TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: THE CASE OF PALESTINE

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Abstract – *Teaching critical thinking has become a major goal of contemporary education. In spite of this, few studies address the issue of teaching critical thinking in Palestinian educational institution; therefore, this study examines teachers' perception about teaching critical thinking skills in Palestinian schools. It employs different data collection tools, including a questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations, and the inspection of exams and worksheets. The study reveals that Palestinian schools do not teach critical thinking skills effectively and consistently. It discusses the following factors that impede the teaching of critical thinking: (a) Teachers lack training in critical thinking, (b) The classroom environment does not enhance thinking, (c) Most questions posed to students require recall of information, (d) Pupils are not given enough wait time to answer thoughtful questions, (e) Pupils are not trained to regulate their learning processes.*

Introduction

*T*eaching critical thinking has become an important goal of contemporary education. Despite this, few studies address the issue of teaching critical thinking in Palestinian educational institutions. The studies conducted so far are limited in scope as they examine the issue only as it relates to university and college students. There is a need to examine the role of Palestinian high school teachers in developing critical thinking skills among students. This requires carrying out an investigation to examine the existing pattern in schools, if any, and to discover the relationship between the teachers' beliefs[1] about critical thinking and their teaching behaviours and methodologies.

Concept of critical thinking

A review of literature in the field of critical thinking offers various definitions, including those of Kuhn (1991), Ennis (1989) McPeck (1981) and Paul *et al.* (1995). Kuhn (1991) defines critical thinking as the skills of argument. Ennis (1989) claims that critical thinking is skilful, responsible thinking that facilitates

good judgment because it relies upon criteria, self-correcting and is sensitive to context. McPeck (1981) similarly defines critical thinking as the tendency and skill to engage in an activity with reflective scepticism. Paul *et al*. (1995) define critical thinking as the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. Paul *et al*. (1995) describe a set of basic critical thinking principals and strategies with suggested ways of developing these skills in daily teaching practices. Paul *et al*. identify critical thinking with moral critique. This involves not just thinking well, but thinking fairly. Paul *et al*. contrast critical thinkers with uncritical thinkers who are easily manipulated and with selfish thinkers who manipulate others. Paul *et al*. calls for focusing attention on both critical thinking skills and critical thinking values as well.

This study has adopted the 'experts' definition' of critical thinking, which is presented in Facione (1996, P. 4-5):

> 'Critical thinking is a purposeful, self regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations about which the judgment is based. Critical thinking is essential as a tool of inquiry. As such critical thinking is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one's personal and civic life. While not synonymous with good thinking, critical thinking is a pervasive and self- rectifying human phenomenon.'
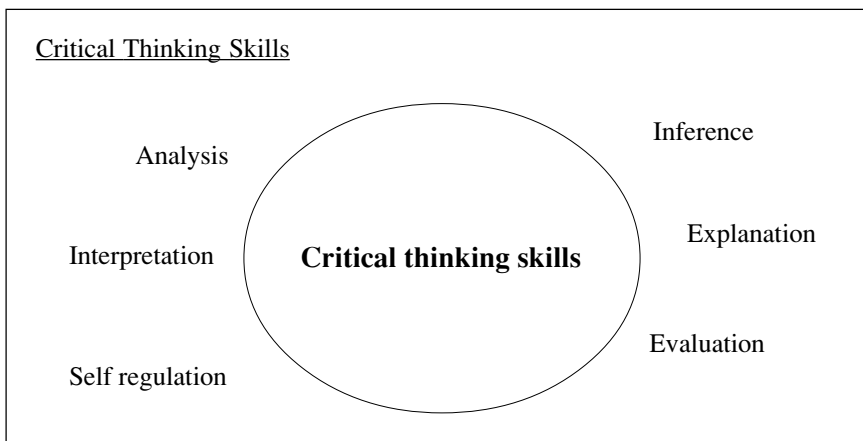
Source: *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts* (Facione, 1996. p.7).

Critical thinking involves abilities as well as certain dispositions. The abilities include interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. The dispositions include inquisitiveness, open-mindedness, analyticity, systematicity, cognitive maturity, truth seeking and critical thinking self-confidence (Facione, 1996).

How to teach thinking?

