

Evaluating the Real-World Relevance of Palestinian Secondary School English Language Materials: A Qualitative Study from Southern Hebron

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ABSTRACT:

The effectiveness of English language teaching (ELT) materials depends largely on their ability to connect classroom learning with learners' real-life experiences. This study evaluates the real-world relevance of the English for Palestine secondary school materials, including the Student's Book, Reading Plus Book, and Teacher's Guide, within the educational context of Southern Hebron, Palestine. Employing a qualitative evaluative design, the study utilized systematic content analysis supported by a researcher-developed Real-World Relevance Evaluation Checklist comprising five domains: contextual alignment, authenticity of language, cultural representation, communicative value, and learner engagement. The checklist was validated through expert review and demonstrated high inter-rater reliability (Holsti coefficient = .94-.97).

The findings reveal that although the instructional materials provide meaningful communicative activities and authentic language tasks, they only moderately reflect learners' lived experiences. Authentic real-life contexts and communicative language use were the strongest dimensions, whereas local cultural representation remained comparatively limited. The analysis further indicates that Grade 12 materials contain a higher proportion of abstract and examination-oriented content than Grade 11 materials, reducing opportunities for contextualized language learning. Teachers consequently assume an essential mediating role by adapting textbook content to meet learners' social and cultural realities.

The study introduces the Contextual Relevance Gap Model, explaining the discrepancy between curriculum intentions and classroom implementation. It concludes that strengthening local contextualization while maintaining global perspectives would improve learner engagement, authenticity, and communicative competence. The findings provide practical implications for curriculum developers, textbook writers, policymakers, and English language teachers seeking to develop more contextually responsive instructional materials.

Keywords: Authenticity; Communicative Language Teaching; EFL Textbooks; Palestinian Education; Real-World Relevance; Teacher Adaptation

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I. Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) materials have evolved from serving as repositories of linguistic knowledge to becoming central tools that foster communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and meaningful language use. Contemporary approaches to language education emphasize that effective learning occurs when instructional materials are authentic, contextually meaningful, and closely connected to learners' social and cultural realities (Tomlinson, 2012; McGrath, 2016). Consequently, the concept of real-world relevance has become a fundamental criterion for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of English language teaching materials.

Real-world relevance refers to the extent to which instructional content reflects learners' lived experiences, communication needs, and socio-cultural environments, enabling them to use language meaningfully beyond the classroom. Unlike authenticity, which primarily concerns the naturalness of language input, real-world relevance encompasses broader contextual dimensions, including learners' identities, cultural backgrounds, and everyday experiences (Gilmore, 2007). Materials that establish meaningful connections between classroom learning and real-life situations are more likely to enhance learner motivation, engagement, and communicative competence.

The Palestinian Ministry of Education has adopted a communicative and learner-centered English curriculum for Grades 1–12 that explicitly promotes contextualized language learning, authentic communication, and the integration of both local and global perspectives (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2015). The curriculum seeks to prepare students to participate effectively in an increasingly interconnected world while maintaining their cultural identity. In practice, however, these curricular principles are implemented primarily through textbooks, making instructional materials the principal medium through which curriculum objectives are translated into classroom practice.

Although the curriculum emphasizes meaningful and contextualized learning, growing evidence suggests that the prescribed English language materials do not always reflect learners' socio-cultural realities, particularly in marginalized regions such as Southern Hebron. Students frequently encounter topics, situations, and cultural references that are distant from their everyday experiences, reducing the perceived relevance of classroom learning. Previous research has demonstrated that when instructional materials fail to connect with learners' realities, they may weaken motivation, limit classroom engagement, and reduce opportunities for meaningful language use (Dörnyei, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Conversely, contextually relevant materials promote learner identity, participation, and communicative development (Tomlinson, 2012).

Another challenge concerns the increasing globalization of English language education. While exposure to international cultures enriches learners' intercultural competence, excessive reliance on foreign contexts may diminish local cultural representation and create a contextual mismatch between textbook content and students' lived experiences (Gray, 2010). Within the Palestinian educational context, achieving an appropriate balance between global perspectives and local identity remains essential for meaningful language learning.

