Evaluating the Higher Order Thinking Skills in Reading of English for Palestine Grade Eight

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ABSTRACT— *This study aimed at evaluating the availability of higher order thinking skills (HOTS) in the reading exercises of English for Palestine Grade 8 to find out to what extent the reading exercises in the SB and WB match the suggested criteria. To achieve the aim of the study, the researchers adopted the descriptive analytical approach. Consequently, she used two tools to collect the needed data which are: a content analysis card and a structured interview. Specifically, to formulate the content analysis card, the researchers built the suggested criteria benefiting from the previous studies, related literature, and institutions' publication. Concerning the validity of the used tool, the analysis card was shown to a number of experts to benefit from their valuable comments and modification. In the light of their comments, the final shape of the analysis card was constructed. After that, the researchers interviewed 16 8th grade English language teachers to find out their views regarding the availability of HOTS in the reading exercises in order to validate or refute the findings she got from the analysis card. The following findings were drawn out from the analysis of the book: Only fifteen out of the 26 items i.e., % 58 which are considered the criteria to evaluate the reading comprehension exercises in the target book 'English for Palestine Grade eight ' are available. Whereas the other eleven items i.e., % 42 are completely neglected. The skills available are not well-distributed in the SB neither in the WB. Thus, the distribution of the available HOTS categories is the following: Concerning the analysis skill, it got % 51.92. The SB has % 58.44, whereas the WB has % 33.33. Regarding the synthesis skill, it got % 41.35. The SB has % 32.47 while the WB has % 66.67. The evaluation skill, on the other hand, got the least score among the other two skills. It got the percentage of % 6.73 in only the reading exercises of the SB, with noting that the exercises of the WB have no share of this skill. In regard to the interview, there was almost agreement among the 8th grade English language teachers that there is a shortage in the HOTS in the reading exercises and they are not well-treated. In the 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 how to enhance such skills in students' mentalitie.*

Keywords— Education, reading, Higher order thinking skills

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1. INTRODUCTION

Book evaluation is a means of matching textbooks with world continuous changes and progress. This is so necessary because what was taught fifty years ago is not the same as what students and societies need now. Accordingly, it is well known that education and curriculums govern building future citizen. Due to this fact, nations all over the world are trying through different means to improve their educational programs. To achieve this, evaluative processes are carried out upon the textbooks to find out the points of weaknesses and strengths as well. Thus, the evaluation process covers different fields of the curriculum; mostly the content presented by the textbook.. Ansary and Babaii (2002: 1-2) state that:

> Although the textbook is not the only tool for the teaching and learning process, it is still of a significant impact for achieving the language learning objectives. Since teachers find it difficult to develop their own classroom materials, have limited time and lie under external pressure that restricts their ability, it gives more emphasis on the use and utility of the textbook to compensate the loss of authentic materials.

Specifically in relation to TEFL, TESL books As Genesee (2001: 144-150) states:

> evaluation in TESOL settings is a process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information. This process enables us to make informed decisions through which student achievement will increase and educational programs will be more successful.

Thus, the current textbooks should meet the needs of the people nowadays in addition to the current developments in the world. In this regard, evaluation of textbooks can be conducted using checklists of criteria through the analytical research. "Analysis and evaluation provide useful data to teachers, supervisors, and other educational departments with concrete evidence regarding strong and weak points of the evaluative books" (Riffe et al., 1998).

Concerning the newly implemented Palestinian textbooks, several initiatives have been carried out to evaluate them and check their effectiveness. Ali's study (2010) was an example of evaluating the English textbooks *English for Palestine Grade 9.* Specifically, They evaluated the reading texts and exercises in the light of certain criteria in that book.

However, reading comprehension texts are important vessels that may train learners to practice all levels of cognitive skills and they are the base of the whole learning process. To demonstrate, any type of reading aims to achieve comprehension. Anyhow, evaluating reading comprehension texts and exercises is of great importance because reading and comprehending what is read is the most important means of gaining and developing individuals' knowledge. In any case whatever anyone reads, he has to achieve a level of understanding, otherwise, reading is an aimless activity. In fact, reading is an important skill in the first and second language. Raymond (2006) assures that "effective reading requires not only accurate reading skills, but also being able to comprehend easily and automatically".

Failing to read and comprehend what is read in early learning stages leads to educational problems in learner's life. (Casey, 2001) states "Failing to learn to read and write in the early years results in more special education placement, retention, and poor self – esteem for the learner than any other cause" Research consistently points to the direct relationship between comprehension skills and success in learning L1 and L2 and all other subjects. Anyhow, reading comprehension skills should be taught beside all cognitive skills starting from recalling information schemata, to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It should be practiced through reading comprehension exercises. Consequently, reading comprehension text should be provided with exercises that develop these skills. As a result, there is an agitating need to successive evaluation of reading comprehension exercises to confirm their effectiveness as a means of developing cognitive skills specifically higher order thinking skills (HOTS) .

In this concern, it can be argued that HOTS are necessary skills that build productive citizens as productivity is based on individuals' ability to analyze, to combine knowledge of different resources, to discuss, to judge, and to evaluate. Therefore, it is the message of the textbook to build citizens who are capable of thinking critically; solving problems, planning, analyzing, and making decisions.

Hence, it is worth noting that curriculum and educational processes are responsible for building learners' abilities and thinking habits. This can be achieved when the textbooks are enriched with critical thinking activities to urge learners to think; otherwise, they will become low achievers who focus on lower thinking skills (LOTS). Marier (2002),affirms that:

> students should be taught how to read in order to become effective readers. To fulfill this aspect, good readers use higher-order thinking strategies to think about, and control their reading before, during, and after reading a selection. Students who do not use HOTS are usually low achievers in reading

Accordingly, research in the field of evaluating textbooks for the availability and treatment of HOTS has been conducted at the levels of all disciplines; science, math, social studies, and language books. Moreover, it has been conducted on the level of achievement test because most teachers' teaching activities are oriented towards exams, so they neglect what is excluded from the exam. Besides, exam wash back influences educational policies and book designing and designers, it incites them to reevaluate textbooks and educational plans to compensate for weaknesses.

Following the same path, this research evaluates HOTS in *English for Palestine Grade 8* in reading comprehension exercises. To achieve that, the researchers have built a check list based on Bloom's taxonomy as a criterion for the evaluation process. For more clarification, Bloom's taxonomy poses six cognitive skills through which thinking processes pass from the bottom to the top. Successively, they are recalling, comprehension, application which are called lower thinking skills (LOTS). These LOTS are mounted by other three skills which are called higher order thinking skills known as (HOTS) represented in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Analysis refers to individuals' ability to break material into its smaller components. Synthesis represents assembling parts of the material to produce a new forms. Evaluation, on the other hand, refers to individuals' ability to judge and take decisions.

To conclude, analyzing the target textbook *English for Palestine Grade 8* is a process that sheds the light on the strengths and weaknesses of reading comprehension exercises and the way they involve and treat (HOTS).

2.   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As the researchers work in the field of teaching English, they noticed students find difficulty in answering reading comprehension question at the levels of higher order thinking skills; analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Consequently, they think that this deficiency is ascribed to lack of practicing these activities. Any lack of practicing (HOTS) activities could be attributed to shortage of such exercises that accompany reading comprehension texts, or to neglecting them by teachers due to the limited time of classroom periods.

Thus, the current study is the first to evaluate HOTS in reading exercises of *English for Palestine* – grade Eight. The researchers, want to evaluate these skills. Their purpose is to identify the areas of weaknesses so that they could provide effective advice to those who are interested in developing English language curricula.

3.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study problem is stated in the following major question :

To what extent do the higher order thinking skills (HOTS) exist in the reading exercises of English for Palestine grade Eight in the light of the suggested criteria?

The following sub – questions emerged from the above mentioned one :

1. To what extent do the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade *eight* include analysis skill ?
2. To what extent do the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade *eight* include synthesis skill ?
3. To what extent do the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade *eight* include evaluation skill ?
4. What is *eight* [th] grade English language teachers' evaluation of the higher order thinking skills in the reading exercises of English for Palestine Grade *eight* ?
5. What is a suggested framework that can be introduced for effective development of higher order thinking skills in English for Palestine Grade *eight* textbook?