This century is characterized by wide use of technologies. The world is becoming smaller. Lifelong learning and responsible participation in society requires deeper thinking skills from students. Teaching thinking has therefore become an urgent mission for educators. The notion of teaching thinking is not new; Socrates laid the foundation for it through his method of questioning, which is known at present as *Socratic Questioning*. This method is considered as the best-known critical thinking teaching strategy (Paul *et al.*, 1995). Other strategies and models for teaching thinking are reviewed by Wilson (2000), who presents Nisbet's (1990) classification of thinking approaches, either through specifically designed programs and/ or by infusion through the curriculum. Examples of the specifically designed programs are: *Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment, the Somerset Thinking Skills Course, Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE), Philosophy for Children, and the Cognitive Research Trust (CoRT).* An example of an infusion program is *Activating Children's Thinking Skills (ACTS) Through the Whole Curriculum.*

All approaches to teaching thinking emphasize the role of the teacher. Teachers who aim at teaching thinking skills create a thinking classroom ask divergent and thoughtful questions and help pupils to monitor their learning and thinking processes.

Many studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the different thinking programs. Wilson (2000) reviews several of these studies. She concludes that some research studies present mixed findings regarding the effect of teaching thinking. Wilson writes, 'Evaluation studies are inconclusive. A number purport to link successful outcomes with teaching thinking skills but it is difficult to control for the influence of other variables' (p.39). It seems that teaching thinking is neither a well defined nor an easy process. Furthermore, it shows that there is not only one right thinking program.

Design

This is an exploratory research that aimed to describe English language teachers' beliefs about teaching critical thinking skills. For this purpose a questionnaire has been developed. Also, the study aimed to examine the

instructional strategies, if any, used by the English language teachers in teaching critical thinking skills.

Population

The population of this study is comprised of all the Arab English language teachers of the 10th and 11th grades who teach in the district of East Jerusalem (55 in total). All of these English language teachers completed the questionnaire that assesses English language teachers' beliefs about teaching critical thinking skills. The population is distributed according to gender, type of school, academic degree and years of experience as the following:

TABLE 1: The Distribution of the Population of the Study According to Different Variables

Gender		
30 males	25 females	
Type of school		
26 private schools	29 governmental schools	
Teachers academic degree		
45 BA	6 MA	4 college diploma
Years of experience		
(1-5 years) 11	(6-10 years)	(10 years and above) 26

The focus group

A purposeful 'in depth' sample of eight English language teachers was selected as a focus group. These English language teachers' lessons were observed, follow up interviews were conducted, and their assessment instruments were analyzed.

Instrumentation

One of the difficulties in examining teachers' beliefs is the fact that they are not directly observable. It is unavoidable that teachers' beliefs must be inferred from their instructional behaviour. For the purpose of this study, the following tools were used:

– A questionnaire

– Classroom observations

– An interview

– Analysis of assessment instruments.

A questionnaire containing 110 items was developed. The questionnaire was distributed to specialists in the field of education in order to test its validity. Modifications by the evaluators were taken into consideration, and the questionnaire was modified accordingly. To test the reliability of the questionnaire, test retest reliability was computed. A group of 13 English language teachers from outside the study population was selected for this purpose. The questionnaire was administrated twice with a three week time lapse between the administrations of the questionnaire. A Pearson *r* was calculated to be 76. The final questionnaire consisted of 83 items distributed among 6 dimensions that assess English language teachers' beliefs about teaching explanation, inference, interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and self-regulation. (See Appendix no. 1)

Respondents to the questionnaire were required to place a tick under the frequency of their teaching behavior (always =5, frequently =4, sometimes =3, rarely =2, never =1).

Researchers have noted the inadequacy of the questionnaire as a measure of beliefs when used in isolation. Therefore a purposeful 'in-depth' sample of eight was also selected. These English language teachers' classrooms were observed. The classroom observations were carried out in the classrooms of the eight selected English language teachers. Each classroom was observed 4 times for a whole period (45 minutes). The purpose of the observation was to obtain an interpretative context for the questionnaire data. For this purpose an observation chart was developed (see Appendix no. 2).

The English language teachers in the 'in depth' sample were also interviewed. The aim of the interview was to probe beliefs about teaching critical thinking. The interview began with an open question to elicit the participant's perspective without sensitizing him/her to the hypotheses of the research. The interview progressed through mutual negotiation. (See Appendix no. 3)

Finally, a set of assessment instruments, which consist mainly of test papers and worksheets, were analyzed. The analysis aimed to identify questions that encourage critical thinking and require the students to analyze, evaluate, and apply information.

Results

Analysis of the completed questionnaires reveals that English language teachers believe that their instructional practices sometimes enhance critical thinking skills (the mean on the overall questionnaire is *3.2* while always =5, frequently =4, *sometimes =3*, rarely =2, never =1). English language teachers believe that they set the environment for teaching thinking skills more than they actually teach critical thinking skills.

