



# Investigation of Education Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) in Palestine Using Critical Discourse Analysis

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights how critical discourse analysis CDA can be applied to language policy. In particular, it examines language policy in Palestine in light of the framework identified by Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999). The study investigates the role of English in education policy and the effort made to reform education policy in Gaza as part of Palestine. In addition, this study attempts to analyze the data collected from the a policy document utilized in this study, Critical document Analysis.

The study provides a more comprehensive picture of Considering that Palestine is an occupied land with enormous political problems yet marked with educational development. Although Palestine is labeled with the use of English as a medium of instruction in science faculties it is faced with various challenges including a lack of guidelines from Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE), inadequate interpretation of the language policy by education stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Role of English, Education Policy, Critical Discourse Analysis, Education Development Strategic Plan.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Critical discourse analysis CDA is an approach, research methodology and tool that aims at exploring the relationships between discourse practices, social practices and social structure, connections that could be opaque in nature. The terms Critical Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are often used interchangeably. By looking at Theoretical framework shows the, recently, the term CDA seems to have been preferred and is being used to denote the theory formerly identified as CL. Therefore, we will continue to use CDA exclusively here for an extensive discussion of these terms and their history). The manifold roots of CDA lie in Rhetoric, Text linguistics, Anthropology, Philosophy, Socio-Psychology, Cognitive Science, Literary Studies and Sociolinguistics, as well as in Applied Linguistics and Pragmatics. (Wodak, 2008). Wodak, (2008) claims that "language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize the relations of organized power.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a cross-disciplinary approach to the study of discourse, and is widely used for analyzing text and talk in organizational studies, humanities and social science (Vaara & Tienari 2004).

Fairclough,(2001) defines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that views language as a form of social practice and focuses on the ways social and political domination are reproduced in text and talk.

As a result of the Oslo Accords and as a consequence of the Early Transfer of Authority Agreement between the PLO and Israel, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education came into existence in August 1994. While the Ministry was setting itself up and recruiting its officers and employees, it had to quickly take over the responsibility of the Palestinian education system in the West Bank and Gaza from the Israeli authorities. It had to simultaneously: (1) build its own structure, (2) recruit staff, (3) develop its management systems and its capacity for planning and management, (4) design development programs and fundraise for their implementation, (5) develop the first ever unified Palestinian curriculum for the West Bank and Gaza, and (6) manage the whole education system on a daily basis. It was an ongoing uphill effort for the creation of the Ministry and for the reconstruction and development of the education sector after 27 years of Israeli occupation.



## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the Palestinian context, there is an urgent need to recognize the reason for the students' intermediate level in English. The students' insufficient knowledge may contribute to the interest of many faculties in introducing more courses in English and developing specializations in the sciences (USAID), 2009. Unlike the faculties of the humanities, the material for these specializations is available largely in Arabic or the faculties of the university might not pay attention to examining and refining the nature and quality of the English instruction. Moreover, instruction in English for many courses has not been improved; the Sciences, Pharmacy, Engineering, Administration and Medicine faculties were unable to translate the English materials into Arabic. It would be better to translate them rather than to expect the university students with their feeble English skills to pay great effort through courses they lack the capacity to master. The need to reform the language policy at the tertiary level should be identified as the key goal by all decision-makers in Palestine, which implies the status planning, acquisition, curriculum and materials with reference to Arabic and English need to be reviewed.

It is noted that a majority of professors themselves are not fluent in English (USAID report 2009); many faculty members have conducted their entire academic studies in a non-English background. Additionally, there is a lack of interest for more "competency based instruction" whereby instruction is measured by what the students have learned. It was, therefore, acknowledged that it would be a healthier way to meet the real language needs of the students, especially for those students with very weak skills in the English language. Although there is no stated language policy for the university, the need for improving the language of instruction within the faculties in the universities was recognized as an important goal by all decision-makers. The quality of the English medium is dependent on the hard work of all those who use English in courses and it is not just the responsibility of the English foreign language faculty alone (USAID report 2009).

