

Analyzing the Effects of Learning English for Iraq on Developing Students' Life Skills

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ABSTRACT

In view of the constant changes and development that the world is witnessing in various aspects of life, it has become necessary for the education system to adapt with that development to create a generation with high levels of competence in life skills. Since the school aims to prepare the student and not relying on providing him with knowledge only, but rather teaching him how to deal with others and with the society in which he lives, and achieving this requires continuous change of curricula and providing them with all that is new of knowledge. Therefore, the current study aims at investigating the effectiveness of Iraqi EFL textbook "English for Iraq" in developing Iraqi students' life skills. To achieve the goals of the study, the researcher conducted a questionnaire as the instrument of the research to measure the extent to which "English for Iraq" textbook can develop and enhance students' life skills. The questionnaire is divided into five categories based on the type of the life skills the textbook is supposedly help to develop, and these categories are: communication/linguistic life skill, personal/social life skill, leadership life skill, critical thinking life skill and decision making/problem solving life skill. The subject of the study is limited to students in the ninth grade in Maysan' intermediate schools along with the teachers who teach using "English for Iraq" textbook as their main reference. After gathering the data from the questionnaire, a statistical analysis has been conducted using percentage and frequencies to determine the extant to which each category is effected and developed. The results from the questionnaire evidently showed that the textbook "English for Iraq " can be used effectively to develop and enhance some types of life skills but not all of them. The results also reveals that the most life skill that EFL textbook appears to help to develop is the personal and social life skills such as (53.33%) of the participants agreed that it can help in developing students' personal identity, also (66.66%) of them agreed that it raise students' awareness of respecting the social and cultural laws and values of the society.

Keywords : *life skills, English for Iraq, linguistic life skills*

PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

The lack of knowledge in life skills is one of the most common problems that the student may face during the stages of his studies. Unfortunately, most of the educational institutions graduate students who suffer a lack of life skills and often many of them fail in their personal and professional lives due to the absence of the skill of self-awareness and the skill of effective communication. Furthermore, the absence of life skills had an impact on impeding the process of reviving societies. Hence, the main problem of the current research emerges, as there has become an urgent need to produce a generation that is armed with

life skills. Since the main tool of teaching students in educational institutions is through texts, therefore, this tool can be used as efficient mean to enhance and develop students' life skills. Hence, the current research seeks to study how the textbook of Iraqi EFL learners provides the sufficient knowledge that concern life skills.

Aims of the Research

The study aims at:

1. Investigating the role of Iraqi EFL textbook “English for Iraq” in developing the life skills of Iraqi intermediate school students
2. Identifying which type of life skills the textbook helps to develop the most

Research Questions

The following questions were created to meet the study's goal:

1. Is there a link between the socio-cultural notions in Iraqi EFL textbooks and learners' life skills?
2. Is there a link between socio-cultural notions in Iraqi EFL textbooks and learners' social behaviors and their capacity to develop appropriate interpersonal connections as life skills?

Research Hypotheses

The researcher proposes the following null hypotheses to avoid subjectivity:

H0 1. There is no significant relationship between Iraqi EFL textbooks socio-cultural constructs and learners' life skills.

H0 2. There is no significant relationship between Iraqi EFL textbooks socio-cultural constructs and learners' social behaviors and their ability to establish useful interactions with people as life skills.

Limits of the study

The is limited to the study of EFL textbook “English for Iraq” in Maysan intermediate school, namely the textbook of the ninth grade. The chosen textbooks are only sociocultural studied, and other aspects of the textbooks are ignored. Furthermore, the gender of the individuals is not taken into account in this research. Furthermore, the socio-cultural notions of textbooks are not sexually differentiated.