English language teachers believe that their teaching practices enhance inference and analysis to the same extent and more than other critical thinking skills. English language teachers' beliefs about teaching explanation, interpretation, evaluation, and self-regulation are weaker respectively.

TABLE 2: The Population's Means and Standard Deviations for the Questionnaire and for every Dimension in the Questionnaire

	Mean	SD
Inference	3.37	.11
Self Regulation	2.73	.10
Analysis	3.37	.10
Explanation	3.35	.10
Evaluation	3.11	.50
Interpretation	3.33	.10
The Questionnaire	3.20	.11

These numbers mean that English language teachers believe that they sometimes help the students to think critically. Perhaps such is the case because teachers are not familiar with the notion of critical thinking. Teacher training programs at universities and colleges do not provide any courses on teaching critical thinking skills (see Sabri, 1997). If teachers were trained to teach critical thinking skills they would supplement existing textbooks by asking thought-provoking questions.

The following is an example from the classroom observations:

> *In the English language textbook for the ninth grade (Advance with English 3/ Oxford/ 1997 a unit about fire (unit 2). The lesson describes fire in areas an impoverished neighbourhood and there are the following lines:*

> '…But the tragedy does not stop there. Women and children made homeless sit huddled under blankets, while the men gather together what they have been able to rescue from their burning homes.'

The teacher asked the students the following questions: What is the 'tragedy'? Give the meaning of tragedy in Arabic. What did the men do? What did the women do?

These questions are closed questions that do not enhance communication or thinking. In the interview, this teacher was asked why she did not ask 'deeper' questions e.g. 'The lesson states that women and children were made homeless, what about men' 'Were men made homeless too?' 'Is that mentioned in the lesson?' 'In your opinion, why it is not mentioned?' 'Do you know any women who help and rescue their families?' 'Do you agree with the writer, why?' The teacher explained that she was not sure what 'deeper questions' mean. After a short discussion she added that her role is to teach English: vocabulary and grammar. She added that she asks similar questions to those at the end of the unit, the same type of questions that will be included in the national exam (Al- Tawjihi).

Some classroom observations show a few examples of teaching critical thinking skills, but most of these examples are surface ones. The following is the best example of teaching thinking in the English Language classroom for the 10th grade:

TABLE 3: An Example from the Classroom Observations

Teacher behaviour	Pupils' thinking
One of the teachers introduced his lesson Helen Keller by putting a picture of her and her teacher on the board and saying:	Interpretation of the picture.
Teacher: Today, our lesson is about a special lady. Look at the lady in the picture, what is she doing?'	- Elicits pupils' background knowledge
Pupil: Talking?	
Pupil: Standing with a friend.	- Does not stop their thinking by providing an
The teacher: 'Where is she putting her fingers?'	answer, instead he
Pupil: On her friend's mouth?	asks leading questions.
Pupil: On the lips.	

Teacher: Why is she doing that?	-Requires the pupil to
Pupil: It is not clear why.	clarify his thinking.
Teacher: What exactly is not clear?	- Helps them to make
Pupil: May be they are playing.	plausible inference.
Teacher: Do you agree- are they playing?	
Pupil: There is not a game like this.	- The pupil realizes
Pupil: They are too old to play such games!	contradiction.
Pupil: May be she is reading her friend's lips.	
Pupil: She can read the lips without touching them.	
Pupil: If she reads the lips then she cannot hear.	
Teacher: What do we call pupils that cannot hear?	- Requires accurate answers.
Various pupils: Deaf.	
Pupil: Oh, yes- she is Helen Keller.	
Teacher: Good! How did you know?	- Requires explanation
Pupil: She is deaf…she can't see sign language or read the lips because she is blind.	- Understanding implications and consequences.
Pupil: That's why she puts her fingers on her friend's lips.	
Pupil: I think that this is her teacher.	
Pupil: Her teacher was her friend.	
Teacher: Yes, this is a picture of Helen Keller and her teacher.	
Pupil: I read a story about her.	Pupils build on their
Pupil: There was a program about her.	background knowledge.
Pupil: There is a school for the blind named after her in Jerusalem.	
Teacher: Why do you think the school was named after her?	
Pupil: Because she was blind.	- Asks for explanations.
Teacher: What do you think?	
Pupil: There are many blind people.	
Pupil: Because she was deaf and blind.	
Pupil: But the school is for the blind only.	
Pupil: May be she gave them some money.	
Teacher: What do you think? Do you agree?	
Pupil: Many people give money to such schools.	- Distinguishing relevant
Teacher: Let us see. What else do you know about her?	from irrelevant information.