4.   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The current study aims to:

- Formulate a checklist of criteria for evaluating HOTS in the reading exercises in English materials,
- pinpoint the areas of weakness in HOTS that are latent in the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade *eight* in terms of the suggested criteria, and
- provide a framework for teaching and developing HOTS.

1.   Significance of the study:

The study may help the following:

Teachers:

To organize effective teaching learning environment by raising questions that nurture students' critical thinking abilities and understand the hidden concepts / ideas .

Supervisors:

To conduct training courses that revolve around enhancing critical thinking and familiarizing the English language teachers with the effective ways for asking questions underlying these concepts. In addition, they may work with teachers to provide enrichment material that support HOTS.

Syllabus designers:

To inspire syllabus designers to modify, organize, and enrich English language curricula with activities based mainly on developing HOTS .

5.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of reading comprehension:

Many definitions have emerged concerning the reading skill due to its importance among the other skills. Thus, many specialists affirm the importance of reading; in this regard, Al-Qudah et al (2002: 109) state that of all language skills, reading is the most necessary for independent learning. Through reading, students can gain access to further knowledge both about the language and about other subjects. Al-Drees (2008: 18) agrees with him (Al-Qudah) and states " by reading a lot, the readers can advance their English background knowledge and broaden vision, inspire their thought,

build the values, train the creative performance and develop their intelligence". Accordingly, specialists and educationalists define reading comprehension as follows:

Mayer (2003: 26) points out that reading comprehension is a "technique for improving students' success in extracting useful knowledge from text". Besides, it is the ability to anticipate meaning in lines of print so that the reader is not concerned with the mechanical details but with grasping ideas from words that convey meaning (Zintx, 1978: 7). In addition, Savage and Mooney (1979: 29) say that "comprehension - the ability to derive meaning and understanding from printed language – is the communication of the act of reading. Reading is the language activity – since language is a tool of communication, and communication involves the reception as well as the expression of ideas, then the act of reading is not complete until comprehension has taken place".

Further, Miller (2002: 8) reports that "reading comprehension is the ability to understand or to get meaning from any type of written material. It is the reason for reading and the critical component of all content learning". Along with these definitions, Millrood (2011: 117) confirms that "reading is a visual and cognitive process to extract meaning from writing by understanding the written text processing information and relating it to existing experience".

The researcher concludes from the above listed definitions that reading is meant for getting meaning encoded by the writer from the text. It is an interactive skill in which the reader interacts with the text and employs his experience and previous knowledge to get the intended meaning. Besides, a reader uses his/her cognitive and meta cognitive strategies in order to make sense and to get the target message the author wants to convey.

Requirements for effective reading:

To achieve the meaning of a text, a reader should activate his experience and background knowledge. Accordingly, a reader's knowledge, experience, and schemata play a significant role in manipulating the meaning of a text as these things are considered to be influential. Thus, efficiency of a reader relies on his pre – requisite knowledge and enough experience about facts in daily life. Further, schemata are also useful to achieve the desired meaning of the text.

Knowledge and experience:

Pre – requisite knowledge may accompany a reader when s/he goes to a text; otherwise, s/he may be entirely stranger to the content of the text. According to Rauch et al (1968), "having pre – experience about a text enables a reader to pursue its meaning effectively". Their argument is that "a good reader brings a variety of experiences and meanings to the printed symbol" because "the more vital experiences one has the more opportunities he has to observe and participate in many – faceted world about him, the more meaning he will bring to the printed word". In other words, the researcher sees that if a reader relate his/her experience to the target text, share information; the reading process will be more successful or he/she will depend only on the information the book supplies.

According to Williams (1996: 39), "the elements a reader should bring with him/her are:

- Knowledge of the writing system.
- Knowledge of the language.
- Ability to interpret.
- Appropriate knowledge of the word as assumed by the writer.
- A reason for reading that determines his style.

Through the acquired data or information, one can compare "what we read with our experience; for example, it is interesting to read about another country because we can compare it with our own, or we can imagine ourselves being there" (Doff, 1997: 181).

Schemata and reading skills:

An effective way of getting the meaning of any text may be linked to one's experience and schema. Of course people have different or multiple experiences for the same happening, but this could help them understand the meaning according to their schemata.

Nuttall (1996: 7) assures that the schema

> is a mental structure. It is abstract because it does not relate to any particular experience, although it derives from all the particular experiences we have had. It is a structure because it is organized; it includes the relationships between its component parts

This means that if a reader possesses similar schemata to that of the writer, he/she will be able to interpret the text successfully and meaningfully. On contrary, a reader of weak schemata cannot understand the message of the writer. In

this regard, Nuttall has illustrated this by an example. The first sentence from the example is, ***"the bus careered along and ended up in the hedge"***. In this text of a single sentence, bus schema can be sited to illustrate the idea. It is to be noted that there is no mention of road in the text, but the reader does not face any difficulty in understanding the elaboration that the bus was running along "a road". This means that our road schema is hovering at the back of our minds in case of need; the road schema for some readers will include components such as walls, hedges, fences which mark the limit of a road" (Nuttall, 1996).

However, if the reader's road schema does not include "hedge" along the roads, s/he will be in difficulty to understand the meaning of the text, and will, perhaps, be in a puzzle where the bus actually stopped! Thus, reading makes use of our existing schemata, and if necessary, modifies it (in the above example, the reader may check and learn the word "hedge", which will add knowledge to his/her existing schemata). Moreover, all the schemata should not, and need not be recalled. In a responsive reader only the relevant schemata are activated (Rahman, 2004: 41).

To conclude, it has been discussed above that schemata of a reader help understand a text. According to Shahidullah (1996: 214), "teaching of reading concerns mainly with schema activation and schema availability". Regarding schemata, in all its faces; social, historical, cultural, or religious, it help one to receive the message of a text properly.

The concept of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)

Definition of (HOTS):

In fact, various definitions of the term HOTS were provided by several specialists who are interested in the field. Consider the following:

> HOTS involves the transformation of information and ideas. This transformation occurs when students analyze ,combine facts and ideas and synthesize, generalize, explain, or arrive of some conclusion or interpretation. Manipulating information and ideas through these processes allows students to solve problems, gain understanding and discover new meaning (Tomei, 2005)

McDavitt (1993: 20) says that "Higher Order Skills include analysis, synthesis, and evaluation and require mastery of previous levels, such as applying routine rules to familiar or novel problems". In addition, (McDade, 1995: 10) defines HOTS as …

> The intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/ or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a rubric to belief and action.

Additionally, higher order thinking skills are described as understanding of facts, concepts, principles, and procedures (Haladyna, 1997). analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom, 1956).

Higher order thinking are also called "critical" or "strategic" thinking, it can be described as the ability to use information to solve problems, analyze arguments, negotiate issues or make predictions (Underbakke, Borg, and Peterson, 1993, Wenglinsky, 2002). It involves examining assumptions and values, evaluating evidence, and assessing conclusions (Petress, 2005).

From the above listed definitions of HOTS, the researcher concludes that HOTS are intellectual processes where students have to activate their minds in order to understand the hidden meaning from the information introduced to them, realize the relations among ideas, draw principles and rules, analyze and classify, generate and combine new ideas, evaluate and judge.

Higher order thinking taxonomy:

One of the most well- known taxonomies in education is Bloom's. It offers a basic model of thinking skills which is adopted by several researchers for their studies' purposes. Bloom's taxonomy focuses on six levels of thinking that students practice while learning or acquiring knowledge. Most importantly, Bloom's and his colleagues' initial attention was focused on the cognitive domain which was the first published part of Bloom's taxonomy, featured in the publication: "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Handbook 1, the cognitive domain" (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, Krathwohl, 1956). Moreover, the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Handbook II, the affective domain includes the manner in which we deal with things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes (Krathwohl, Bloom, Masia, 1973). The psychomotor domain, is the third domain of Bloom's taxonomy, it includes physical movement, coordination, and use of the motor-skill areas (Simpson, 1972).

Pickard, M (2007:21) comments on saying:

> Bloom's taxonomy contains three overlapping domains: the cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The taxonomy is a means to express qualitatively the different kinds of

intellectual skills and abilities. The cognitive and affective domains provided a way to organize thinking skills into six levels, from the most basic to levels that are more complex.