Teachers often compensate for this imbalance by adapting textbook content to suit learners' needs, incorporating locally relevant examples, modifying activities, and contextualizing instructional tasks. Such practices highlight the dynamic relationship between curriculum design and curriculum implementation and underscore teachers' pivotal role in mediating instructional materials (McGrath, 2016). Nevertheless, limited empirical research has systematically evaluated the real-world relevance of Palestinian English language materials from this perspective.

Accordingly, this study evaluates the real-world relevance of the English for Palestine instructional materials, including the Student's

Book, Reading Plus Book, and Teacher's Guide for Grades 11 and 12, within the context of Southern Hebron. Through a qualitative evaluative approach, the study examines the extent to which these materials reflect authentic communication, contextual relevance, cultural representation, communicative value, and learner engagement. Furthermore, it introduces the Contextual Relevance Gap Model, which conceptualizes the discrepancy between curriculum intentions and classroom implementation and provides a framework for understanding how contextual relevance influences the effectiveness of English language instruction.

Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

What criteria can be used to evaluate the real-world relevance of Palestinian EFL instructional materials?

To what extent do the Student's Book, Reading Plus Book, and Teacher's Guide satisfy these criteria within the context of Southern Hebron?

The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on ELT materials evaluation by providing evidence-based recommendations for curriculum developers, policymakers, textbook designers, and English language teachers seeking to enhance the contextual relevance and pedagogical effectiveness of Palestinian English language materials.

II. Literature Review

The evaluation of English language teaching (ELT) materials has shifted considerably from emphasizing grammatical accuracy and structural organization toward assessing how effectively instructional resources support meaningful communication and contextualized learning. Contemporary approaches view textbooks as pedagogical tools that shape learners' linguistic competence, cultural awareness, motivation, and engagement rather than merely presenting language content (Tomlinson, 2012; McGrath, 2016). Consequently, textbook evaluation now incorporates dimensions such as authenticity,

real-world relevance, communicative value, cultural representation, and learner engagement.

A. Theoretical Foundations

The present study is grounded primarily in Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which conceptualizes learning as a socially mediated process occurring through interaction with cultural tools and meaningful contexts. From this perspective, textbooks function as mediating artifacts that shape learners' understanding of language and culture. Instructional materials become effective only when they facilitate meaningful interaction between learners, language, and their social environment.

The study is further informed by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes the development of communicative competence through authentic language use rather than isolated grammatical instruction (Richards, 2006). CLT advocates instructional tasks that simulate real-life communication, encourage interaction, and enable learners to negotiate meaning in realistic situations. Therefore, communicative value constitutes an essential criterion for evaluating ELT materials. In addition, Materials Development Theory argues that effective instructional materials should stimulate learner interest, expose students to authentic language, and connect classroom learning with meaningful experiences (Tomlinson, 2012). McGrath (2016) further emphasizes that textbook quality should be evaluated not only according to content but also according to the contexts in which materials are implemented.

B. Real-World Relevance and Authenticity

Real-world relevance has become a central principle in contemporary language education. It refers to the extent to which instructional materials reflect learners' daily experiences, communication needs, and socio-cultural realities, enabling meaningful language use beyond classroom settings. Materials perceived as relevant enhance learner motivation, participation, and knowledge transfer, whereas decontextualized content often reduces

engagement and communicative effectiveness (Dörnyei, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Closely related to relevance is the concept of authenticity, which concerns the use of natural language, realistic communication tasks, and genuine social situations (Gilmore, 2007). However, authenticity alone does not guarantee relevance. Materials may contain authentic language while remaining disconnected from learners' cultural experiences. Consequently, effective ELT materials should integrate authentic language within contexts that are meaningful to learners' own environments.