Pupil: I read that her teacher helped her and she learned reading and writing. She even wrote some books.

Teacher: That is right.

Pupil: She was successful although she was deaf and blind.

Pupil: That is the reason why the school is named after her.   — Requires clarification

Teacher: What is the reason?

Pupil: Because she was successful.   — Drawing conclusions.

Teacher: And?

Pupil: She is an example for the blind to follow.

Pupil: Not only for the blind but also for all people.

Teacher: Does she remind you of anyone else?

Pupil: Yes, Taha Hussein.

Teacher: How are they similar?

Pupil: Both are blind. Both wrote books.   — Noting significant

Teacher: Yes- both are achievers in spite of their disabilities.   similarities.

How are they different?   — Interpretation and

The teacher and the pupils continue discussing   clarification of ideas.
similarities and differences, then the pupils read
and discuss the lesson.

The instructional behaviour of this teacher helps the students to think critically. The teacher could have talked and given a brief introduction about Helen Keller, while the pupils listened passively to him. Rather, he acted as a guide and allowed the pupils to take an active role in their learning. He did not talk much and most of his talk he raised thinking questions. The pupils felt free to express their ideas and the teacher helped them to clarify their thoughts. His responses encouraged the pupils to think. He did not say 'no that is wrong' or 'good.' Such a response would block the pupils' thinking process. Instead, when the pupils failed to answer, he asked leading questions to help them respond correctly.

The above is just one extraordinary example in a pattern that emerged from the observations. This English language teacher holds an MA in education and teaches in a private school. The interviews with teachers and the observations of the classroom reveal that English language teachers consider their roles in the classroom to lecture, tell, cover material and teach the subject matter. As one of

the teachers said: 'I have to finish the entire book, to cover the material. I want to explain the grammatical rules and to help the students to learn more vocabulary and reading skills. I have to talk all the time to make sure that students get the right answer. It will be difficult within 45 minutes to ask the pupils to express themselves and to answer open-ended questions'.

In general, the following can be concluded from classroom observations, teacher interviews and analysis of assessment instruments:

Teachers lack training in critical thinking

Classroom observations, interviews and analysis of assessment tools indicate that teachers are not familiar with critical thinking; they do not know what its skills are. The teachers do not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to make inferences, analyze, interpret, evaluate, explain, or regulate their learning process. All English Language teachers in the study and most English language teachers in Palestinian schools are graduates of the English Language and the education departments in the local universities and colleges. Palestinian teacher preparation programs 3-do not include a course or seminar on critical thinking (see Sabri, 1997). Al-Qattan Centre for Educational Research and Development (QCERD, 2001) evaluated teacher training programs and identified several problems including the duplication of field of specializations and programs, the absence of admission criteria agreed upon by the institutions, the lack of human resources, many programs are overly theoretical and neglect the practical dimension of real school settings. Teachers are trained in a way that focuses on coverage of theories and facts more than developing critical and reflective practitioners. Sabri, (1997) calls for improvements in the teacher training programs and indicates that competencies related to the practical issues of classrooms are more important than other theoretical issues of education. Teacher training programs in Palestinian universities should place more emphasis on class applications and teaching techniques rather than concepts and theories of learning. Teachers should be trained to think critically about their roles in the classroom, to integrate critical thinking skills with the curriculum and to enhance pupils' thinking.

The educational school system does not enhance thinking

In most observed lessons the students sit passively while the teacher is talking and explaining. Students are not asked to put into their own words what the author, the teacher or other students said. They are not given the chance to express their own views or to challenge each other's ideas and points of views. This picture in the classrooms reflects the patterns of governance in the entire

school system which is 'a highly centralized bureaucracy that operates on a strict hierarchical basis; it reproduces patriarchal roles in society; its real purpose is to domesticate and control' (Moughrabi, 2002, p.10). He describes a picture from the textbook National Education (2000) for grade one (the picture is on p.51) that shows: 'the school principal sitting around a table with some teachers. The heading of this particular lesson is 'Workers in our school'. Beneath the picture is a statement of the objective: 'to identify those who work in our schools and to deduce the nature of their functions.' What is striking about the picture is the fact that the principal (male, despite the existence of a significant number of female principals within the system) is sitting at the head of the table while the teachers (two males and two females) are sitting timidly on each side. The principal wears glasses, a coat and tie; his head is significantly bigger than the rest, and his finger is raised as if he is making a point' (Moughrabi, 2002, p.10). This description illustrates the relationship between teachers and school principals. So it is difficult for teachers to play the role of guides and facilitators of critical thinking in such an educational system which 'still concentrates on rote learning and memorizing, instead of developing self-learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills that help in personal and social decision making' (Hashweh, 1999, p.24).