As the cognitive domain is the main concern in this study, it will be discussed below in details.

The cognitive domain:

As mentioned earlier, the cognitive domain (Bloom, 1956) involves knowledge and the development of intellectual skills. It also includes the six major categories; knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. It's noticeable that the categories start from simple ones moving up to more complex ones which imply that one cannot master the higher levels before mastering the lower ones. The six categories are shown in Figure (2.1) below:
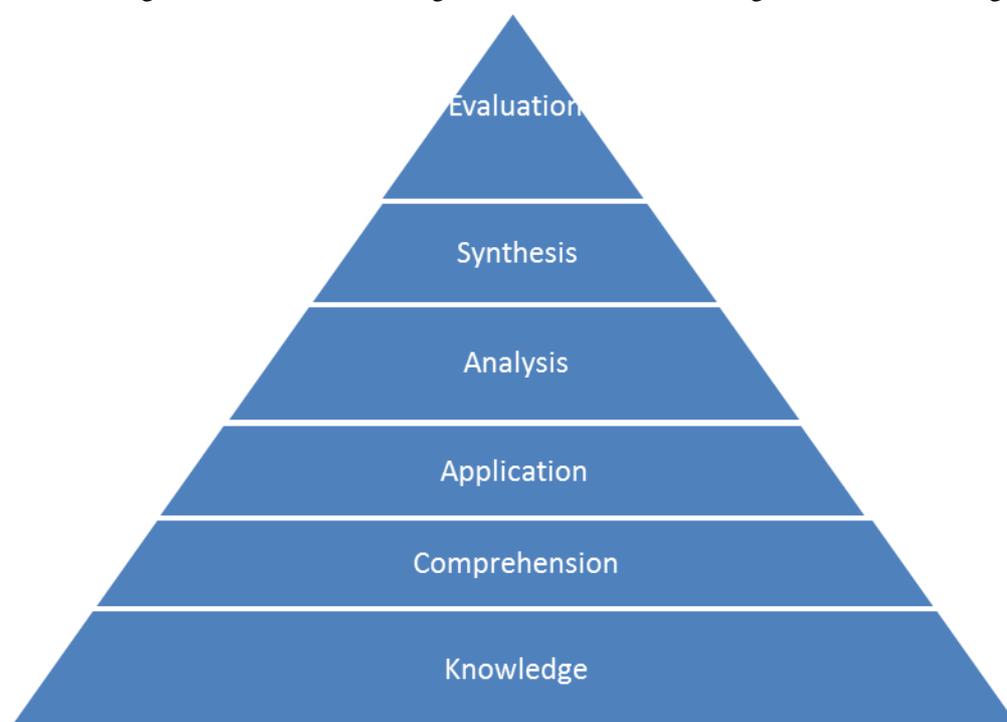

Figure (2.1)
Bloom's Taxonomy and the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy

Strategies of HOTS:

Readers usually use HOTS strategies to improve their abilities in thinking. Thus, good readers use higher order thinking strategies to think about, and control their reading before, during, and after reading a selection. In addition, students who do not use HOTS are usually low achievers in reading (Marier,2000). Although there are many strategies of HOTS, following is a brief discussion about four of these strategies.

Questioning in reading activities:

Questioning as a strategy can develop levels of thinking skills for deeper learning and more understanding. It helps students to prepare for reading and to understand while reading (Hendricks et al., 1996). Questioning can be facilitated with the Directed Reading – Thinking Activities Approach (DRTA) described by Haggard (1985, as cited in Hendricks et al, 1996),whereby the teacher reads a text with students, stops at intervals, and asks questions. Students discuss their answers in a whole – class activity in order to have a better understanding of what they are reading. A Question – Answer Relationship (QAR) technique proposed by Raphael (1984) has been linked to improved students' reading comprehension after reading (Sorrell, 1990 as cited in Kelly, 1999; Spivey, 2000). Thus, by using the student generated questioning strategy, text segments are integrated and thereby improve reading comprehension (Oczkus, 2003:24).

Inferring

Inferring is to some extent related to reading between lines. Students need to use their own knowledge along with information from the text to draw their own conclusions (Serafini, 2004). Through it, students will be able to draw conclusions, make predictions, identify underlying themes, use information to create meaning from the text and use

pictures to create meaning (Harvey and Goudvis,2000:33 – 40). Besides, students can be taught to use illustrations, graphs, and titles from the text to make inferences.

Summarizing

This process requires from students awareness of what is important to be paraphrased and summarized. Alder (2001) states that the process of summarization requires the reader to determine what is important while reading and to paraphrase the information in the readers own words. Accordingly, teacher modeling and student practice of the summarization process has proven its effectiveness in improving students' ability to summarize text and text comprehension as well. Students can be taught to identify main ideas, connect the main ideas, eliminate redundant and unnecessary information, and remember what they read with the summarization strategy (Abu Nejmeh, 2011: 9).

Prediction

Prediction as a strategy for improving comprehension "helps the reader set a purpose for their reading" (Mcknown and Barnett,2007:17). Additionally, Pesa and Somers (2007:31) expand that before reading, prediction can "activate prior knowledge, set a purpose for reading, and engage the reader from the outset". Introducing the title of the reading, pictures associated with its content, and key words can prompt prediction (Mcknown and Barnett,2007). During reading, Pesa and Somers (2007) assert that prediction can help students monitor their comprehension and continued interest. Block and Israel (2005 as cited in Mcknown and Barnett,2007:18) agree that "good readers use their experiences and knowledge to make predictions and formulate ideas as they read". Further, students can compare their predictions with information in the actual text (Mcknown and Barnett,2007). The importance of students revising their predictions when necessary is highlighted by Teele (2004, as cited in Mcknown and Barnett,2007), who links this to improved reading comprehension.

Teachers who read aloud in class can guide students' predictions with questions. Oczkus (2003) emphasizes that "this strategy also allows for more student interaction, which increases student interest and improves their understanding of the text". After reading, this strategy can "help students to interpret, analyze, and deepen their understanding" (Pesa and Somers, 2007:32).

Enhancing thinking skills of learners:

Attention of how to teach thinking to learners should be devoted due to its importance. There are a few articles which have made meaningful suggestions on how to enhance thinking skills of learners. In fact, our learners need someone who urges them to think; someone who really plays an essential role in developing the thinking skills of learners. Accordingly, the teachers, parents, the learners, and teacher institutions are playing a significant role in enhancing such skills of learners..

Role of teachers

The success of any program relies heavily on the teachers. The centre for critical thinking (1996) suggests that teachers should let their students be aware of what they are in for the first day they attend classes, teachers should speak less in class, develop specific strategies for cultivating thinking, use concrete examples in class, regularly question students, and break class down frequently into small groups to work on specific tasks. Additionally, the centre adds that teachers should think aloud in front of the students and present concepts in context of their use. Thus, this may be a very useful way of how to teach students to think without noting that.Besides, Cotton (2001) suggests that teachers should use various instructional approaches to enhance thinking skills. He; for example, says that the use of probing questions, redirection on and reinforcement increases students' content knowledge and enhance the development of thinking skills. Moreover, he says that teachers should use higher order questions in the classroom and also have enough waiting time for students to respond to a question. Thus, teachers should know that students have the capacity to think and learn if they are trained enough by their teachers; therefore, it is the responsibility of teachers to expand and strengthen students' thinking by urging them to use their background knowledge in their current situations.

To support this idea, Collins (1993) states that in enhancing critical and creative thinking (higher order thinking skills), the teacher must be a model. He must practice the thinking skills in the teaching process. Accordingly, he must provide opportunities for students to select activities from a range of appropriate choices, seek imaginative, appropriate, and ethical solutions to problems, exhibit genuine interest, curiosity and commitment to learning (Owu – Ewie,2008:71).

Further, Collins suggests that teachers can enhance critical and creative thinking by involving students in role plays / simulations, using "structured controversy", encouraging students to recognize contradictions, asking divergent questions, asking students to analyze the content of materials / texts, and asking students to defend their assertions with reason. Thus, teachers ought to eradicate negative attitudes about thinking from students' minds and replace it with a positive one that may help nurture the creative thinking in learners' minds. Harris (1998) lists the following as positive

attitudes that teachers should promote in their students: curiosity, constructive discontent, the belief that problems can be solved, the ability to suspend judgment and criticism, see good in the bad, problems lead to improvement, and a problem can be solved.