Significance of the Study

If we believe that education is a means to an end of preparing students for life, we should fill our EFL textbooks with positive and useful social and cultural conceptions that overtly and indirectly teach students essential life skills. Furthermore, since Iraq is a Muslim nation, individuals need religious as well as social and cultural life skills. In other words, Iraqi students are immersed in a religious culture that necessitates the development of unique life skills. Faith and trust on God are examples of religious life skills, as are practical belief in religious commandments (e.g. prayer, fasting, veiling), Islamic morals and behavior, and worshiping in mosques. The results of this study will benefit educational policymakers, material creators, syllabus designers, teacher educators, researchers, and instructors by demonstrating the socio-cultural inconvenient of Iraqi EFL textbooks. Through various techniques and forms, policymakers, material creators, and syllabus designers may add and show the social lives that are lost in textbooks. In the event of deficient textbooks in such areas, teacher educators might urge instructors to address the necessary life skills in their teaching processes and classroom surroundings.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**Introduction**

In this modern world, there have been rapid drastic changes that have coincided with an increase of people's primary needs in general and students in particular. The needs of learners in general and school students in particular to train and develop the life skills of students take is develop quality and essential to improve educational outputs, “Textbooks play an important role in language classrooms in all sorts of educational institutions, public schools, universities, and language schools—all throughout the globe,” according to Garinger (2001:34). In certain cases, instructors are given the freedom to choose their own textbooks. However, textbooks are recommended, prescribed, or assigned to the great majority of instructors.” This viewpoint is connected to the findings of this research, which explain the critical significance of textbooks in language lessons.

Furthermore, according to Riazi (2003:22), "textbooks play a highly critical role in the area of language teaching and learning, and are regarded the second most significant element in the second/foreign language classroom after the instructor." "A textbook is a tool in the hands of the instructor," Sheldon (1988:11) writes, "and the teacher must know not only how to use it, but also how valuable it may be." The abundance of published resources for English language instruction (ELT) on the market makes choosing the right course book difficult. Furthermore, the choice of a core textbook denotes an executive educational decision involving significant professional, financial, and even political involvement". The researcher is interested in the cultural influence of Iraqi EFL textbooks in increasing learners' living skills based on these assertions.

Life Skills

Societies attached great importance to life skills, so some countries designed their curricula according to the development of those skills among learners, while others created specialized people called life skills and created special curricula for this, such as the course "Methods of Teaching and Developing Life Skills," "Time Management Skills Course." And the course "Communication Skills" and we will discuss the concept of life skills from the point of view of Educators: defined it (Ramesh & Farshad. (2006).) as: "It is positive behavior, values, attitudes, and the ability to reach the desired goal. It includes a range of competencies, including creativity, critical thinking, the ability to organize, problem-solving skill and communication skills, and according to (Nair, 2005)

It is: "a set of skills that help a person to assimilate technology, adapt to it, raise the level of his abilities, improve his life, enhance linguistic growth and self-direction, increase his ability to social interaction, develop his ability to think innovatively and avoid crises. A set of personal and cognitive skills that enhance the learner's self-ability, develop critical thinking, communicate effectively with others, and self-reliance that leads to success and progress.

Importance of life skills:

Human, by nature, is a social being who needs life skills to help them coexist and communicate with others. It is up to education to activate programs to develop these skills for the student and to design the curricula accordingly, because the success of the learner in his life depends on what he possesses of life skills and experiences that lead to the expansion of his perceptions and the development of his mental abilities (Vranda, & Rao, 2011). The importance of these skills is as follows:

- 1 - It increases the student's self-confidence because it enables him to apply them in the situations he faces inside and outside the school.
- 2- It enhances the learner's ability to manage interaction with others in his community.
- 3- The learner is able to absorb the developments in the fields of technology and technology.
- 4- It gives the learner a chance to live a better life.
- 5- It enhances the learner's motivation and increases his desire to learn.

