhance critical thinking skills. Other classroom management principles that necessitate a thorough concentration by teachers to enhance critical thinking skills are the following:

Self s editing/correction: Teachers should follow the following strategy to enhance this skill. Once students make a mistake, the teacher should not rush to provide answers to students. This behavior eradicates students' skills while they are in the womb before birth. Instead, teachers should give the student a chance to select between the answer he gave and the one/s the teacher supplied. Second, the teacher may repeat the student's answer with a rising intonation to signal that something wrong occurs. Third, teachers can repeat what has been said by the student stopping just before the mistake.

Teacher Talking Time and Student Talking Time: Teachers should always remind themselves that students attend schools to learn not the teachers. Language teaching, in particular, wouldn't be of any success if students weren't given the appropriate opportunity to practice and use the language. I do believe that language is communication. As Palestinian, the majority of students have no chance to use the English language but inside the classroom. Well-qualified teachers are those who minimize STT and maximize TTT to the optimal level.

The teacher should let students lead. Students should be encouraged to step into the teacher's shoes for a bit. For example, students can be asked to tell teachers and classmates what they have learned or to reflect on a specific lesson expressing their thought, feelings, and attitudes. Students can be given some presentations on a section or a topic from the subject matter.

The researcher believes that *building rapport* with students means effective teaching. If students like the teacher then they like the subject matter as well, and they will be more interested, engaged and motivated. Indeed, such an environment will certainly provide a convenient atmosphere for critical thinking enhancement. Building rapport with students doesn't only enhance critical thinking skills but it also accomplishes the following:

a. Invites an environment of open communication through which teachers learn more about their learners' likes and dislikes in addition to learning styles and strategies they really prefer to effectively achieve their goals.

b. Facilitates the process of providing feedback and encourages genuine communication between teachers and students.

Question Seven: What assessment methods/tools should EFL teachers adopt to enhance critical thinking skills for EFL learners in Palestine?

Sumarni et al (2018) emphasized that learning that must be implemented is the learning that can develop higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). This included skills of "*problem-solving, creativity, critical, and decision making*"(P. 1). They added that one of the motivations for the development of Critical Thinking Skills assessment is to prepare students to achieve more in universities and to be successful in the workforce. This can be mainly achieved by successfully transfer from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning with great focus on higher-order thinking skills.

In fact, Assessment is one of the main crucial factors that affect language learners' critical thinking skills. Through adopting innovative assessment tools and methods, EFL learners will develop their abilities to think critically. The researcher believe that teacher should encounter their students with sound choices of assessment methods, tools and activities that may bring about a drastic change in our students' mentality. Shirkhanj Servat (2011) emphasized the use of

ongoing assessment and referenced criterion assessment to enhance EFL learners' critical thinking skills. To enhance EFL learners' critical thinking skills through assessment practices, the following suggestions will help a lot:

1. Having *ongoing assessment* instead of having one-shot exams or even two exams before the final one.
2. Adopting *criterion-referenced* testing in place of norm-referenced testing. CR testing classifies students by the learning objectives while NR compares and contrasts between learners' grades. The researchers believe that the first type enhances collaboration rather than competition and it minimizes memorization and maximizing interpretation, analysis and creating.
3. *Giving feedback* after each exam enables learners to understand rather than memorize senselessly. So, answers to exams and assignments should be discussed with students elaborately.
4. *Self-assessment & Peer-assessment:* Students should be given the chance to assess not only themselves but also their peers. I think this enables them to think critically as they use the highest level of Blooms' thinking skills. During this process, students don't only identify the error, but they also have to defend themselves and argue peers to convince them in case of negotiating meaning or any other aspect. To enhance the students' questioning capacity, teachers should provide them with models such as: What do you think about this? What are your *reasons* for thinking that …? (This gives students practice in justifying their opinions by providing supporting reasons.) What does that imply? (This encourages them to draw conclusions.) What explains …? What would be the result of..? What if …? (This should lead to hypothetical reasoning).

In most of the reading texts questions of English for Palestine, the focus is on knowledge and comprehension. Occasionally these texts include some questions that address higher levels of thinking such as synthesis and evaluation. The researcher believe that questions of reading texts have to cover all levels of thinking skills from knowledge to evaluation.