In the teaching process, teachers should structure learning tasks around problem solving, decision making, or conceptualizing which show students opportunities on how to use thinking skill (Beyer,1987). Specifically, in this process, students are to show their view points, provide evidence, and take correct decisions in the light of their arguments. This makes students feel self confident to some extent and be able to respond to challenges to different points of views put forward; identify and examine the underlying assumptions and examine their consistency. Though this is a student – centered process that offers the teacher the opportunity to interpret the process to see how students are using the important thinking skills they have learnt in the execution of a problem or task (Beyer,1987).

To conclude, teachers have an essential role in enhancing students' thinking skills by asking questions that do not have direct answers, encourage them to feel free when asking additional questions, and encourage them to express their opinions in addition to showing respect when listening to others' points of view.

Role of parents:

Another reason behind enhancing thinking skills is the parental involvement. It is crucial to mention that the environment which the child is born in plays a pivotal role in developing the child's personality. In addition, parents should have positive attitudes to enhance thinking skills among learners. Specifically, parents, at home, should engage their kids in giving reasons for their choices and actions and give them the freedom to express their points of view in a way that they feel responsible for such actions. Besides, Lopes (1995) in talking about how to help kids grow creatively, suggests that parents should relax controls which diminish self – confidence, it is not always critical to have the correct answer to a problem, inspire perseverance, provide creative atmosphere, and offer but not to pressure kids. Thus, encouragement from parents promotes kids' interest in thinking.

Role of school:

In addition to the parental role in enhancing thinking skills, the school has also a major role to play in enhancing these skills among learners but according to Perkins (1990), schools do not serve this interest very well. He adds that schools should promote the intrinsic motivation of learners; additionally, schools need to appreciate teaching and learning of thinking skills by awarding prizes to teachers and students engaged in thinking skills activities. By doing so, the school provides an ecosystem that nurtures, supports, and honors skillful thinking (Beyer,1988). The school also should provide staff development as teaching thinking skills do not come readily to all teachers. Beyer (1988) is of the opinion that considerable staff development has to be undertaken to carry a thinking skills program from curriculum guide into effective student learning. Thus, providing continuous staff development help schools to be aware of the modern trends in teaching skills and applying them in the teaching process.

Teacher training institutions:

Enhancing thinking in learners by incorporating the teaching of thinking skills in the teacher education curriculum is the role that should be played by teacher institutions. Cotton (2001) for example affirms that training teachers to teach thinking skills (critical and creative thinking) leads to student achievement gains. He adds that teacher training is the key factor to most successful thinking programs.

Moreover, Crump, Schlichter, and Palk (1988) have identified that there is positive relationship between teacher training and student achievement. According to Beyer (1988), to develop proficiency in the strategies and skills used in the teaching of thinking skills, a teacher training program must include the following elements: provide education through lectures, reading, and discussion in the theories and research upon which they are based, demonstrate constantly how these strategies work, offer repeated practice and observation in the use of these strategies and skills, and provide coaching. The teaching of thinking skills in schools will be enhanced when there are qualified teachers to handle them effectively in the classroom; further, Stuart (1999:24) in a comparative analysis study in primary teacher education identified that tutors do not use appropriate methods that enhance thinking skills. She states "It is quite rare for tutors to get professional development designed to help them. Most stumble into and train in the way they were trained – sometimes using their university notes of fifteen years ago".

To improve the performance of learners on thinking skills tests, pre – service teachers institutions must improve teacher training. Hence, teacher training institutions must teach cognitive skills to pre – service teachers before training them to teach thinking skills in the classroom (Ashton, 1988). Finally, teacher institutions need to incorporate thinking skills into all aspects of teacher preparation and train future teachers to be models of effective thinking strategies (Walsh & Paul,1988).

The role of learners:

Learners play the major role in the thinking process. They have to show positive attitudes in class especially where discussions are the most dominant activity. Thus, they have to cultivate their minds towards creative and critical thinking. Accordingly, Wilks (1995) suggests the following as some of the things learners should do in a discussion group to enhance thinking skills: not to yell or call out, concentrate on what others are saying, be tolerant, and say what they think and feel freely. Learners must ask questions for clarification, listen attentively, make sound judgment, think before they respond to a question or comment, weigh the implications of what they say, give reasons for what they say or do, learn to practice thinking skills learnt, and learn to take risks. Harris (1998) suggests that learners should do away with negative attitudes that block how they will use the creative and critical thinking they have learnt. These negative attitudes according to Harris include using expressions like "Oh no, a problem!, it can't be done, I can do it, but I am not creative or critical thinker, I might fail". Therefore, learners should develop positive attitudes like curiosity, see the good in the bad and believe that most of the problems can be solved. Harris adds the following as good attitudes: perseverance, flexibility, imagination, and knowing that mistakes are unavoidable.

English for Palestine Grade Eight

An Overview of English for Palestine Grade eight

English for Palestine *eight* is the eighth level of a complete English series. Level 8 complements and extends the work in level 6 and 7. As such, level 8 maintains the continuity of the course and offers many new features to stimulate and challenge teachers and students: for example, there is emphasis on vocabulary building, on comparing and contrasting points of grammar and on developing reading skills.

As in previous levels, the course has a double strand of communicative activities and skills work. The skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are integrated throughout the course, and there is now more emphasis on combining the skills in sequences of activities. New vocabulary and grammatical structures are carefully controlled and are introduced in the context of the language skills. The students are guided through graded writing activities to encourage them to write independently. The writing element of the syllabus in level 8 focuses on learning how to write clearly and concisely in English (ETB, 2007: 4).

Reading objectives in English for Palestine Grade eight *:*

The general objectives of teaching reading in *English for Palestine Grade eight* have been stated by the Palestinian Ministry Of Higher Education as follows*:*

- Answer factual, inferential, judgment or evaluation questions.
- Read familiar material with correct pronunciation and intonation.
- Recognize proform referents.
- Generate questions about a reading text.
- Summarize a reading text.
- Make predictions about a reading text.
- Make inferences about a reading text.
- Develop awareness of synonyms and antonyms.
- Develop awareness of semantic fields (word mapping).
- Identify the main idea of a reading text.
- Identify supporting details.
- Distinguish main idea from supporting details.
- Recognize rhetorical markers and their functions.
- Comprehend visual survival material.
- Deduce meaning of unfamiliar words from context.
- Skim for gist or general impression of text or graphics.
- Distinguish fact from opinion.
- Infer mood and author's attitudes or tone.
- Understand different types of letters.
- Scan for specific information from texts and realia (ads, menu, schedule, calendar, flight information, tickets, etc.).
- Interpret information presented in diagrammatic display.
- Relate text to personal experience, opinion, or evaluation.
- Analyze components of text such as setting, theme, character, etc.
- Extract and synthesize information from different sources (ELC, 1999: 31).

It is obvious that the majority of these objectives are related directly to HOTS; hence, the researchers relied on them to some extent to build criteria as they include all the necessary reading skills needed for 8th graders.

6. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Studies related to evaluating EFL/ESL textbooks :

Kamile and Karliova (2009) in their study examined and evaluated the selected English language course books from the view point of vocabulary selection and teaching techniques they employ; further, the five course books chosen by the researchers were all for adults and young adults to learn and teach English as a foreign language. To achieve this goal, content analysis was employed in the study. Findings of the study revealed that all selected course books integrated lexis into their syllabuses, giving emphasis to word knowledge by means of separated headings and additional sub – headings, such as vocabulary, word building, word formation, easily confused words, keyword transformation, near – synonyms and synonyms. In addition, all of the course books have colorful layouts supporting vocabulary acquisition and comprehension through pictures, graphic designs, drawings, diagrams and cartoons except for grammar in context 2 which has also some pictures and drawings, but all are in black – and – white format and fewer in number, which makes the Student's Book somehow dull and less attractive than the rest of the course books.

Similar to the previous study, Nemati (2009) in his study evaluated English pre – university textbook of Karnataka state if India with respect to general criterion as well as vocabulary teaching. To achieve this, the researchers used two types of evaluation. First, a questionnaire was made with reference to some critical features extracted from different material evaluation checklist in addition to, a part related to different strategies of vocabulary teaching. Moreover, the prepared questionnaire was completed by 26 pre – university teachers from 12 randomly selected governmental and nongovernmental schools. In the second phase, to analyze vocabulary of the book systematically, some texts of the book were randomly selected, submitted to vocabulary profile to see if they are sequenced from the most frequently used words to less used one.