C. Cultural Representation and Communicative Value

Textbooks also function as cultural artifacts, transmitting values, identities, and worldviews. Research has shown that many internationally produced ELT materials prioritize Western cultural contexts while providing limited representation of learners' local cultures (Gray, 2010). Although exposure to international perspectives contributes to intercultural competence, insufficient representation of local culture may reduce learners' sense of identity and contextual connection. Within the Palestinian educational context, the Ministry of Education (2015) emphasizes balancing global awareness with national identity by promoting contextualized language learning and culturally responsive instruction. Consequently, evaluating cultural representation within Palestinian EFL materials is essential for determining how effectively curriculum objectives are translated into instructional practice. Communicative value represents another important evaluation criterion. According to Richards (2006), communicative tasks should promote interaction, collaboration, problem-solving, and authentic language use. Activities such as discussions, interviews, debates, collaborative projects, and functional writing tasks provide learners with opportunities to apply language in realistic communicative situations. Conversely, isolated grammar exercises and mechanical vocabulary drills contribute little to communicative competence when presented without meaningful context.

D. Teacher Mediation

Despite the central role of textbooks, teachers remain the primary mediators between curriculum and classroom practice. Rather than implementing textbooks mechanically, teachers frequently modify, supplement, and contextualize instructional materials to accommodate learners' needs and local realities (McGrath, 2016). Teacher adaptation becomes particularly important when prescribed materials inadequately represent learners' socio-cultural environments or communicative needs. This adaptive role demonstrates that textbook effectiveness depends not only on curriculum design but also on teachers' pedagogical decisions during classroom implementation.

E. Empirical Studies and Research Gap

Previous studies consistently report recurring limitations in ELT materials, including inadequate contextualization, insufficient authenticity, and an imbalance between global and local cultural representation (Gray, 2010; Tomlinson, 2012). Similar findings have emerged in Arab educational contexts, where textbooks frequently emphasize international themes while providing comparatively limited attention to learners' local identities and experiences (Alibakhshi, 2018). Although these studies provide valuable insights into textbook evaluation, relatively little research has examined the real-world relevance of Palestinian English language materials, particularly within marginalized regions such as Southern Hebron.

Accordingly, the present study addresses this gap by systematically evaluating the English for Palestine materials for Grades 11 and 12 through a comprehensive framework encompassing contextual alignment, authenticity, cultural representation, communicative value, and learner engagement. Furthermore, the study advances existing scholarship by proposing the Contextual Relevance Gap Model, which explains how discrepancies between curriculum design and classroom implementation influence the perceived relevance and effectiveness of English language instruction.

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative evaluative research design using systematic content analysis to examine the extent to which the English for Palestine instructional materials reflect real-world relevance within Palestinian secondary education. Qualitative content analysis was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of educational materials while allowing the interpretation of contextual, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions beyond quantitative measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Krippendorff, 2018).

The evaluation focused on three official instructional resources prescribed by the Palestinian Ministry of Education for Grades 11 and 12:

Student's Book

Reading Plus Book

Teacher's Guide

These materials constitute the primary instructional resources for English language teaching in Palestinian public secondary schools and therefore represent the curriculum as implemented in classroom practice.

B. Sample

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure analytical depth and representativeness. Selected units from Grades 11 and 12 were analyzed because they encompass diverse language skills, communicative activities, instructional formats, and thematic content.

The selected units represented a broad range of educational themes, including:

Tourism environmental sustainability

communication technology

workplace interaction

globalization

democracy

food production

Palestinian cultural identity

These units also included various communicative activities such as discussions, interviews, debates, collaborative tasks, report writing, and problem-solving exercises, providing rich data for evaluating contextual relevance and authenticity.

C. Research Instrument

Data were collected using a Real-World Relevance Evaluation Checklist developed specifically for this study. The instrument was constructed following an extensive review of literature on ELT materials evaluation, authenticity, communicative language teaching, and contextualized learning (Tomlinson, 2012; Gray, 2010; McGrath, 2016), together with the objectives of the Palestinian English curriculum (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2015).