Life Skills and Textbooks

Education based on life skills and their development in the student is one of the most important goals of contemporary education. In recent years, regional and international organizations (such as UNESCO, 2006, and Alesco, 2004) have been interested in including and presented life skills in school textbooks. The future of the learner depends on education to adopt this trend by changing the approach of traditional practices in education based on the role of the teacher as a lecturer and the role of the student as a recipient of information. As adopted by the State of Oman, the United Arab Emirates and other countries that focused on developing these skills among students and including them in academic curricula between the learner's daily attitudes and the anchored material being taught (Yankey & Biswas, 2012). This is according to the experiences of the learners, their abilities and the individual differences between them. Many educators emphasized the lack of these skills in the curricula based on self-learning, communication,

communication, responsibility and others, which led to the inclusion of the curriculum content of life skills contributes to achieving an integrated approach that includes the skills. Attitudes and knowledge that the learner requires to assess his interests, provided the appropriate skills are determined according to the academic stages to meet contemporary developments so that they can be an effective and influential learner in society. Through the integration of these skills within the textbook, the student can acquire cognitive skills and includes exercises that encourage cooperative and teamwork, love of knowledge and search for it from various sources, and problems are solved inductively, so that education becomes functional, as it employs information in the desired learner's behavior. This has been well addressed in the academic curricula such of UAE, Oman, the United States of America and Britain, stressing that these skills are an essential part that every individual needs to increase his ability to face the insect changes that have occurred in global economies in recent years and adapt to modern life and face frustration and pressure through flexibility in dealing (Clark, 1990).

The Textbook

An official written document, organized and directed as an introduction to the study masters, and it includes appropriate terms, forms, texts, illustrations, exercises that help in the teaching process, and aids that help the teacher in the teaching process. Therefore, it must be prepared in accordance with educational and scientific specifications and standards through which the educational process is improved, and the positives that it contains are revealed and strengthened and the difficulties facing its application according to the developments in the world of technology and technology and removed them (Allyn & Bacon,2010).

The Importance of the Textbook

Textbook is the first source of knowledge for the student and enables him to view the information and facts contained therein, so the student proceeds from it, each according to his preparations and abilities. It helps the student in self-learning because he can refer to it inside or outside the school. Furthermore, textbook develops the student's good reading skill, and

is not limited to one language, but to all subjects that are taught studying it. It contains a legacy of information, facts and experiences, and it may have automatic reactions and responses to the information presented therein. Additionally, it determines the size of the material given to the student and is arranged logically in a way that suits the mental level of the student. Finally, textbook develops the student's thinking aspects and discovers their needs and tendencies and fulfills them and providing them with positive attitudes and values, and modifying some undesirable values and attitudes (Pilania,2005)

METHODOLOGY

Population of the Research

Population of the study are the individuals or things who constitute the subject of the research problem, and to which the researcher seeks to generalize the results of the study. The population of the current research includes students at their ninth grade from different intermediate schools who are learning English using "English for Iraq" textbook and teachers who teach English for those students using the same textbook. The total number of the population are 60 students and teachers.

Research Instruments

In the current research, the researcher conducted a questionnaire for assessing the amount of life skills in the "English for Iraq" textbook that students can acquire.

Construction of the Questionnaire

After reviewing the literature and previous studies in this field, such as the study, the researchers adopted the adopted the questionnaire from Khosravani, Mahboobeh, Khosravani Mahmood and Khorashady zadeh, Abbas's research entitled "Analyzing the Effects of Iranian EFL Textbooks on Developing Learners' Life "where they classify life skills into five categories and these categories are: communication/linguistic life skill, personal/social life skill, leadership life skill, critical thinking life skill and decision making/problem solving life skill. In order to determine the validity of the items and the

classification or components of life skills and the definition of each component, the questionnaire was presented to a group of experts and specialists in education. Experts agreed with 95% of the validity of relying on the definition and classification of life skills of in the current research.

Preparing the Instructions of the Questionnaire

The instructions of the questionnaire are a guide that guides the respondent during his response to the items of the questionnaire. Thus, it was taken into account that the instructions are clear, and the researchers concealed the purpose of the questionnaire so that the respondent would not be affected by it when answering. In order to reassure the respondent of the confidentiality of his answer and its use for scientific purposes, the instructions page did not include a item for mentioning the name of the respondent.