The current study attempts to answer the following question:

What is the role of English and Arabic in education policy devised by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) in Palestine?

## 3. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSES (CDA)

The analysis is mainly focused on a major section of the document (that has relevance to teaching and learning), namely, the role of English and Arabic in education policy created by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Palestine.

In the present study, a document were critically analyzed. Such documents were of great value to examine the study from different angles and enrich the researcher's knowledge about the role of English and Arabic in education policy created by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Palestine before conducting the interviews with respondents. This method enabled the researcher to highlight and pursue any contradiction in the evidence emerging as a result of the inconsistencies between the data clarified in the documents and the interviews in line with two of the documents that were analyzed to support the evidence found through the interviews, these include: Education development strategic plan (EDSP) 2008-2012, Ministry of Education and Higher .

The (EDSP) seems to be a written document directed at the wider public, but the educational community is the obvious primary target, especially the major stakeholders mentioned in the document: teachers, principals, learners, Ministry of Education Officers, and support staff. Its genre is mixture, containing elements of policy genre interwoven with political material.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical, contexts.

Wodak (2001), as cited in Wang (2006), consider discourse as 'a form of social practice' and takes consideration of the context of language use to be crucial to discourse.

Discourse analysis (DA) is generally broader in what it studies, utilizing pretty much any naturally occurring text, including (existing) written texts, lectures, documents, and so forth analysis. It is also "a social research method that offers data about the investigated phenomenon and independency of the researcher's actions. It is typically produced for specific functions relates to some aspect of the social world. A document can be used by the investigator for perception purposes. Such Official documents are intended to be read as unbiased statements of fact but they are socially produced" (Corbetta, 2003).

Yin (2003) declared that "For case studies, the foremost necessary use of documents is to corroborate and supplement proof from different sources". Corbetta (2003) identified benefits of the documents over different analysis ways. (a) It is a non-sensitive technique where the document's information is not subject to a possible distortion; (b) it benefits the researcher to read the past; (c) it helps the researcher to check the past (Denscombe, 2010). However, documents may have some limitations in



terms of the truthfulness and completeness of the data (Patton, 2000).

*A. Notes on Data Selection and Methods*

Define Data selection depends on a particular genre of texts. These are published (EDSP) texts in the form of official five-year plan. These texts belong to the Government, Practitioners, and general public. The selection of texts was based on the researcher's notion that the texts should display how the MOEHE describes their tasks and plans to determine whether and how languages are operating in relation to the rules set out in the Education policy.

The texts that could tell us something about the information, views and ideas on education and governing that supported the review activities as presented to foreigners.

*B. Strategies for Critical Discourse Analyses (CDA)*

By way of beginning analysis, strategies of CDA, outlined by CDA practitioners (Fairclough, 2001; Kress, 1991; Van Dijk, 2001; Wodak, 1996) can be summarized as follows:

- a) Investigating the framework of the discourse: historical, political or social background of a conflict and its main members.
- b) Studying groups, authority relations and struggles involved.
- c) Detecting progressive and damaging opinions.
- d) Creating clear the assumed and the implied focus.
- e) Examining all official structure: lexical (vocabulary) choice and syntactic construction, in a way that supports to highlight separated group attitudes.

**TABLE I. OVERVIEW OF SELECTED TEXT**

Period	Agency	Audience	Documents/sources	Data selection	(CDA)
2008-2012	<p>Education development strategic plan (<b>EDSP</b>) Ministry of Education and Higher</p> <p>The selected texts (approximately 43 pages) for analysis.</p> <p>Most studies of political discourse are in English are internationally best known because of the hegemony of English Van Dijk, (2001)</p>	<p>1-Government</p> <p>2-Policy Makers</p> <p>3-general public</p>	<p>Five-year Education Development Plan (2001-2005)</p> <p>Lamis M. Alami</p> <p>Minister of Education and Higher Education</p> <p>International Experts</p> <p>Local Experts</p> <p>Technical Team from General Directorate and Administrative Units General Education</p> <p>Supporters and Donors</p> <p>local development partners UNRWA, private sector, NGO's.</p>	<p>Identified and sorted genres, notions and terminologies that were frequently used in (<b>EDSP</b>) and turn into ideological dimensions to answer research question</p>	<p>Fairclough's framework for critical analyzing of (CDA)</p> <p>Taylor's (2004) approach</p>