The checklist consisted of five evaluative domains comprising twenty-five indicators:

Real-World Relevance (Contextual Alignment)

Authenticity of Language

Cultural Representation

Communicative Value

Learner Engagement

These domains provided a comprehensive framework for evaluating how effectively the instructional materials connected language learning with learners' real-life experiences.

D. Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert evaluation by specialists in English language teaching, curriculum development, and educational evaluation. Based on their recommendations, several indicators were revised to improve conceptual clarity and alignment with the study objectives. The overall level of expert agreement reached approximately 85%, indicating satisfactory content validity.

To ensure reliability, two independent evaluators analyzed the selected instructional units using the developed checklist. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Holsti's coefficient, producing values ranging from 0.94 to 0.97, which indicate a very high level of coding

consistency and confirm the reliability of the instrument.

E. Data Collection

The researcher conducted a systematic analysis of the selected instructional materials. Each unit was examined repeatedly using the evaluation checklist, and textual examples, instructional activities, reading passages, writing tasks, communicative exercises, and cultural references were documented according to the predefined analytical categories.

The same analytical procedures were applied consistently across the Student's Book, Reading Plus Book, and Teacher's Guide to ensure methodological consistency.

F. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using an integrated qualitative and descriptive approach.

Quantitative descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were used to determine the distribution of the evaluation domains across the instructional materials. Qualitative thematic analysis was subsequently employed to interpret patterns related to authenticity, contextual alignment, cultural representation, communicative value, and learner engagement. The findings were interpreted within the theoretical perspectives of Sociocultural Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, and contemporary materials development frameworks.

G. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to accepted principles of educational research ethics. All instructional materials were analyzed objectively using

predefined evaluative criteria. Findings are reported accurately without manipulation or selective interpretation, and all theoretical sources have been acknowledged following APA (7th edition) guidelines.

H. Limitations

The study is subject to several limitations. First, the analysis focused on purposively selected textbook units rather than the complete instructional materials. Second, although rigorous procedures were followed, qualitative content analysis inevitably involves interpretive judgment. Finally, the study examined textbook content without incorporating classroom observations or students' perceptions. Despite these limitations, expert validation, high inter-rater reliability, and systematic analytical procedures enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

IV. Results and Discussion

The content analysis evaluated the English for Palestine instructional materials for Grades 11 and 12 across five dimensions of real-world relevance: authentic real-life contexts, local cultural relevance, global/intercultural relevance, communicative language use, and abstract or decontextualized content. The analysis included the Student's Book, Reading Plus Book, and Teacher's Guide to determine how effectively the curriculum reflects authentic language learning and contextualized instruction.

A. Distribution of Real-World Relevance Domains

The analysis revealed considerable variation in the representation of the five evaluation domains across the instructional materials.

Table 1: Distribution of Real-World Relevance Domains

Domain	Frequency	Percentage
Authentic Real-Life Contexts	106	40.8%
Communicative/Functional Language Use	87	33.5%
Global/Intercultural Relevance	62	23.9%
Local Cultural Relevance	55	21.2%
Abstract/Decontextualized Content	50	19.2%

The findings demonstrate that authentic real-life contexts represent the most frequently occurring dimension within the analyzed materials. Numerous instructional units address practical themes such as education, employment, communication technology, tourism, environmental sustainability, and healthy lifestyles. These contexts provide learners with opportunities to apply English in situations resembling real-life communication, supporting the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (Richards, 2006).

Similarly, communicative language use constitutes one of the strongest features of the curriculum. Interactive tasks—including interviews, discussions, collaborative projects, debates, and report writing—encourage learners to negotiate meaning and participate actively in classroom communication. These findings support Tomlinson's (2012) assertion that meaningful communication enhances learner engagement and promotes deeper language acquisition.