The classroom environment does not facilitate the teaching of thinking. All of the classrooms that were observed are set up with the desks in rows; the teachers' desk or table is situated in the front of the room. Such an arrangement does not enhance interaction. A better arrangement is to be in groups where pupils can work cooperatively. When asked about using teacher-fronted instruction and lecturing the entire lesson, almost all teachers gave the same reasons; time limitations, crowded classes, the activities in the textbooks do not lend themselves to group work, and teachers lack training on cooperative learning.

Teachers require from their students to 'pay attention' but they do not use thoughtful vocabulary (e.g. analyze, compare, provide evidence, speculate, predict) that helps them to focus their thinking.

Pupils are not given enough wait time to answer questions thoughtfully

The 'wait-time' is an instructional variable that defines the periods of silence that follow teacher questions and students' completed responses. Teachers in the study give pupils very limited time to answer a question before providing an answer themselves or turning the question to another pupil. Giving students more 'think time' to respond makes a marked difference in their thoughtfulness and in the whole intellectual atmosphere of the classroom (Stahl, 1994; Swift *et al.*, 1985).

Most questions posed to students require only recall of information

English language teachers generally test pupils' understanding by asking them to answer yes/no, true/false and traditional essay questions that do not require meaningful thinking or understanding. Most attention is given to facts and pupils are seldom challenged to think. Students are not trained to reason well or encouraged to make justifications for their opinions and beliefs. Teachers do not provide thought provoking questions. At the same time, pupils do not ask thoughtful questions. Similarly, the English language textbooks do not provide thoughtful questions or problems. The teachers' only goal is to prepare the pupils for the national test that does not require the pupils to think critically. Teachers should be trained to ask the right questions because the key to powerful thinking is questioning. Examples of questions that encourage critical thinking are: what does it mean? Is it true? If it is true, so what? What other alternatives are there? Put in your words what has been said? Support your claim.

Pupils are not taught self-regulation skills

Self regulation means 'to monitor one's cognitive activities, the elements used in those activities, and the results educed. Particularly by applying skills in analysis, and evaluation to one's own inferential judgments with a view toward questioning, confirming, validation, or correcting either one's reasoning or one's results' (Facione, 1996, p.11). Self-regulation is considered as the most remarkable thinking skill because it allows critical thinkers to improve their own thinking. Some educators call this skill 'meta-cognition,' meaning it raises thinking to another level (Facione, 1996). Following from this definition, teaching self-regulation means helping students to learn to think in the course of learning their discipline. The questionnaire shows that teachers' believe that they do not teach pupils self-regulation. In classrooms, the teachers do not help their pupils to become independent reflective learners, nor do they demonstrate effective learning strategies. Consequently, pupils do not take an active role in their learning process; they do not know how to set their own goals, plan for their own learning or monitor their progress. There are very limited instances where the teacher and the pupils discuss strategies for dealing with problems, rules to remember and time constraints.

Teachers use traditional assessment tools only

Pupils can regulate their learning process if they can assess their points of weakness and strength. However, teachers in Palestine tend to use only traditional tests to assess pupils' performance and understanding. Usually the assessment

takes place after completing a lesson, or completing a project. Criteria for assessment are not known to pupils prior to the test and it is not negotiated between the teacher and the pupils. Teachers do not provide opportunities for peer and self-assessment. Thus, pupils cannot find out for themselves what they know and what they do not know. Teachers lack training in using authentic assessment tools. Most teachers are not familiar with various types of assessment and their associated vocabulary (authentic, portfolio, self-assessment, rubrics, and so on). Empirical research shows that authentic assessment is a powerful measure of student achievement and teaching effectiveness (Herrington & Herrington, 1998; Zimmerman, 1992). Therefore, it is important to train teachers in the use of authentic assessment tools to help students to evaluate their learning.

The findings of this study reveal that teaching critical thinking skills is a challenging task. The Palestinian educational system does not teach thinking skills effectively and consistently. This, of course, is not a situation unique to Palestine. Tsai (1996) reached similar findings for Taiwan. He stated that the Taiwanese educational system does not help students to think 'better'. He examined secondary teachers' perspectives of teaching critical thinking in Taiwan. Teachers in Tsai's study confirm that students do not acquire critical thinking skills from Taiwanese schooling. There is indication from literature that teachers lack training in teaching critical thinking skills. Pithers (2000), reviewed the literature of critical thinking and presents evidence which suggests that not all students may be good at critical thinking; and not all teachers teach students 'good thinking skills'. Paul *et al.* (1995) stated that a statewide test in California demonstrated that many teachers and even some testing experts have serious misunderstandings about the nature of reasoning and how to assess it. Che (2002) described a critical-thinking skills project in Hong Kong suburban secondary school and analyzes teacher and student evaluation of the project, concluding that teachers find it difficult to abandon teacher-centred teaching because of inadequate training in teaching critical thinking. Ruminski & Hanks (1995) found that teachers believe they are teaching critical thinking, but they seem not to do so in a systematic or well-defined manner.