Pilot Administration

A pilot is administered to a sample of (60) intermediate school students and teachers who are learning and teaching English as foreign language using “English for Iraq “textbook. Considering the time allotted for answering the items, it has been found that students need 35 minutes to respond to the questionnaire item

Schoring Scheme

For the purpose of constructing the items of the life skills questionnaire in its initial form, the two researchers formulated all the items of the questionnaire based on the definition and theoretical framework of life skills. The questionnaire contains (46) items, distributed over five categories. The researchers found it appropriate that the answer are gradual at four levels for each item, which are (high, N stands for neutral, low, and nothing). The Mark's given to each answer are as follows: (high:5, neutral: 3, low:1, nothing :0).

To what extent the considered textbook improve the following life skills in learners?	Weighted averages	Weighted Percentages
A. Communication/Linguistic Life Skills		
1 Effective verbal and non-verbal communication with others that help the students to establish relationships	3.46	58.33%
2 Expressing of feelings, ideas and opinions clearly	2.71	43.33%
3 Giving and receiving feedback	2.36	31.66%
4 Understanding other people's viewpoints	2.2	30%
5 Organizing thoughts to reflect logical thinking and speaking	2.61	40%
6 Influencing & persuading others	3.21	51.66%
7 Expressing respect for others' contributions	2.25	25%
8 The ability to acknowledge mistakes and accept criticisms	2.71	33.33%
9 learning to respect and tolerate the others even if you don't agree with their opinions (Being patient in relation with others)	2	23.33%
10 Active listening (real situations like in classes, airports, shops, watching films, listening to music, etc.)	3.7	58.33%
11 The ability to speak fluently and accurately in real situations such as shops, airports etc.	3.4	53.33%
12 Correct reading and study skills (even newspapers, stories, novels, etc.)	2	23.33%

13 Using body language and gestures for conveying meaning and understanding	2.88	40%
14 Observance of lexical and grammatical/structural rules in written utterances	2.03	25%
B. Personal/Social Life Skills		
1 Developing of personal identity	3.13	53.33%
2 Respecting the social and cultural laws and values of the society	3.85	66.66%
3 Respecting others' values	3.8	70%
4 Acquiring of social responsibilities	3.6	58.33%
5 Truthfulness in action and speech	2.88	38.33%
6 Respecting older generations (including parents, adults, and teachers)	3.98	68.33%
7 Respecting other religions	3.81	65%
8 Discipline in life activities	3.11	48.33%
9 Respecting and observance of people's right (e.g. in public places, traffic rules, sin against mankind, etc.)	3.51	55%
10 Team and group work	4.25	76.66%
11 Practical belief to religious values and instructions (e.g. praying, fasting, veil, honesty, depositary, avoiding backbiting, finding good friends, etc.)	3.88	71.66%
C. Leadership Life Skills		
1. Organizing a group to reach its goal	4.11	75%
2. Using different leadership styles	3.13	51.66%
3. Getting others to share in leadership	3.5	55%
4. Developing short-term and long-term goals	2.51	35%
5. Working cooperatively with others	3.1	46.66%
6. Demonstrating responsibility for personal actions and contributions to group activities	2.4	31.66%
7. Building of self-confidence and self-esteem (Having firm determination)	3.25	48.33%
8. Giving and receiving feedback	2.63	30%
9. Self-evaluation/assessment	2.86	34.44%
10. Managing emotions (anger, stress, etc.)	2.31	25%
11. Being brave and courageous in taking decisions and in conducting different activities	3.23	55%
D. Critical Thinking Life Skills		
1. Analyzing attitudes, values, social norms and beliefs	2.2	18.33%
2. Identifying relevant information and information sources	2.4	25%
3. Applying of technology	4.25	78.33%
4. Recognizing bias	3.05	43.33%
5. Organizing thoughts to reflecting logical thinking	2	16.66%
6. Be able to understand more than one issue	2.31	25%
7. Relating solutions to a wide variety of issues	1.91	20%
8. Finding answers to challenging questions	2.86	45%
9. Confident in reaching a reasonable conclusion	2.16	21.66%
10. Searching for the truth even when it makes uncomfortable	1.51	13.33%