The results of data from the questionnaire revealed that except for some shortcomings that exist in the book, the book is generally accepted by %70 of the teachers; furthermore, the results of vocabulary analysis showed that it is better to change and do some modification in the sequence of presenting the text. That is texts with more frequent vocabularies and the easier ones come first and texts with much more difficult vocabularies should appear at the end of the book.

Hashemi (2011) conducted a study in which he evaluated the three English language textbooks that were used at high schools in Iran from the high school English teachers' point of view. For the study purpose, a 46 – item questionnaire was developed about the five sections of the textbooks (vocabulary, reading, grammar, language function, and pronunciation practice), their physical make – up, and practical concerns. Additionally, fifty high school teachers with more than five years of teaching experience were asked to reflect on the questionnaire by checking one of the four options included. Results of the study indicated that the textbooks are not acceptable from the teachers' point of view concerning their five sections, their physical make – up, and some practical concerns.

Studies related to evaluating English for Palestine :

Fattash (2010) in his research aimed at addressing the congruity of the new Palestinian English language school curriculum, which has been recently introduced, with the requirements and aspects of the most recent language teaching method (the communicative approach) aimed at investigating the teachers' views of the various skills embodied in the content of this curriculum, and attempted to find out whether the requirements and aspects of the communicative curriculum were taken into consideration. For the study purpose, a questionnaire was prepared, administrated, and distributed among hundred and twenty seven English language teachers representing the total population of teachers in Nablus Districts. The study revealed a number of encouraging results such as the reading materials in the new curriculum are interesting and appealing to the new generation and the reading component is relevant to the students' cultural background. It also revealed a big number of findings that need to be seriously looked into in the process of future evaluation of the curriculum.

In an attempt to identify the existing and required life skills latent in the content of English for Palestine – grade six textbook, Hamdona (2007) designed a content analysis card that sought to collect data relevant to the study; besides, these data involved making a survey for the textbook so as to analyze the activities that match the five domains set by the study. Findings of the study showed variation in the frequencies of the five main domains and in each domain as well. Specifically, communication life skills domain got the highest score of 36.39%. The next score was personal / social life skills domain, leadership life skills domain was in the third position, the fourth was decision making / problem solving life skills and finally the lowest score was critical thinking.

To conclude, recommendations were drawn to make balance in distributing the five domains in life skills in the content of the textbook. The researchers also recommended reviewing the existing material associated with the international

models for classifying life skills; he added that workshops should be held in order to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the textbook to support strong points and remedy weakness.

Studies related to evaluating HOTS and reading comprehension in English textbooks:

For evaluating the higher thinking skills according to Bloom's taxonomy, Alul (2000) in his study evaluated the instructional questions in the Eighth Grade English Textbooks used in Palestine during the academic year 1999-2000 via Bloom's taxonomy to find out to which degree it developed higher thinking skills.It is worth noting that the name of the target book is Petra 'Jordanian curriculum' which used to be taught in the West Bank before applying *English for Palestine series* in 2001. More specifically, questions presented in the textbook, work book and the stories were analyzed and compared according to Bloom's taxonomy method. For the study purpose, an analysis sheet was prepared. Furthermore, key words were used as criteria in the classification of the questions according to the requested taxonomy. Additionally, lower and higher level question groups were calculated, frequencies and percentages were tabulated and represented by bar graphs to facilitate the analysis of the results. Results of the study revealed that there was still a preponderance of lower level questions in the studied textbooks. Finally, the researchers recommended that more studies be conducted on English Petra textbooks for the other grades. They also recommended that the Palestinian curriculum designers improve their questioning techniques in the new Palestinian curricula.

Similarly, based on the revised Bloom's taxonomy, Lan and Chern (2010) conducted a study in which they aimed at investigating the cognitive process levels and knowledge types measured on the English reading comprehension tests of college entrance examinations administrated from 2002 to 2006 in Taiwan. Thus, a descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the similarities and differences of the content and cognitive skills intended to be assessed between the two tests, hoping to serve as a reference for English teachers while helping learners develop the needed cognitive skills in reading and test preparation. Results showed that for both tests, four major levels in the revised Bloom's taxonomy (remember, understand, apply, and analyze) along with eight sub- levels, and three types of knowledge (factual, conceptual, and procedural) along with three sub types were identified, with a total of five major question types and nine subtypes of questions. Additionally, items on remember factual knowledge and understand factual knowledge, which belong to lower cognitive levels, were the majority in the two tests, and few items were found at higher levels of (apply) and (analyze). Further, the major differences between the SAET and the DERT were the frequency, occurrence, and distribution of items testing different cognitive sub- skills and knowledge sub types. Finally, it was found that executing/apply items were more favored in the SAET, whereas the DERT has more items on inferring (a sub type under understand category).

In the study of Rahman (2004) the reading syllabus and reading materials used at the intermediate level in Bangladesh were examined. Thus, the study discussed the recent developments in reading pedagogy. It also presented an evaluation of teaching the different sub skills of reading and then through an empirical study examined whether both higher or lower order sub skills were covered in the reading syllabus, and taught properly in the country. Moreover, the methods for empirical investigation in the study included students' and teachers' questionnaire survey, students and teachers' interview, classroom observation and administering reading tests; further, reading components of the syllabus and the reading materials were also evaluated. Results showed that students have problems in most of the sub skills of reading, and it also showed that the approaches to teaching and learning reading skills are still backdated; additionally, the observation showed that the syllabus, materials and tests were not bad, but these emphasized only the lower order skills; the higher skills, on the other hand, were totally neglected.

Additionally, the series of New Interchange textbooks were analyzed by Ming (2011) in his study from the viewpoint of Bloom's taxonomy. Accordingly, he investigated the learning objectives of the textbooks used in private colleges in China, and compared the differences between textbooks written by Chinese and foreign specialists, in order to give suggestions about which kind of textbooks were more suitable for Chinese English learners especially English majors, the textbooks written by Chinese scholars or those written by foreign specialists. To achieve the intent of the study, the researchers used Bloom's taxonomy for analyzing the textbooks and made an open- ended questionnaires to find out what students think about the books. Further, the data in the study were the series of Cambridge International English course textbooks for communication course and integrated skills of English for comprehensive course. Findings of the study revealed the following:

- These textbooks are heavily based on communication language learning to help students talk more in class and advance their creative thinking.

- The integrated skills of English were suitable for freshman or junior students to improve their basics.

- Knowledge and comprehension- based parts were the most important tasks and exercises (57.5%), and this placed the book at the low level of Bloom's taxonomy.

- The assignment of pair work/ group work and the discussion tasks, which ranked high as comprehension/ application of Bloom's taxonomy, occupy very little in the units; therefore, teachers have to enhance the level introducing creative/ analysis- based assignments.

Commentary on the previous studies:

By reviewing the above mentioned studies, the researcher's background has been expanded especially on choosing the suitable tools that researchers followed when conducting evaluative studies.

Most importantly, as few studies evaluated the HOTS separated from other skills in general studies in the world and in the Palestinian studies, this study tended to evaluate the HOTS in reading exercises in the Palestinian English textbook. Therefore, the researchers see that the current study will be more different from other studies.

In addition, different tools were used in these studies which helped the researchers to choose the used two tools to conduct the current study. Some of the suitable used tools in the mentioned studies include analysis cards (Kamile & Karliova 2009, Al – Yousef 2007, Hamdona 2007, Al – Mazloum 2007, Aqel 2009, El Shawa 2011, Risner, et al 1991, Rivas 1999, Lan & Chern 2010, Charles 1980, and Ali 2010); questionnaire (Mahmoud 2006, Aqel 2009, Masri 2003, Nemati 2009, Hashemi 2011, Tok 2010, Ezici 2006, Litz 2001, Seda 2007, Al – Yousef 2007, Alamri 2008, Fattash 2010, Al Ja'bari 2010, Rahman 2004, and Ming 2011) and an interview (Ezici 2006, Seda 2007, Al Yousef 2007, and Ali 2010).