At present, Al-Qattan Centre for Educational Research and Development runs a collaborative action research project with elementary school teachers. The project aims at infusing critical thinking skills across the curriculum. Teachers in the project follow Richard Paul's model for remodelling existing lesson plans in a way that helps the children to think well. Paul *et al.* provides practitioners with a set of basic critical thinking principals with suggested ways of developing theses skills in the daily practice of teaching. This action research project is a small but a serious effort that focuses on teaching thinking skills. There is a need for deliberate, better, and systematic attention to the teaching of critical thinking

skills. This requires building a more participatory and democratic educational system which aims to create active, critical, and reflective teachers and learners. Teaching critical thinking is the responsibility of all parties involved in the educational process. Teachers must learn to be reflective thinkers themselves before they are capable of teaching their pupils critical thinking skills. Therefore, teacher preparation programs should provide teachers adequate training in the skills and strategies involved in critical thinking. Officials of the Ministries of Education and educational NGO's need to adopt critical thinking as part of their educational policy. Critical thinking must be part of any strategy for strengthening the educational system. Teacher's manuals should encourage teachers to develop critical thinking skills in classrooms. In addition, textbook designers and material developers are recommended to include problems and questions that challenge the students to think critically.

Conclusions

Following from the results of this study a number of recommendations can be made regarding critical thinking in the educational system:

1. Developing a student-centred concept of teaching

Teacher training should focus on developing a student-centred concept of teaching. Teachers should view their roles as facilitators and directors of learning, not as lecturers and transmitters of knowledge. The Arab Human Development Report (UNDP, 2002) calls for a radical change in the methods of training teachers. The teacher preparation programs should familiarize teachers with self-learning, enable teachers to cooperate with parents and the local community and allow them to use new methods of evaluating students and providing education guidance.

2. Developing a solid foundation in critical thinking

Teaching critical thinking requires school teachers to have a solid foundation in critical thinking. Therefore, teachers should be required to take a course in critical thinking skills. Such a course will familiarize them with the components of critical thinking and help them to be critical thinkers themselves.

3. Setting the environment

The classroom environment should allow learners to be actively involved in the learning process. Students need teachers' support to find the means and the

confidence to express their new ideas. Teachers should encourage students and accept their mistakes, innovation, curiosity and risk-taking

4. Supplementing the current curriculum by posing thoughtful questions and using thoughtful vocabulary

Instruction should pose problems that are meaningful to students, while classroom activities should consist of questions and problems for students to discuss and solve. Some of these questions might arise directly from the curriculum, such as considering a historical decision, or evaluating evidence. Others may arise from students' experience, such as how to raise money for a newsletter. The role of the teacher is to help the students define the problem and facilitate discussion. In addition, teachers should use thoughtful language, using specific thinking skills labels and instructing students in ways to perform those skills. For example teachers should use phrases like: 'Let's compare the pictures, how can you classify…?' 'What conclusions can you draw?' 'How can we apply this?' Paul *et al*. offer a set of basic critical thinking strategies with suggested ways of integrating these strategies in the teachers' instructional practice. These strategies can be applied to any lesson by following Paul's model for remodelling lesson plans.

To enhance the teaching of critical thinking skills, English language teachers may use English language newspapers in the classroom. Using newspapers present a new and alternative type of reading. Students can be empowered by making personal choices about what to read. They can predict the content of articles and guess the meaning of new vocabulary. Students can be trained to think critically about the ideas they read and form their opinions and points of view about what they are reading.

5. Teaching self-regulation

Teaching self-regulation means helping students to learn to think in the course of learning their discipline. Teachers can do this by modelling ways of thinking, and scaffolding students' attempts to reflect on their points of strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers can help their students to regulate their learning by using authentic assessment tools, which require students to think critically while applying skills to solve real-world problems. Using authentic assessment tools such as the portfolio, rubrics and personal and peer checklists will help the students to be aware of inconsistencies and in a better position to comment on how they solved the problems.