11.Thinking of different ways to answer a question	3.1	46.66%
E. Decision Making/Problem Solving Life Skills		
1.Setting goals	3.06	43.33%
2.Determining alternative solutions to problems	2.58	30%
3.Listing options before making a decision	3.85	70%
4.Thinking about what might happen because of my decision	3.1	46.66%
5.Evaluating decisions	2.46	26.66%
6.Systemic planning using resources to accomplish a purpose	2.46	38.33%
7.Time management	3.38	51.66%
8.Conflict resolution		
9.Working out problems that are presented to me	3.28	48.33%
10. Listing all points of views when making decisions	3.55	55%

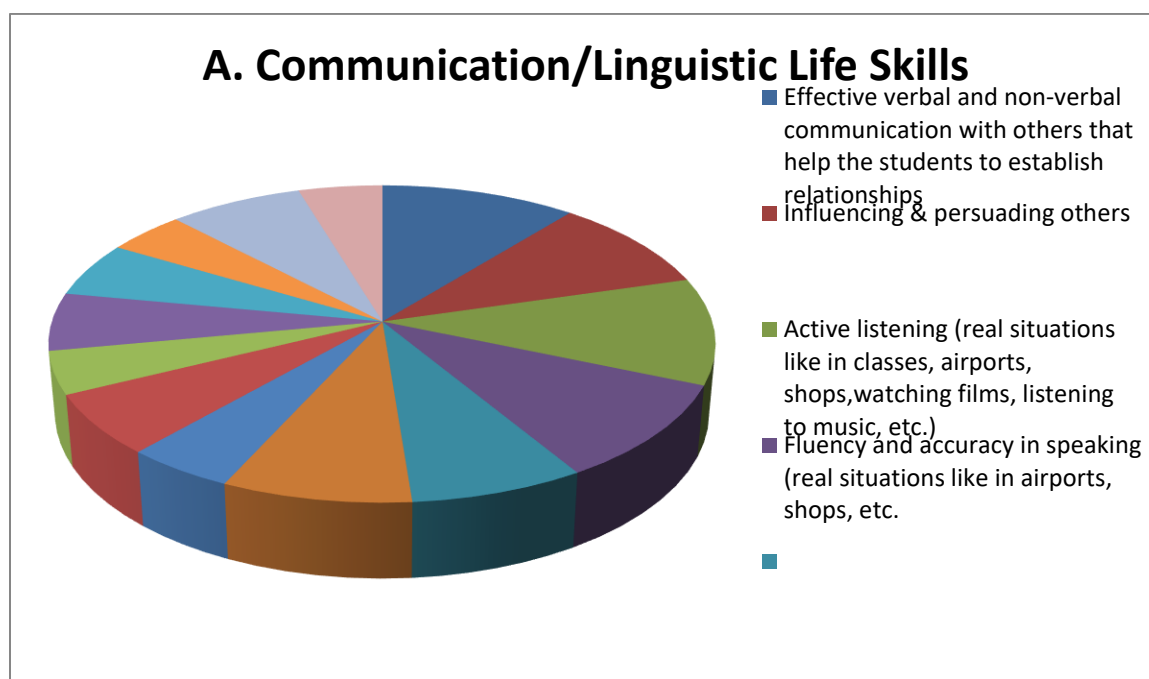


Figure (1) weighted average of Communication/Linguistic Life Skills

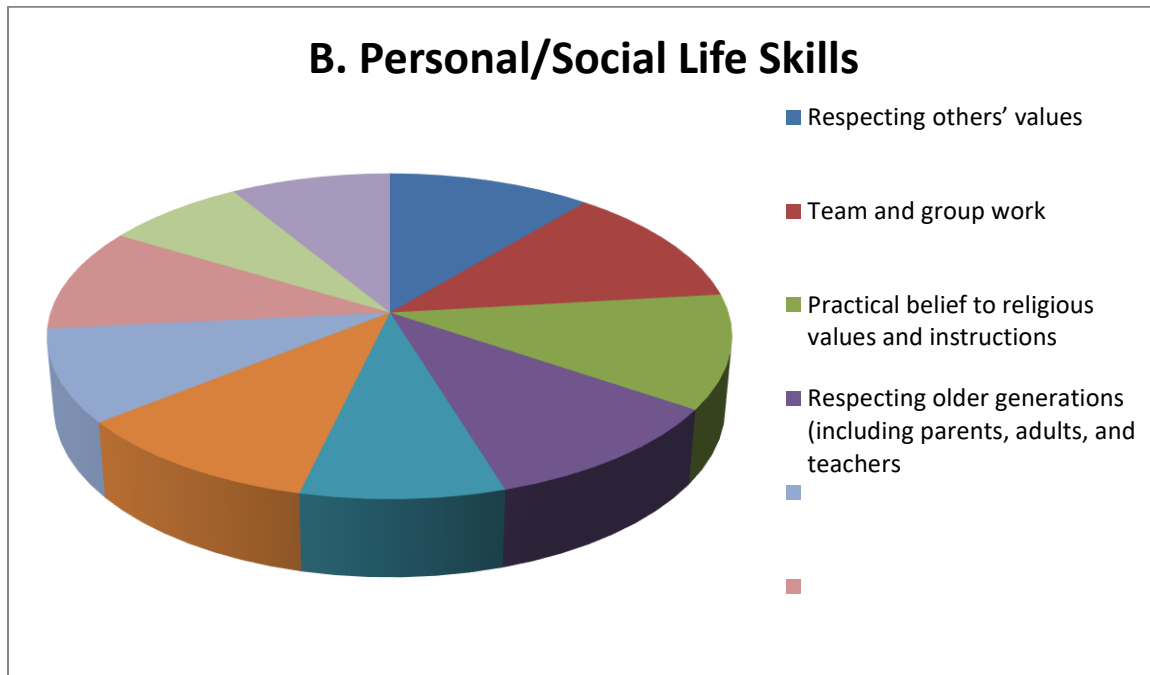


Figure (2) weighted average of Personal/Social Life Skills

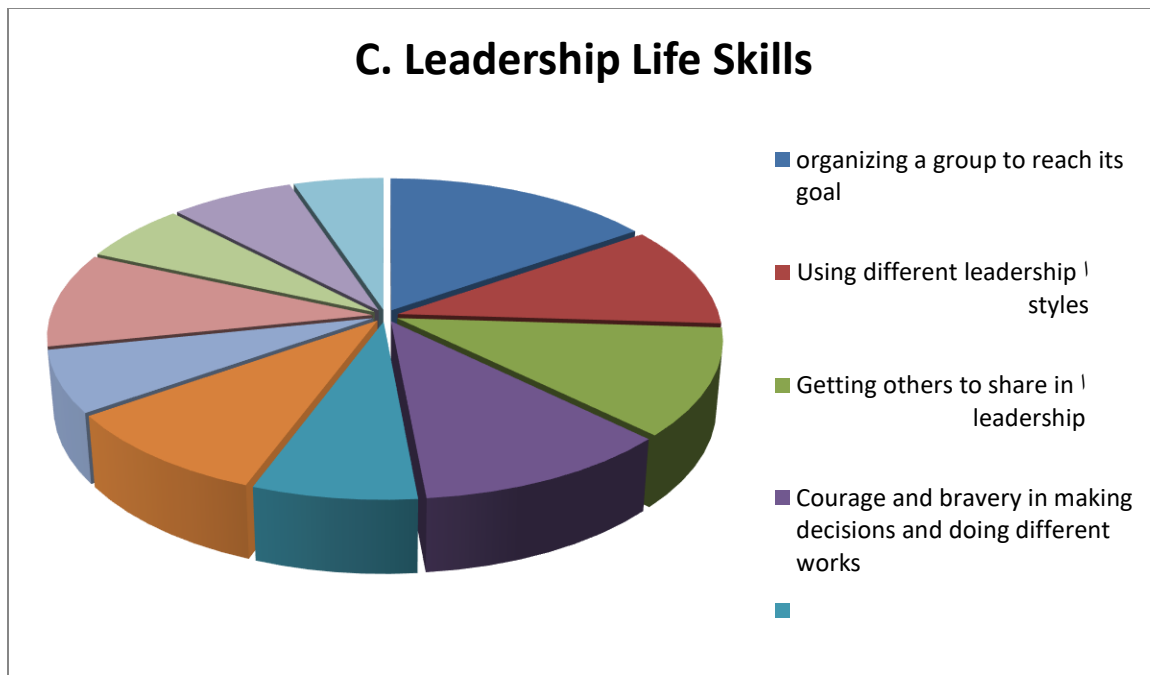


Figure (3) weighted average of Leadership Life Skills

RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The following is a presentation of the research results that were reached in light of the research aims.

Results Related to the First Aim:

The researcher applied the life skills questionnaire in its final form to the research sample, and the mean

score was found, which is (261.22) and with a standard deviation of 24.93, as the standard error was (204), and using the (t-test) for the sample showed that the calculated value is (65.4) and when compared with the tabulated value (1.096) at the level of significance (0.05), it appeared that the calculated value is higher than the tabulated value, which clearly reflects the role of employing EFL textbook “English for Iraq” in developing Iraqi students’ life skills. The table (3) Explains this.

Sample	No.	Mean scores	Standard Deviations	Standard error	Tabulated Value	Calculated Value	Significance level