Critical document Analyses of two official documents in Written Document Analysis Worksheet was conducted as shown in Appendix (I). The researcher has answered different questions through four worksheets regarding: Type of document, its characteristics, date of documents, etc.

Table 1 illustrates the selected data through which the researcher sought to identify a particular genre of published texts in the form of official document plan.

### C. Social analysis

Social change contains change in social practices and in the interacting of social practices, This includes change in orders of discourse and relations between orders of discourse (and so changes in genres, discourses and styles and relations between genres, discourses and styles). Moreover Fairclough (2001) suggests one should 'go outside the text, using academic and non-academic sources to get a sense of its social context.' The historical context was examined before attempting to identify the social problem in its semiotic aspect. The focus is on "the networks of social practices", therefore, the 'ideological analysis' was emphasized more than the 'linguistic' one to represent good education governance. Taylor (2004: 437) calls "The Palestinian Reform & Development Plan sets out a strategy for implementing the PNA's vision of the future Palestinian state" (EDSP 2008-2012, p. 11). The above remark was made by the previous Minister of education, Dr. Lamis Alalami in 2008. In the above quotation, Alalami highlights the steps the PNA has already taken to restore good governance after heavy restrictions on movement and travel and other obstacles to normal life obligatory by Israel.

The minister Alalami continued that "the EDSP also imagines implementing policies and programs that focus on further improving the quality of education at all levels" (EDSP 2008-2012:12). In that quotation, she referred to the fact that the quality of education at all levels is still inadequate. Improvement of quality will be a major concern in the coming period. Following that speech and further various governmental declarations later, the idea of improving the quality of education has become a major focus in the coming period. "Although major achievements have been made in enrolment rates, quality of education at all levels like general education curriculum and textbooks is still inadequate" (EDSP 2008-2012: 49).

In short, quality of education at all levels is still inadequate as a social problem, one that is external, unchangeable, and unquestionable – one that must be responded to urgently. The quicker and the more comprehensive the response, the better it would be for the quality of education. It is obvious that the document is a characteristic response to rapid global pressures for education quality reform agenda. Despite the fact that the General Education curriculum and textbooks are very

recent and just completed, they are considered a major historic achievement in the history of Palestine".

The EDSP has neatly linked social goals into its framework as the minister indicated. The reform agenda of the document shows signs of improvement in student achievement, especially in Arabic, math, science and technology. This vision calls for sustained, four subjects, which will be achievable in the future. English language appears as unconcerned genre. Alalami added "The average of students' scores in mathematics and Arabic language in fourth grade will be increased from 24.8 to 51.9".

It also seems that public informational components and governmental features are added with the more conventional policy genre as the following quotation indicates. "Reforming quality of education at all levels and a major effort to improve quality of higher education will be made including encouraging research".

### D. Interdiscursive analysis

Interdiscursivity refers to Analysis of texts. It includes 'interdiscursive' analysis of how genre evident discourses and styles are articulated together. These categories are distinguished and related at the level of social practices (as elements of orders of discourse) (Fairclough 2001: 241).

Ministry of Education and Higher Education intends to transform its educational system, in line and in support of the nation's drive to fulfill education quality. This vision calls for productivity-driven growth, which will be achievable through the context of the research.

"The quality of education is improved, that its relevance to the needs of society at large and its link to the labor market and the economy is strengthened. In order to realize these goals and objectives, the capacity of MOEHE in policy formulation, planning, implementation and monitoring, together with its partners, have to be developed" (EDSP 2008-2012: 51).