In conclusion, this paper examined teachers' beliefs about and practices of teaching critical thinking in English Language classrooms in some Palestinian

schools. The findings of the study reveal that the Palestinian school system does not teach critical thinking skills effectively and consistently. The study recommends that critical thinking should be part of any overall strategy of strengthening the educational system and includes guidelines for teacher preparation programs.

Notes

1. Borg (2001, p.86) defines a belief as 'a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment, further it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour.'

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APPENDIX 1
The questionnaire

This questionnaire has been developed to assess teachers' beliefs about their practices of teaching critical thinking skills in the English Language classroom
Teachers are asked to place a tick under the frequency of their teaching behavior.
1= always, 2= often, 3=sometimes, 4= rarely, 5= never.

Item	1	2	3	4	5
1. I expose my students to real life situations such as responding to a letter, advertisement, inquiry, etc.					
2. I encourage my students to synthesize information from different sources.					
3. I encourage students to make guesses and predictions (e.g. about vocabulary meaning, story endings)					
4. I use thoughtful language when I speak to my students (e.g. what do you predict, compare, analyze, etc.)					
5. I give an element of choice among activities and within the same activity.					
6. I encourage silent reading with a purpose.					
7. I help my students to develop independent learning strategies.					
8. I help my students to develop strategies for self-evaluation.					
9. I consider the process as important as the product.					
10. I ask my students to evaluate the text they read or listen to.					

Item	1	2	3	4	5
11. I provide students with opportunities to learn how to learn (e.g. model to them learning and study strategies).					
12. I express my readiness to change my opinion in the light of new evidence.					
13. I encourage my students to express their opinions freely and voice their thoughts.					
14. I demonstrate to my students examples of the tentative nature of knowledge.					
15. I train my students to evaluate information produced by mass media.					
16. I help my students to reflect upon their learning process (e.g. write personal journals about their progress in learning)					
17. I sensitize students to the strategies that are most suitable to their particular learning style.					
18. In my teaching the focus is not only what to learn but also on how to learn.					
19. I encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning.					
20. I guide students through a process of discovery and drawing conclusions.					
21. I encourage students to reflect on the processes involved in language learning and to find out what works for them.					
22. I elicit from student-s responses about the effective ways of learning vocabulary.					

Item	1	2	3	4	5
23. I engage my students in discussions about using prior knowledge to define or describe specific vocabulary words. (Offering a physical description, what it is used for, or where it is found)					
24. I ask my students to analyze the qualities of a well-written text.					
25. I train my students to give accurate answers (e.g. I ask them to check and verify answers).					
26. I expect my students to be precise; I ask them to give more details and to be more specific.					
27. I encourage students to consider an issue from a broader perspective (e.g. I ask them 'what would this look like from a conservative, modern, religious, etc., standpoint?'					
28. I train my students to give logical answers. (I ask them how does that follow?'					
29. I encourage students to support their answers with evidence.					
30. I ask my students thought-provoking questions that require them to use higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, application and evaluation of information.					
31. My students feel secure enough to challenge each other's ideas.					
32. My students are encouraged to explore, test, search and predict.					
33. I encourage self-initiated and independent learning.					
34. In reading lessons, the focus is on how to read a text for understanding and comprehension, not on reading the text for the students.					

Item	1	2	3	4	5
35. I ask my students to describe to what extent their point of view of an issue is different from or similar to the point of view of an instructor, other students, and the author, etc.					
36. I encourage my students to make connections between related concepts and ideas.					
37. I require students to give examples to support or to clarify what they have said.					
38. The questions I pose require students to evaluate options and make decisions.					
39. I encourage students to discuss an issue with another student or with a group of students.					
40. I encourage students to generate their own questions on a reading text.					
41. In my exams I require justifications for answers to 'multiple choice' tests.					
42. I stimulate my students' background knowledge on topics/ concepts under consideration, e.g. by brainstorming.					
43. I encourage students to ask questions about what they don't understand.					
44. I model and demonstrate metacognitive strategies such as organizing, evaluating, and planning learning.					
45. I demonstrate understanding and empathy through listening to and describing the ideas and the feelings of others.					
46. I encourage students to think about thinking by asking them questions like 'what do you do when you memorize?' or how do you know that you are correct?'					