Concerning the results of the study, most of them showed negative results such as Hashemis's study (2011) which indicated that the textbooks are not acceptable from the teachers' point of view considering their five sections, their physical make – up, and some practical concerns. Tok (2010) revealed that "Spot On" textbook actually did not stand up reasonably well to a systematic in – depth analysis. In Ezici's study (2006), results showed that both teachers and students felt negative about the characteristics of the textbook and that the reading passages needed to be simplified in terms of both vocabulary and structure. Al Ja'bari (2010) showed that there is a gap between the ministry guidelines for the syllabus and reality. In addition, Alul (2000), Lan & Chern (2010), Rahman (2004), and Ming (2011) in their studies affirmed that there was still a preponderance of lower level questions over HOTS.

On the contrary, some studies assured that the textbooks are well designed and fulfill the textbook evaluation criteria such as Al – Mazloum (2007), Mahmoud (2007), Al – Yousef (2007), the findings of these studies proved that the textbooks analyzed were suitable and highly recommended for use in the classroom.

7. METHODOLOGY

Research method

The researchers, in order to conduct the study, adopted the descriptive analytical method of research. The descriptive method means "any research that describes a setting or events in numerical terms" (Brown and Rodgers, 2002: 118).

Hence, the researchers adopted this type of research as the study seeks to evaluate to what extent the HOTS are available in Grade *eight* textbook.

Instrumentation

Content analysis is used as the research instrument for this study. Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1278) define content analysis as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns".

Consequently, to achieve the study purpose, a content analysis card was used to collect, describe and analyze data regarding the availability of HOTS in reading exercises of English for Palestine-Grade 8 in the light of the suggested checklist in the analysis card. After that, the researchers carried out a structured interview with the English language teachers of grade *eight* to find out their views concerning the availability of HOTS in the reading exercises of the target textbook.

The content analysis card:

The researchers included the needed items for evaluating the three higher cognitive skills in the content analysis card. After that, these items were shown to experts to benefit from their comments concerning the suitability of the used items. In addition, most of the items used were taken from the objectives of teaching reading stated by the Palestinian ministry of higher education. Thus, the items of the content analysis card were twenty-six divided into three main domains (analysis, synthesis and evaluation).

Limitation of the analysis:

1- The analysis covers all the reading exercises of the reading texts in SB and WB as well.
2- The teacher's book isn't included in the analysis.
3- The analysis focuses mainly on the reading skill not on other skills.

Besides, the content analysis card was shown to experts so that the researchers could benefit from their comments and suggestions for further modifications.

Validity of the content analysis card:

To ensure the validity of the content analysis card, it was shown to some experts from different institutions. The majority of the referees (9) were from the Islamic University of Gaza, two of them were from Al-Qattan Centre, one of the referees was from Gaza University and the remaining one was an English supervisor in UNRWA.

The list of the criteria was checked to examine:

1- The comprehensiveness of the dimensions needed for the analysis,
2- The relevance of the items to the general dimensions, and
3- The clarity and linguistic correctness of the criteria.

After showing the content analysis card to experts and in the light of their suggestions, some of the items included in the checklist were omitted due to having nearly the same meaning. All in all, the referees assured the suitability of the criteria included in the checklist for evaluating the availability of HOTS in the reading exercises of *English for Palestine – Grade eight* . After confirming the final version of the checklist, the number of items became (26) distributed into three categories i.e.; analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Reliability through persons

To test the level of consistency through persons, the findings of the analysis of the reading exercises of the first five units of SB and WB in *English for Palestine grade 8* done by the two researchers was examined by Holsti equation.

Table **(3.6)** shows the level of consistency between the results of the two researchers.

Table (3.6)
Coefficient Correlation Among Researchers: Reliability through Persons

	Analyzers	**Number of items**	**Points of agreement**	**Points of difference**	**Correlation coefficient**
SB	First Analyzer	69	66	3	95.6
	Second Analyzer	69			
WB	First Analyzer	28	28	0	100.00
	Second Analyzer	28			

The results in the table above show that there is a high correlation between the two researchers, which enables the researcher to process the data collected.

The interview

The researchers carried out a structured interview with English language teachers who teach *English for Palestine – Grade eight* . Specifically, They consulted many experts from the field to choose the suitable questions for the purpose of the interview and to benefit from their experience.

Description of the interview:

The interview handled the following points :

1- The availability of HOTS in the reading exercises from teachers' point of view.
2- The mostly used skill of HOTS in the reading exercises in both SB and WB.
3- The least used skill of HOTS in the reading exercises in both SB and WB.
4- Whether the reading exercises enhance students' HOTS.

5- Any suggestions would be provided to enhance HOTS in the reading exercises of the target book.

Population of the interview:

It includes all 8th grade English teachers in UNRWA schools in Khanyounis city. Thus, the sample consisted of (31) teachers; (18) male and (13) female teachers.

Sample of the study:

The sample of the interview includes 16 teachers; (7) male teachers and (9) female teachers. It represents 50% of the population. The sample was stratified randomly. The interview was carried out with the teachers who taught SB and WB of *English for Palestine – Grade eight* .

Validity of the interview:

To ensure the validity of the interview, the researchers distributed it to (13) juries from the Islamic University, Gaza university , UNRWA English Supervisors and QCERD. All agreed on the suitability of the questions in the interview card.

Moreover, the researchers distributed a defining sheet to 8th grade English language teachers. This aimed at familiarizing the English teachers of what HOTS exactly mean and to give them an idea about the items included in the analysis card.

Carrying out the interview

The researchers interviewed the sixteen members of the sample individually then They calculated points of agreement and differences statistically.

8.   THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Question 1:

To what extent do the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade *eight* include analysis skill ?

To answer this question, the researchers analyzed the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade *eight* . The following domain includes 13 criteria related to the reading exercises in both SB and WB. Table (4.1) shows frequencies, averages and relative weight of the sub skills belonging to analysis skill.

Table (4.1)
Frequency and percentage of the items in the analysis skill

Items	SB	%	WB	%	total	%
1- Distinguish facts from opinions.	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
2- Categorize information in text.	5	11.1	4	44.4	9	16.7
3- Compare items in text.	3	6.7	0	0	3	5.6
4-Guess meaning of words in context.	4	8.9	1	11.1	5	9.3
5-Read between lines.	0	0	0	0	0	0
6-Recognize causes and effects.	19	42.2	3	33.3	22	40.7
7-Explain the information introduced.	2	4.4	0	0	2	3.7
8-Recognize clues and evidence.	7	15.6	1	11.1	8	14.8
9-Elicit rules and principles.	0	0	0	0	0	0.0

10-Infer the mood, attitudes, or tones of the author.	2	4.4	0	0	2	3.7
11- Distinguish main ideas from the supporting ones.	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
12- Order items according to their importance.	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
13. To break down the text into its main component.	3	6.7	0	0	3	5.6
	45	100	9	100	54	100

Successively, the above table shows that very high percentages are scored for the items 'recognize causes and effects' which got the highest percentage among the other items % 42.2 with a frequency of 19, 'recognize clues and evidence' got % 15.6, 'categorize information in text' got % 11.1, 'guess meaning of words in context' 8.9 and so on. With noticing that these results are attributed to the SB only,whereas the majority of the criteria are not available in the exercises of the WB as illustrated in the table**.**

Question 2

To what extent do the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade 8 include synthesis skill?

To answer this question, the researchers analyzed the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade 8. The following table includes frequencies, averages and relative weight of the sub skills belonging to Synthesis skill.

Table (4.2)
The frequency and percentage of the items in the synthesis skill

Items	SB	%	WB	%	total	%
1.Rearrange information related to the text .	0	0	1	5.3	1	2.3
2 Summarize texts.	0	0	1	5.3	1	2.3
3. Write or retell the material of the text using his own words.	0	0	2	10.5	2	4.7
4. Predict events or solutions related to the text.	9	36	0	0.0	9	20.9
5. Discuss to persuade.	4	16	0	0.0	4	9.3
6. Hypothesis data.	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0
7. Generate information related to the text.	2	8	9	47.4	11	25.6
8. Combine his own information with the information in the text.	8	32	3	15.8	11	25.6
9. Connect knowledge from different sources.	2	8	2	10.5	4	9.3
	25	100	18	100	43	100

Table (4.2) shows the percentage and frequency of each item of synthesis skill. It is obvious that, in the exercises of the SB, the item "predict events or solutions related to the text" got the highest frequency of 9 times and the percentage % 36. This indicates that the reading exercises are enriched to some extent with predicting events. After that, the item "combine his own information with the information in the text" comes to occupy a percentage of 32 with a frequency of 8. On contrary, the exercises of the WB are not enriched enough with synthesis activities except for the item "generate information related to the text" which got % 47.4 with a frequency of 8.