The improvement of education is a major theme in the document. Therefore, it should be granted a special focus along with its link to the labor market and the economy.

A special focus for MOEHE was put on linking education, especially post-secondary education, to the labor market(s) and the needs of the society. There is also more interest in science and technology policy in higher education to be developed and encouraged.

"The study of science and technology will be improved, with special attention to the expansion of the utilization of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in education at all levels and computer-related studies. The percentage of students studying science and technology will be increased at all levels. Science labs and their utilization in schools will be



increased as well. A science and technology policy in higher education will be developed and related research will be encouraged” (EDSP 2008-2012: 49).

Since the change in the ideology has a remarkable relationship with the labor market and the needs of the society, the document calls for a shift in the education system. To make this shift, there should be more concern about science and technology policy in higher education to be developed and encouraged (p.20- 21).

The same theme seems to resonate in the document along with another evident and major theme. The other major theme in the document is 'nation-building. This revolves around 'new education institutions', - both governmental and non-governmental - that will be established at all levels of education like kindergartens, schools, and higher education (p.20- 21).

Alalami, minister of education, also stated that laws regulations and mechanisms of the education system will be reviewed to better regulate non-governmental institutions at all levels. The structure of the MOEHE, at all levels and institutions will be reviewed and modified in order to reflect recent and expected developments and to prevent overlap in functions. Rules, regulations, mission statements and job descriptions will be reviewed accordingly.

Alalami, minister of education, in her speech about new labor's education policy, a key theme she concerns has been their central function in economic competitiveness, manifested in the proliferation of targeted educational strategies.

"Nation building is underpinned by the National Philosophy of Education to achieve the Palestinian government's goal of social justice. The philosophy of education clearly outlines the main objective of education in Palestine. This objective aims to develop the potential of people, and to contribute to the harmony and quality of all the components of the education system".

Two other major themes have been emphasized as well. These are improving partnerships with local and international organizations and the geographical unity. Coordination and cooperation with UNRWA, NGOs, the private sector and international development partners will be granted more attention. Also, due to the current situation of the Gaza Strip, the ministry will not neglect the Gaza Strip as a sieged region. It will cover the needs of this region as well as the West Bank and Jerusalem.

#### E. Linguistic analysis

Fairclough (2001) suggested that one might need to be 'selective and schematic' in analysis, because that language analysis can be 'complex and many-sided process' (p.241). To do that, Taylor's (2004: 437)

approach is satisfactory for analysis, which entails analyzing the following aspects of the (EDSP):

- Whole text organization means structure, e.g. narrative, argumentative, etc.
- Clause combination.
- Grammatical and semantic features mean the study of implication that is used for understanding human expression through language. Other forms of semantics include the semantics of semiotics.

#### F. Whole text organization

The (EDSP) is organized linguistically in the form of problem-solution structure, though not in the typical sense. For instance, it does not follow Fairclough's (2001b: 258) perfect framing of 'objective + problem + solution + evaluation of solution'. Here, the (EDSP) only foregrounds the 'objective' and 'solution', whilst could not highlight the 'problem'. However, it can be easily assumed that the (EDSP) is The Palestinian Reform & Development Plan set out for implementing policies and programs that focus on further improving the quality of education at all levels. This reform and development plan is mainly focused on training pre-service and in-service teacher, upgrading mechanisms to evaluate and improve teacher performance, curriculum development, better (and cost effective) facilities, and modern equipment in the 600 lowest performing schools across Gaza and the West Bank as its key solution. According to Taylor (2004), such text structure is an aspect of the promotional character of the document. The (EDSP) conveys that the government also proposes the systemic reform of management and decision-making systems and processes within the education sector. It sets out by highlighting the urgent need to transform the educational system (objective) and explains what and how these reforms ought to be made through investing in more cost-effective infrastructure and facilities, provision of public financial management capacity building, and other measures that progressively increase the sustainability of sector costs (solution). On the whole, (EDSP) document consists of a convincing but well-thought out change guidelines for the whole educational system. The whole text organization has the inert actuality about how Palestinian education should look like in five years' time, excluding physical growth of UNRWA and private institutions. At the same time, it outlines what needs to be done and the resources required for its implementation. The central focus of the plan is the promotion of quality education in all educational institutions in Palestine, and better linkage with the socio-economic development needs of society and the labor market, particularly in the area of higher education, technical and vocational education and training.