Nevertheless, although communicative interaction is strongly represented, local cultural

relevance remains comparatively limited. Palestinian social realities, traditions, and everyday experiences appear only intermittently throughout the instructional materials. Instead, the curriculum devotes greater attention to global topics such as democracy, environmental issues, globalization, and international communication. While these themes contribute to intercultural competence, they do not consistently connect with learners' immediate social environments.

A further concern is the continued presence of abstract and decontextualized instructional content. Grammar exercises and vocabulary activities frequently appear in isolation from authentic communicative situations, limiting opportunities for meaningful language application. Such findings suggest that elements of traditional language instruction continue to coexist with communicative approaches.

B. Evaluation of Real-World Relevance

The second stage of the analysis examined the extent to which each instructional component fulfilled the established evaluation criteria.

Table 2: Achievement of Real-World Relevance Criteria

Criterion	Grade 11	Grade 12	Teacher Guide	Overall
Authentic Real-Life Contexts	24%	21%	19%	21.3%
Local Cultural Relevance	15%	12%	11%	12.7%
Global/Intercultural Relevance	17%	18%	14%	16.3%
Communicative Language Use	26%	24%	28%	26.0%
Abstract Content	18%	25%	28%	23.7%

The results indicate that communicative language use represents the strongest dimension across all instructional materials. Learners are regularly encouraged to participate in collaborative learning, discussions, role-playing activities, interviews, and functional writing tasks. These instructional practices are consistent with learner-centered pedagogy and communicative language teaching.

Grade 11 materials demonstrate stronger contextualization than Grade 12. Several instructional units integrate authentic situations associated with food production, tourism,

workplace communication, and environmental awareness. These topics facilitate meaningful interaction between classroom learning and students' everyday experiences.

By contrast, Grade 12 materials contain a noticeably higher proportion of abstract instructional content. This pattern appears closely associated with the examination-oriented nature of the Tawjihi curriculum, where greater emphasis is placed on structural language knowledge and academic preparation than on communicative language use.

The Teacher's Guide exhibits a similar tendency, concentrating primarily on procedural classroom management and instructional explanations rather than strategies that explicitly connect learning with students' lived experiences.

C. Interpretation of Findings

The findings reveal that the Palestinian English curriculum has made substantial progress toward implementing communicative language teaching principles. The widespread inclusion of authentic communicative activities reflects the Ministry of Education's commitment to learner-centered instruction and practical language use.

However, communicative methodology alone does not guarantee contextual relevance. Authentic communication must also reflect learners' cultural identities, daily experiences, and social realities. The relatively limited representation of Palestinian contexts indicates that authenticity has been addressed more successfully than contextualization.

These findings support Gray (2010), who argues that many contemporary ELT textbooks prioritize internationalized content while underrepresenting local cultures. Similar conclusions have been reported by McKay (2012), who emphasizes that effective English language materials should balance intercultural awareness with local identity rather than presenting global perspectives in isolation.

Furthermore, the persistence of abstract instructional activities demonstrates that examination requirements continue to influence curriculum implementation. Although communicative tasks are increasingly common, structural language instruction remains prominent, particularly within Grade 12 materials.

D. The Contextual Relevance Gap Model

Based on the findings, this study proposes the Contextual Relevance Gap Model, which explains the discrepancy between curriculum intentions and classroom implementation.

The model suggests that curriculum documents advocate contextualized, communicative, and

learner-centered instruction. However, during implementation, several factors—including textbook design, examination requirements, and limited local contextualization—reduce the extent to which learners experience meaningful language learning.

Within this framework, teachers become essential mediators who bridge the gap by adapting textbook content, incorporating locally relevant examples, and contextualizing instructional activities according to learners' needs.

Consequently, real-world relevance emerges not as a fixed characteristic of instructional materials but as a dynamic interaction among curriculum design, textbook content, teacher mediation, and learners' socio-cultural contexts. This conceptualization extends existing theories of materials evaluation by emphasizing the socially constructed nature of contextual relevance.