Question 3

To what extent do the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade eight **include evaluation skill ?**

To answer this question, the researchers analyzed the reading exercises of English for Palestine – grade *eight* .

The following table includes the frequencies, the averages and the relative weight of the sub skills belonging to the Evaluation skill.

Table (4.3)
The frequency and percentage of the items in the evaluation skill

Items	SB	%	WB	%	total	%
1- Express his/ her opinions towards situations in the target text.	5	71.4	0	0	5	71.4
2- Conclude themes of texts.	2	28.6	0	0	2	28.6
3- Recognize subjectivity and objectivity.	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
4- Make choices based on reasoned argument.	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
	7	**100**	**0**	**0**	**7**	**100**

Table (4.3) reveals that 2 criteria out of the four ones "express his/her opinions towards situations in the target text and conclude themes of the text" are available in the reading only, while the exercises of the WB do not include any of these criteria at all. This shows that there is a sign of deficiency in this skill and the reading exercises really need to be enriched with more evaluative studies.

Question 4

What is 8th grade English language teachers' evaluation of the higher order thinking skills in the reading exercises of *English for Palestine Grade* *eight* ?

To answer this question, the researcher carried out an interview with 8th grade English language teachers to check their evaluation of HOTS in the reading exercises of English for Palestine Grade *eight* . Next is the teachers' answers to the posed questions.

Q1: **Based on your teaching experience, do you think that HOTS are well-treated in the reading exercises? Please elaborate.**

Their answers to the question were the following:

12 teachers out of 16 said that HOTS are not well-treated or rather neglected, they see that most of the pre-reading and the post reading questions treat the comprehension level of thinking since the passages are meant for comprehension. Besides, the lack of HOTS in the reading exercises may be ascribed to the following three reasons:

1- Most of the passages are scientific in form, hence, it is not easy for the author nor for the teacher to ask questions that include HOTS.

2- The exercises after each reading text are not organized in a way to aid the implementation of Bloom's taxonomy.

3- They believe that the authors have not followed a certain method of questioning.

Additionally, they see that the reading exercises focus primarily on the lower skills such as knowledge, comprehension and application. Therefore, these exercises do not satisfy competent students because they need more questions that promote their thinking abilities.

The remaining four teachers proved that HOTS are covered fully and the exercises are above students' mentalities. In addition, students cannot guess the meaning of some vocabularies because they are too many and they, as teachers, find difficulty in dealing with such exercises since they have to finish the whole textbook within a very limited time. Another teacher said that HOTS are there and they are also above students' mentalities; therefore, teachers deleted these exercises and replacedthem with the support material done by the UNRWA since it suits students' abilities and levels.

Q2: Based on your teaching experience, which of the HOTS are mostly used in the reading exercises *English for Palestine grade* *eight* ?

Their answers to the question were the following:

14 teachers out of 16 emphasized that the analysis skill is the mostly used and more presented than the other two skills because according to Bloom's taxonomy **synthesis** and **evaluation** are the highest skills. Accordingly, analysis skill is introduced through guessing the meaning of some words and recognizing the causes of some events. Regarding the synthesis skill, it includes the ability to write, make summaries, and sometimes construct a comprehensive idea of the text. As a result, this skill comes after analysis.

On the contrary, two teachers have different opinions. One of them said that evaluation is the mostly used while the other said that synthesis then analysis skill is the mostly used in the exercises.

Q3: Based on your teaching experience, Which of the HOTS are less concentrated on? Why?

Their answers to the question were the following:

15 teachers out of 16 asserted that evaluation exercises are excluded or rather neglected (do not exist). This is due to the fact that students' minds are still limited. Thus, they cannot judge things appropriately or give opinions toward situations; therefore, the curriculum designers may exclude such activities because they know that the evaluation skill is the highest one in Bloom's taxonomy and students can just answer the simple and direct questions. Furthermore, students do not have the ability to express opinions or judge things because their exposure to the language is poor. They do not practice it except in classrooms and in fact the curriculum, especially Grade *eight* , is so long and more complex than other textbooks in the prep stage.

On the other hand, just one teacher said that analysis skill is less concentrated on without giving any explanation.

Q4: Based on your teaching experience, Do you think that the reading exercises improve students' HOTS? Why?

Their answers to the question were the following:

Ten teachers said that the reading exercises do not improve students' HOTS since the majority of the questions focus primarily on comprehension level, so they resort to the support material which contains some exercises that enhance HOTS to some extentdone by the UNRWA. Others said that the exercises do not improve students' HOTS due to the lack of the three skills (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). In addition, some of those teachers said that they, as teachers, add additional exercises for toppers to satisfy their desire in learning.

On the contrary, six teachers have proved that the reading exercises promote students' HOTS, not so much, but from time to time;specifically, in the analysis skill which is the most used and focused on. It improves students' ability in reading critically and guessing the meaning through context. Still they need more focus on the other two skills. Others stated that reading exercises improve students' HOTS a little bit but not so much because the main focus is how to make students succeed not to think deeply of the introduced information. Besides, these exercises are meant for the high achievers in order to benefit from them. Regarding low achievers, they can just learn the lower skills represented in comprehension and application.

Q5: What suggestions would you provide to enhance HOTS in the reading exercises in the target textbook?

Their answers to the question were the following:

Eight teachers said that it would be better if these textbooks are provided by more questions that include HOTS which suit students' level and environment. In addition, providing students with a suitable and variant passages; e.g., stories, social problems, daily situations, and some useful scientific passages. Moreover, following a certain technique of asking the questions such as Bloom's taxonomy taking into account the gradation from simple to complex questions and keeping in mind students' needs. Thus, HOTS should be varied and short; i.e., each question should contain one specific idea. Specifically, HOTS should be covered and suit students' attitudes, interests, desires, and levels. Two teachers suggested conducting remedial and enrichment material that cover these three skills. Three teachers suggested that English teachers should have more training courses on how to deal with these skills and how to improve students' abilities to apply HOTS in their life. Other two teachers suggested that more time should be given to students to be able to practice these skills. One teacher said that it is better to change this textbook totally and replace it by another one which suits students' abilities. The above answers were obtained from various teachers who teach 8th grade in Khanyounis city only. Besides, these answers were the teachers' views concerning the reading exercises in the target book.

Question 5

What is a suggested framework that can be introduced for effective development of higher order thinking in *English for Palestine grade eight* textbook?

In an attempt to answer this question, the researchers have suggested the following framework which consists of four steps to be followed by teachers when teaching HOTS. Examples of HOTS exercises are also provided.

Objectives of the framework

This framework puts forward a vision of a four – step procedure that mayprovide teachers with the practical form to be followed while training their students to practice HOTS. Moreover, it provides more reading exercises related to higher order thinking skills as an enrichment material to units (3,6,7,10,14) from the target book.

Step one:

Determine the learning objectives

A teacher should determine the learning objectives of the whole reading comprehension course and the objectives of each specific class as well. Objectives act as the base which defines the behaviors students should exhibit in class. Concerning the objectives of practicing higher order thinking skills, they should be constructed in the form of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. To illustrate, analysis exercises should include questions such as classifying, comparing, and guessing meaning.

With regards to the synthesis skill, students are to synthesize, combine, reconstruct the text in a different form, rearrange, generate questions, hypothesize, and conclude the author's message.

At the level of evaluation, students are to judge, explore bias, describe characters, define the moral lesson.

The following are forms of higher order objectives on the level of analysis:

- Students should classify (certain items) in the text.
- Students should compare ………………… with ………………… (items found in the text).
- Students should find causes of …………………… (items found in the text).
- Students should find results of ………………….. (items found in the text).
- Students should guess meaning of words in context.
- Students should take notes.