### G. Clause combination

Simple sentences dominate the text, but compound and complex sentences are seen as well. The document is written as a set of statements and is mostly presented as a series of declarative statements with high density of the use of modals such as *needs to* (expressing obligation), *must* (expressing necessity), to indicate a sense of urgency: *needs to make a critical transition and urgent need to transform the educational system*. These reforms ought to be made through investing in more cost-effective infrastructure and facilities. The grammar is mainly 'paratactic' rather than 'hypotactic' (Fairclough, 2001b: 260), i.e. the subordination of one clause to another by a conjunction. As suggested by Fairclough (op cit), paratactic combinations are particularly obvious with the list of bullet points. Fairclough argues 'sets up a non-dialogical divide between those who are making all the assertions, and those who are addressed— those who tell and those who are told' (p.260). There is a dialogue happening nearly in some pages in the last section of the EDSP document that is seemingly more dialogic than others. These activities are kind of dialogic discourse that supports learning and thinking.

### H. Grammatical, Semantic Features and vocabulary

In terms of time and tense, it is obvious that there is a constant alternation between the use of the past tense and the future tense in the sentences used. For instance: "Education should contribute to national identity and the national heritage. Education should contribute to the building of the Palestinian State." (p.49) are commonly featured in the document. In terms of voice and modality, the frequent use of the modal 'will' with the declarative mood gives the sense of a government in perfect control. One notes that the (EDSP) is imbued with the voice of authority, where the language of telling dominates. Most of the sentences are declaratives, indicating statements of facts. Authority is further reinforced by the use of modal verbs expressing a high degree of conviction. For instance: 'These reforms will focus on investing in more cost-effective infrastructure and facilities' (p.11). It is more prominent in sections where explanatory (informational) notes are given. For instance, 'The insufficient funding is an ongoing major concern and it is having a seriously negative impact on the quality and relevance of higher education'.

In order to make the reform come into effect in the education system, this reform will focus on investing in more cost-effective infrastructure and facilities (p.11). The voice of authority in the document is notably reinforced by the frequent use of numbers and dates. For instance, the EDSP (Educational Development and Strategic Plan) 2008-2012 started in November 2005 soon after the implementation of the first 5-Year Education Plan' (p.25). Meanwhile, the frequent use of the definite modal 'will' introduced a sense of urgency in addition to

the authoritative tone it created. For instance, "The curriculum for grades 1-12 will be reviewed and the textbooks will be modified accordingly and provided to students". This strictness and firmness is also upheld by the following example: 'Education is therefore no longer adequate but the only way forward'. The expressions in the data are related to three main domains as follows:

- i. access by students to educational services and their endurance or retention at numerous stages,
- ii. quality of education provided and of the teaching-learning process, and
- iii. management of higher education and the applicable capacity development' (p. 31)

The document presents the government as a foretelling performer and mover in Development Strategic Plan (EDSP).

In terms of vocabulary, there is another positive feature of the document. There are examples of new hybrid terms such as 'nation building', 'New Educational Institutions', 'Technology age', 'Learning society', 'Adequate reform'...etc. Other variety of vocabulary used in the document also appeal to the discourse of reform. These are like 'change, future, funding, partners, reform, continue, transform'...etc.

## 4. DISCUSSION

In the light of the data collected, education systems and current language education had to be analyzed. The analysis was guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), i.e. the field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. In brief, the findings of the Critical Discourse Analysis have been summarized as the following:

Many achievements have been accomplished in the earlier five years, with balanced growth reaching a level of development that could be paralleled with middle-income states. The new Palestinian curriculum contains many crucial innovations related to languages; one of these innovations made Palestine at the front in this area. Hence, it is said that Palestine was the first Arabic country to teach English from the grade one.