Students	60	261.22	24.93	204	1.096	65.4	0.05

Results related to the Second Aim

The second aim of the study is to identify which type of life skills the textbook helps to develop the most. In this concern, the types of life skills mentioned in this study are five types. The division of the questionnaire was based on these types. Based on the statistics analysis of the results, it has been found that the most life skill that EFL textbook appears to help to develop is the personal and social life skills. Form table (1) we can clearly see that most of the participants agreed that EFL textbook helped in developing the students personal identity (53,33%), also in respecting the social and cultural laws and values of the society (66.66%). Furthermore, more than 70% of the participants believed that it also helped to develop the students’ ability to respect others’ value, respecting older generations, Team and group work and practical belief to religious values and instructions.

Conclusion

The previous results indicate that the intermediate school students have the life skills at a good level, and this means that the life skills are the first requirement for the success of the in his life practical life. This indicates that the school is often the basis for developing and achieving social recognition and acceptance of cognitive skills of students and they acquire knowledge and problem-solving skills that are necessary for their success in the university. The sufficient information about life skills in EFL textbook

can provide students with the effective practice in the larger society, so their knowledge and abilities, skill and social skills will contribute to raising self-sufficiency, through coping with the cognitive skills of friends, comparing performance with the performance of others, and evaluating teachers’ success or failure of students in a way that reflects his good and bad judgments about their abilities. Thus, the textbook can become an institutions and a source for learning life skills, when it helps students to develop many skills that drive them to success or use these skills to achieve success. Nowadays, we find the modern trend to acquire skills, which is to go to training to acquire and develop skills, and the best evidence for this is what we see of paying huge attention for those courses, whether by direct attendance or through the internet. The analysis of the results from the questionnaire showed clearly that “English for Iraq “ textbook can help to some level in developing some types of life skills but clearly not all of them. Evidently, it has been found that the most life skill that EFL textbook appears to help to develop is the personal and social life skills.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the current research, the researcher recommends the following: -

1. The Ministry of Education directs schools to continue providing psychological, social and educational support to students, in order to ensure the development of their life skills.

2. Working on developing and upgrading the skills of school students through: encouragement of students to develop their cognitive, social and psychological skills within their school subjects

Suggestions

The researcher suggests carrying out the following studies:

1- Conducting a study to identify the life skills of other samples of primary and secondary school students, teachers, principals, and others

2-Conducting a study to find out the relationship between life skills and other variables such as achievement, mental alertness and some variables related to motivation such as causal attribution and learned helplessness.

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