On the level of synthesis:

- Students should summarize the text.
- Students should retell or rewrite the text using their own words.
- Students should generate questions related to the text.
- Students should suggest alternative solutions or ends.
- Students should combine their information with that of the text.

On the level of evaluation:

- Students should explore bias in the text, criticize, recommend, and evaluate.
- Students should elicit the theme of the text.

The above mentioned objectives should be introduced to students in form of action verbs or behavioral verbs. Consider the following examples:

- Compare wedding party in 'Palestine' to wedding party in 'Scotland'.
- Paraphrase the text in your own words.
- Express your opinion towards the following situation….

It is worth noting that well designed objectives lead to achieving the desired behavioral response.

Step two:

Students should be familiarized with the meaning of the behavioral verbs; for example, when students are expected to answer or respond to the following questions:

- Compare between the advantages and disadvantages of both mobile and telephone (Unit 1), they should be trained how to do systematic comparisons, and how to assign similarities and differences between them.
- When students are asked to guess the meaning of words in context, they should be trained to find clues in the text which help them to elicit the meaning.

An example of that is the following:

The word "*instrument*" in Unit 2, P. 12 . To explore the meaning of this word, students should find clues that may lead to the meaning. They should look at the sentence before, the sentence after, and relate all to the whole text. At the same time the teacher guides students through the following questions about the sentence before:

Which music are they listening to? (tablah)

After this, the teacher asks students to investigate the sentences after; for instance, he says: Look at the words al'oud and guitar. What are these?

Students may give different meanings, the teacher then picks the most appropriate one and writes on the board: tablah, 'oud, and guitar are musical *instruments*.

At this time, students get the meaning through exploring the relation among those items (tablah, 'oud, and guitar). All of the words are related to music. So they are musical instruments(*these activities belong to the analysis skill*).

Step 3

Reflecting: students are asked to describe the thinking steps they go through to get the meaning of the target word or any thinking process they lead. Real practice and reflecting are necessary to build the students' ability to think critically. Accordingly, the whole process is a matter of interaction between the teacher and the students in one hand and students and the text in the other.

The role of the teacher as a guide is strong and clear in this early stage of practicing higher order thinking skills. Nevertheless, it faints gradually when students are used to doing it on their own.

Step four

*Feedback***:** continuous feedback should be introduced by the teacher to the students after every activity on the cognitive level along with the psychological level. This is to assess the information they have got to motivate them making more efforts. In addition, feedback is based on a teacher's assessment of students' performance which enables him to know the level of achieving objectives.

It is necessary to mention that teaching reading comprehension should pass in three phases pre reading activities which focus on activating students' schemata to interact with the text, examining the title and the accompanied pictures to predict events related to the text in addition to the other two phases which are while and post reading in which each has its specific steps.

Practical example of HOTS activities:

In an effort to illustrate the application of this framework on English for Palestine Grade – *eight* , the researchers chose some units (3,6,7,10,14) and has suggested the following activities to develop HOTS. Before this, an example about the story "*the tortoise and the hare*" is provided as a model for teachers to follow when applying the suggested activities from the target book.

Procedures:

Procedural activities should be carried out in question-answer form. Questions can be used to support the gradual thinking process which passes from lower to higher level. For example, a teacher can go gradually from asking about direct facts in the story moving to analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating. It is worth noting that each question should have a specific and clear objective and should lead to another one.

The Tortoise and the Hare

Once upon a time there was a hare who used to boast how he could run faster than anyone else. One day when he was teasing a tortoise for its slowness, the tortoise answered back: "Who do you think you are? There's no denying you're swift, but even you can be beaten!" The hare squealed with laughter.

 The hare replied, "Beaten in a race? By who? Not you, surely! I bet there's nobody in the world that can win against me, I'm so speedy. Now, why don't you try?"

The tortoise accepted the challenge. A course was planned, and the next day at dawn they stood at the starting line. The hare yawned sleepily as the meek tortoise trudged slowly off. When the hare saw how painfully slow his rival was, he decided to have a quick nap. "Take your time!" he said. "I'll sleep for sometime then I will win the race in a minute.

The hare woke up and gazed round, looking for the tortoise. But the creature was only a short distance away, having barely covered a third of the course. Breathing a sigh of relief, the hare decided he might as well have breakfast too, and off he went to munch some cabbages he had noticed in a nearby field. But the heavy meal and the hot sun makes him tired and sleepy. With a careless glance at the tortoise, he fell fast asleep again and was soon snoring happily. The sun started to sink, below the horizon, and the tortoise, who had been plodding towards the winning post since morning, was scarcely a yard from the finish. At that very point, the hare woke with a jolt. He could see the tortoise a speck in the distance and away he dashed. He leapt and bounded at a great rate, his tongue lolling, and gasping for breath. Just a little more and he'd be first at the finish. But the hare's last leap was just too late, for the tortoise had beaten him to the

winning post. Poor hare! Tired and in disgrace, he slumped down beside the tortoise who was silently smiling at him."Slowly does it every time!" he said.

9. CONCLUSION

The overall findings of this study demonstrated that higher order cognitive skills in reading comprehension exercises are not well covered, not well treated nor well distributed. There is a lack of progression from the lower cognitive skills to the higher ones. To illustrate, out of the twenty six categories adopted as criteria to evaluate higher order thinking skills, only fifteen are covered in the student book i.e. % 58 while % 42 were neglected. Moreover, in the work book only ten skills i.e. % 46 are covered while %54 are neglected.

As to the treatment of the exercises, mostly the same form of questions was introduced, For instance, all the questions related to recognize causes and effect sub skill are treated with why questions. In addition, only taking notes exercises are related to analyzing text into its components.

As to the distribution of exercises, some skills have a high rate of frequency, others have a very low rate of frequency. e.g., the sub skill 'predicting events or solutions related to the text' takes place 9 times whereas 'discuss to persuade' sub skill takes place only once. There is an agreement between the results of the interview and the results of the target book analysis. In that, both agree on the lack of higher order thinking skills in the text books and on the unbalanced distribution of them throughout the book in addition to the shortage of variety of questions.

 These findings do not match the general objectives of teaching reading in English for Palestine stated by the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education which focus on higher order thinking skills such as generating questions about a reading text, inferring, judging or evaluating questions, recognizing proform referents, summarizing a reading text, making predictions about a reading text, making inferences about a reading text, identifying the main idea of a reading text, deducing meaning of unfamiliar words from context, skimming for gist or general impression of text or graphics, distinguishing fact from opinion, inferring mood and author's attitudes or tone, interpreting information presented in diagrammatic display, relating text to personal experience, opinion, or evaluation, analyzing components of text such as setting, theme, character, and extracting and synthesizing information from different sources.

The researchers attribute this weakness to the following reasons:

- The author of the book is not aware of the necessity of providing higher order thinking skills into the reading comprehension exercises in English for Palestine stated by the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education.
- Designing activities related to higher order thinking skills needs producing high quality of strategies which need much time and effort.
- The time allocated to teaching reading comprehension is not long enough to provide such advanced activities.

In the light of these findings, the researchers recommend the following.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, this section presents some recommendations with a view to modify the reading exercises in *English for Palestine Grade eight* as follows:

[1] As the present syllabus of English for Palestine Grade *eight* does not include enough higher order sub skills of reading, it is recommended that the book designers should modify the reading exercises to include higher order thinking skills such as predicting, using contextual clues, guessing meaning of words through context, interpreting texts, evaluating a text critically, recognizing the author's position and bias, distinguishing between facts and opinions, understanding author's tone, mood and attitude, etc.

[2] English supervisors are recommended to prepare enrichment materials that provide teachers with more exercises that cover higher order thinking skills. In addition, they should hold more workshops to train the English teachers how to develop and enhance students' thinking skills.

[3] The researchers recommend that the English language teachers should provide students with more reading activities, help them with hints and clues, and train them to practice the cognitive and meta cognitive strategies while reading. In this regard, teachers should not lecture all the time, and explain everything to the students but they should encourage the students to read and find out by themselves the different layers of meanings in the texts.

[4] It is recommended that the textbook should provide pair work and group work activities to improve the outcomes of reading processes. Furthermore, it is recommended that the reading exercises should engage students in 'word attack', 'sentence attack' and 'text attack' activities. Accordingly, students should be active organizers, not passive recipients.

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