Regarding its quality and significance, the new Palestinian curriculum has been well perceived by all education stakeholders because of 'its impact on the future Palestinian State and identity building' (EDSP: 11). Palestinian students lastly had an access to their national history, literature and art in the syllabi.

Most students in Palestine use Arabic as a medium of instruction before going to the tertiary level. Before starting school, children have very little exposure to English. They are used to employing Arabic to learn all topics and using English as a subject only. This lasts from



the first grade till secondary school, where students study English several times a week during lesson time. Later in Science Faculties, they would be forced to use English as a tool of instruction. In other words, university curriculum is in English and teachers there teach mostly in English beside Arabic.

According to Spolsky (2004), one of the components of LPP beliefs is ideology which concerns with language use, for example, a speech community's agreement on what importance to apply to each of the language variables or named language varieties that make up its selection (p. 14). Many ideologies appear in official documents; the first ideology is 'creating a feeling of belonging and patriotic fervor' to Palestine as a state in compulsory education. The concentration is on Arabic language which is able to create a feeling of national belonging; giving everyone the same opportunities; reducing inequalities, increasing social mobility, avoiding stratification from generation to generation. The main ideology focuses on nation and identity building, e.g. Palestinian students finally have access to their national history, literature and art, and also to their own school versions of other key subjects such as Religion, Geography, Language, and Civics). Generally, religious and political tolerance is emphasized in a considerable number of texts.

Spolsky (2004) declares that "Language management (planning) is the formulation and declaration of an explicit plan or policy, usually but not necessarily written in a formal document, about language use, but it would also demand reviewing the current LPP and the courses of study offered at both universities, (p. 11). Nevertheless, there is no clear declaration about the use of English as a medium of instruction in official documents in Palestine. Al-Aqsa University is the only governmental university which supports the use of EMI in the curriculum offered at the Science Faculties.

The course books in Science Faculties are most often chosen from Arab and regional countries to be taught in English, whether the curriculum suits Palestinian students and community or not. To the researcher's best knowledge, no curriculum which reflects the Palestinian people's beliefs, interests and concerns was designed by Palestinian experts. This is due to the lack of funds, or the fact that Palestine is still under the occupation of Israel. On the other hand, Palestine does not have a law which define language policy. Consequently, policy issues are vague when it comes to written document related to EMI at the tertiary level. Since the beginning of the 1993, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has been ambiguous regarding its policy towards EMI in education.

The medium of instruction at university must be approved by the Higher Education authorities for the planning, coordination and supervision of higher education within the provisions set forth in the Higher Education law if all the requirements defined in the related regulation are met. In Palestine, in general, and in the Gaza Strip, in particular, realistic national standards that drive the process of education and the development of a curriculum in line with the reality of the actual conditions are lacking (World-Bank, 2006). The educational system is under a constant state of emergency resulting from the war activities by the Israeli Occupation. As for higher education, its development is of a relatively recent date. Educational development in Palestine is a challenging experience because Palestine is not yet an independent country and is witnessing conflict on a daily basis.

## 5. CONCLUSION

After This study primarily used the critical discourse analysis for fact finding purposes. The methodology selected offers numerous CDA which are well suited for the study. The analysis focused specifically on a major section of the discourse (that has a relevance to teaching and learning), namely, the role of English in the education policy created by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Palestine.

The analysis showed that, the (EDSP) policy document like many texts, particularly those from government ministries, can be considered as an evident for developing discursive release. In using EDSP as a tool, it has been the intention of this article to help raise awareness of the nature of all texts as complex representations and constructions of social practices, their attendant ideological positions and power affairs in Palestinian context.

Since the change in the ideology has a remarkable affair as a result of instrumental labor market and the needs of the society, the document calls for a shift in the education system. To make this shift, there should be more concern about science and technology policy in higher education to be developed and encouraged.

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