Item	1	2	3	4	5
47. I inform my students that their excuses of 'I can't' or 'I don't know how to…' are unacceptable behaviors in the classroom.					
48. I invite students to restate, translate, compare, and paraphrase each other's ideas.					
49. I use role-playing and stimulations and other activities that enhance social skills in my classroom.					
50. My students participate in considering alternative points of views and selecting and evaluating appropriate resolutions.					
51. I pose questions using hypothetical to signal divergent thought. (E.g. what would you do if you were he, what could happen if?)					
52. I ask my students to summarize the written and the oral texts they study.					
53. I ask students to compare events, content, characters, solutions, etc.					
54. I rephrase, paraphrase and translate my students' answers.					
55. I allow time for students to think before they respond to high- order- thinking questions.					
56. I allow for student-led interaction in which some topic, question, problem or issue is considered.					
57. I ask students to provide evidence to support their suggestions or answers.					
58. If my students face difficulty, I ask leading questions, paraphrase and clarify.					

Item	1	2	3	4	5
59. I subdivide my class into work groups or committees.					
60. I use different organizational patterns and instructional strategies in my classroom (lecture, group work, etc.)					
61. I allow my students to decide on strategies to solve problems.					
62. My students are encouraged to set their own goals and means of assessing accomplishment of those goals.					
63. During individual work I monitor students' progress and mediate their experiences.					
64. I turn students' everyday problems into an experience that encourages thinking.					
65. I present my students with many examples of a particular grammar point and expect them to work out and find the rules for themselves.					
66. I ask students to judge the grammaticality of some sentences and utterances.					
67. Students are asked to state grammatical rules in their own words.					
68. I give students some sentences that contain errors and ask them to correct the errors.					
69. I ask student to assess which mistakes are more serious than others, i.e., evaluate the gravity of mistakes of errors.					
70. I ask students to assess which mistakes impede communication and which don't.					

Item	1	2	3	4	5
71. I encourage students to take initiative in evaluating problem areas.					
72. I encourage students to take initiative in assessing methods that strengthen themselves in problematic areas in their learning process.					
73. I encourage my students to use grammatical patterns already covered in the class to construct sentences of their own.					
74. I encourage students to ask for clarification.					
75. I encourage students to ask questions.					
76. I use picture sequences and cartoons to engage my students in creating stories and dialogues around the pictures.					
77. I try to reduce anxiety in my classroom by being friendly, patient and cooperative.					
78. I show my students how to take control of the communication process by modeling clarification strategies such as 'could you please repeat that? Could you show me how to…?'					
79. I provide my students with examples of questions they can ask themselves in order to measure their own progress. (E.g. can you understand your English? Can you understand the speaker's language?'					
80. I teach learning strategies separately.					
81. I integrate learning strategies in the content of lessons.					
82. I invite the students to examine the relation between thinking and feeling.					
83. I break difficult tasks into smaller and easier parts.					

APPENDIX 2
Interview questions

1. How do you set the environment for thinking in your classroom?
2. Do you use different organizational patterns?
3. Do you encourage the students to express their feelings, how?
4. How do you stimulate your students' background knowledge about the topic of the lesson?
5. Do you train your students to monitor their progress in language learning, how?
6. Do you ask them to reflect on their learning progress, how?
7. Do you teach students learning strategies, what learning strategies? How?
8. Do you teach student different ways to deal with a difficult text? How?
9. Do you ask students thought-provoking questions that require them to use higher order thinking skills such as analysis, application and evaluation information? Give me examples please.
10. Do you pose questions that require students to evaluate options and make decisions, give me examples please?
11. Do you ask train students to evaluate texts that they read? Do you ask students to evaluate information produced by mass media?
12. Do you engage students in considering alternative points of view?
13. Do you engage your students in evaluating appropriate resolutions?
14. Do you invite students to put in their words what the author, you, another student has said.

APPENDIX 3
Evidence of Critical Thinking/ An Observation Chart

The Teacher

1. Encourages the students to synthesize information from different sources.
2. Encourages students to make predictions about vocabulary meaning.
3. Shows interest in effort and not only in correct answers.
4. Develop independent learning strategies, language awareness and self-evaluation.
5. Asks students to analyze the characters and the events of the story.
6. Models to the students learning and study strategies.
7. Encourages students to take responsibility of their own learning.
8. Asks students to support their answers with evidence.
9. Elicits from students background knowledge about the topic of the lesson.
10. Allows the students to think before they respond to questions.
11. Reduces anxiety in the classroom.
12. Asks high-order thinking questions.
13. Asks students to elaborate their answers.
14. Uses thoughtful language in the classroom e.g. I think, I assume, inference, conclude, analyze, etc.
15. Helps pupils to avoid generalizations.
16. Invites the students to examine relationships.
17. Helps the students to see inconsistencies and contradictions in arguments.
18. Helps the students to assess their points of weaknesses and strengths.
19. Requests the students to classify concepts, ideas, and teams, etc.