V. Conclusion

This study evaluated the extent to which the English for Palestine instructional materials for Grades 11 and 12 reflect the principles of real-world relevance within the educational context of Southern Hebron. Using a qualitative evaluative approach supported by systematic content analysis, the study examined the Student's Book, Reading Plus Book, and Teacher's Guide across five dimensions: contextual alignment, authenticity of language, cultural representation, communicative value, and learner engagement.

The findings demonstrate that the instructional materials partially achieve the objectives of contextualized language learning. Authentic real-life contexts and communicative language use constitute the strongest dimensions of the curriculum, reflecting the Ministry of Education's commitment to learner-centered and communicative approaches. The inclusion of discussions, interviews, collaborative learning, functional writing, and problem-solving activities provides learners with meaningful opportunities to use English for authentic communication.

However, the analysis also revealed significant limitations. Local Palestinian cultural representation remains comparatively limited, while global and intercultural themes receive greater emphasis throughout the curriculum. Furthermore, Grade 12 materials contain a higher proportion of abstract and examination-oriented instructional content, reducing opportunities for contextualized language learning and meaningful communication. These findings indicate that although the curriculum promotes communicative competence, its implementation does not always reflect learners' immediate social and cultural realities.

One of the principal contributions of this study is the development of the Contextual Relevance Gap Model, which conceptualizes the discrepancy between curriculum intentions and classroom implementation. The model demonstrates that real-world relevance is not determined solely by textbook content but emerges through the interaction among curriculum design, instructional materials, teacher mediation, and learners' socio-cultural contexts. Teachers therefore occupy a pivotal role in bridging this gap by adapting and contextualizing instructional materials to meet students' educational and cultural needs.

Overall, the findings suggest that enhancing local contextualization while preserving international perspectives would significantly strengthen learner engagement, authenticity, and communicative competence within Palestinian English language education.

VI. Practical Implications

The findings have important implications for curriculum developers, policymakers, textbook writers, teacher educators, and classroom practitioners.

First, future revisions of the English for Palestine curriculum should incorporate a greater number of learning activities that reflect Palestinian learners' daily experiences, cultural identity, and contemporary social realities. Strengthening local contextualization would increase learners' motivation while maintaining opportunities for intercultural learning.

Second, curriculum designers should reduce the predominance of isolated grammar instruction, particularly within Grade 12 materials, by integrating grammatical knowledge into meaningful communicative tasks that reflect authentic language use.

Third, textbook developers should establish a more balanced relationship between local and global perspectives. While intercultural awareness remains essential, it should complement rather than replace learners' own cultural experiences.

Finally, teacher education programs should provide professional development in contextualizing instructional materials, enabling teachers to adapt textbook content effectively while maintaining curricular objectives.

VII. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Revise future editions of English for Palestine to include more authentic Palestinian social, cultural, and educational contexts.

Increase the proportion of contextualized communicative activities that promote meaningful interaction beyond the classroom.

Reduce reliance on decontextualized grammar exercises by embedding language structures within authentic communication.

Develop teacher guides that include practical strategies for adapting textbook content to local classroom realities.

Provide continuous professional development on materials adaptation and contextualized language teaching.

Achieve a more balanced integration of local identity and global citizenship throughout English language materials.

Conduct further research incorporating classroom observations, teacher interviews, and students' perspectives to evaluate how contextual relevance influences motivation, engagement, and language

VIII. Contribution of the study

This study makes several original contributions to English Language Teaching research.

Theoretical Contribution

The study advances current literature by introducing the Contextual Relevance Gap Model, which explains how curriculum effectiveness depends upon the interaction among curriculum design, textbook content, teacher mediation, and learners' socio-cultural realities.

Methodological Contribution

The researcher developed a comprehensive Real-World Relevance Evaluation Checklist consisting of five domains and twenty-five indicators that may be employed in future textbook evaluation studies.

Practical Contribution

The findings provide evidence-based recommendations for improving Palestinian English language materials through stronger contextualization, balanced cultural representation, and enhanced communicative learning achievement.

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