Another crucial point that teachers should take into account is that not restricting assignments to one format. They should allow students to select their preferred formats to explore the task such as assignments, short paragraphs, posters, bubbles, magazines, emails, blogs, etc. Varied formats encourage students to explore multiple genuine and innovative ideas and themes that open the door wide for creativity.

Advanced students should also be challenged with extension *projects* for all levels of learners. In this way, individual differences are taken into consideration, so successful learners learn more themes and at a faster rate, and they have a room for experimenting with more complicated open-ended tasks rather than regular ones.

Tests are considered as sub-set of assessment. Therefore, teachers should include *authentic assessment* tools in addition to traditional tests. For example, students should be familiar with these alternative tools such as portfolios, presentations, observations, interviews, projects, surveys, etc. To guarantee sound results from using such authentic tools, teacher should train their students on the principles and the ways of implementing these tools. For instance, rubrics for each tool should be attached with the assignment in addition to some basic guidelines pertaining to the proper implementation for each one.

Conclusion

Upon an in-depth review of the existing literature on critical thinking, it is highly recommended that teachers assist their students to become effective critical thinkers, i.e. to help them acquire both the critical thinking skills and critical attitudes to deal with the changes and challenges given. In terms of classroom teaching, teachers' effective use of questions, involving students in discussions on challenging and motivating topics and different forms of reflection conducted on the basis of respect could engage students in meaningful critical thinking processes. Moreover, a context that supports and values inquiry and a teaching and learning atmosphere that respects different and sometimes competing for viewpoints are crucial in facilitating students' critical thinking development. Such practical techniques as debates, problem-solving tasks, self-assessment, and peer-assessment can also be helpful. Finally, teachers' in-class application of critical thinking skills by providing explicit explanations of the importance of critical thinking could also help students enhance critical thinking. Once foreign language learners become critical thinkers, their language skills will be improved too. Including the aforementioned activities in English for Palestine and implementing them in the other three domains, students will certainly find themselves enthusiastic, motivated, and enjoyable, collaborators, etc. It is worth mentioning here that well organized and prepared interactive-based activities are a catalyst to help learners understand the learning process and be communicatively competent. Designing and applying critical thinking skills requires the teacher to be flexible, creative and open-minded. Therefore, to achieve this goal, teachers need to develop alternative genuine methods of teaching,

creative classroom management techniques and authentic assessment in addition to traditional tests. Regarding syllabus designers, more critical thinking tasks are to be incorporated into the content. Such curriculum provides teachers with a plethora of critical thinking tasks and activities which enable them to more freely choose the ones that meet their student's levels. The researcher thinks that it is nearly the job of teachers to adapt the material to conform to teaching critical thinking skills. For instance, in a reading passage, teachers should relate their learners' experience to that stated in the passage. In writing activities, teachers should provide outlines based on the targeted critical thinking skill with some keywords used in such an argument or skill. In listening and speaking tasks or activities, students should be taught how to draw conclusions and go deep to find out explicit meanings.

All in all, in this vast world that becomes a small village because of the tremendous fast and wonderful advancement in Information Technology, using the programs, apps, games, etc. become a must in each educational institution. These applications do not only provide a nontraditional environment, but they also enhance many critical thinking skills. Providing learners with good critical thinking skills enables them to store information in the long term memory, and in the future, they will be productive employees, and active and engaged citizens. They can also take decisions that lead to better life circumstances in the future. The key point in utilizing Web-Based Technology is shifting from teacher-based to learner-based learning that is more motivating and enjoyable. Web-based technology tools can be a great tool to help facilitate student engagement.

Patrick Cole (2016) sated that to keep learners interested and engaged, technology can be used to teach critical thinking skills. He proposed ten apps that are great resources for teachers to have their learners become curious individuals with the ability to think for themselves. It was emphasized that instead of memorizing the information, critical thinking help learners to analyze it, draw Conclusion, find Practical Applications, integrate the new information with the previous one, form and defend opinions based on information, recognize the difference between good and bad Information, summarize and synthesizing information, strategize and collaborate and finally plan for his future. From the ten apps, I choose seven as I think they are more practical. Following are the seven tools and resources for using technology to teach critical thinking skills.

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