

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

EXPLORATION OF THE DESIGN PROCESS AND CONTENT
OF GRADE ONE LEBANESE OFFICIAL ARABIC
CURRICULUM

by
SIWAR MOHAMMAD HASHWE

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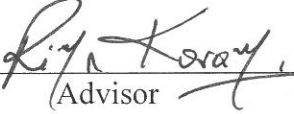
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Siwar Mohammad Hashwe for Master of Arts
Major: Elementary Education- Language Arts

Title: Exploration of the Design Process and Content of Grade One Arabic Curriculum

This study was designed to explore the design process of the currently designed Grade One Arabic, and the content of the currently applied Grade One Arabic Curriculum designed by Center of Educational Research and Development [CERD] in Lebanon. The study has three purposes: a) explore the design process of the currently designed grade one Arabic Curriculum, and determine to what extent it matches theoretical models, b) explore the content of the currently applied grade one Arabic Curriculum, and determine to what extent it covers language arts areas proposed by Cox (2008), and c) explore the content of the 1997 grade one Arabic Curriculum, and determine to what extent it covers twenty first century skill proposed by Voogt and Roblin (2012). The study used a qualitative research design which employed the grounded theory and content analysis methodologies. Data were collected using individual interviews with six curriculum designers, and analysis of curriculum documents. Data received from interviews were transcribed and categorized into previously developed categories for this study; and compared to criteria designed for this study to describe interviewees understanding of a curriculum and the design process they followed to design it. Data acquired from curriculum documents were reviewed and compared to the criteria developed for this study in order to identify to what extent the content covers Language Arts areas proposed by Cox (2008) and twenty first century skill proposed by Voogt and Roblin (2012). Findings revealed that curriculum designers agree that that the process of curriculum design started by conducting needs analysis, then learning competencies were designed. Designers then developed content and assessment tools. Concerning the content, findings showed that: reading skills are fully covered, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visual presentation, and grammar skills are partially covered, and spelling skills are not covered in this curriculum. Findings also showed that: digital literacy skills are not covered, social and cultural skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and communication skills are partially covered in this curriculum.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum design is a complicated process that involves different steps, and educational reform and improvement could be considered as its main aims. (Hussain, Degar, Azeem, & Shakoor, 2011).

Curriculum is analyzed in order to check its impact on students' achievement, its alignment with international criteria and standards of quality, and to identify teachers' and students' perceptions toward it. For example, a study was conducted in Esfahan Secondary Schools in the scholastic year 2011-2012 to investigate the perspectives of students towards the curriculum. A survey questionnaire was used as a research tool and distributed to students, and data was analyzed statistically (Masoomi zadeh, Berjisian, & Harandi2013). Another study was conducted in Taiwan to study and evaluate the impact of curriculum reform in higher education on students' development. Surveys were emailed to students, interviews were conducted with family members, informal talks were conducted with students, and teaching materials were analyzed; and data received from them were analyzed (Sufen, Hsu & Chien-Ming2009). To understand the perspectives of elementary science and technology teachers towards the functionality of the curriculum, a study was conducted where teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews, and results were analyzed to show that teachers were facing problems with this curriculum (Geçer, & Özel, 2012).

Research Problem

A curriculum was designed in Lebanon in 2009 by the Center of Educational Research and Development [CERD]; however, it is still not published and not agreed when it will be applied in schools. The currently used curriculum in schools was developed by CERD in 1997. Reviewing literature does not allow us to identify studies that analyze or describe the design process of this curriculum based on international criteria of effectiveness. In this study, the researcher wanted to explore the design process and content of grade one Arabic Curriculum; thus, explored the design process of the currently designed grade one Arabic Curriculum, and the content of the currently applied grade one Arabic Curriculum. The design process was explored to determine to what extent it matches theoretical models. Richard (2013) explains that the backward design, the forward design, and the central design are the three models of language curriculum design. The content was reviewed to determine to what extent it covers language arts areas proposed by Cox (2008), and twenty first century skills addressed in Voogt and Roblin (2012) meta- analysis. Cox (2008) states that language arts areas are: reading, writing, listening, speaking, spelling, grammar, viewing and visual representation. Twenty first century skills addressed in Voogt and Roblin (2012) meta-analysis are: digital literacy, communication skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and social and cultural skills.

Literature review allowed the researcher to identify different curriculum studies that are conducted in different countries, answer different research questions, and follow different evaluation approaches. Gibson (2013) conducted a study in America to check the types of assessments included in the curriculum and their impact improving students' learning; findings showed that many of these assessments do not help in improving

students' learning. Preveen (2011) evaluated the curriculum in the light of educational policies that were set in 2010 and led to educational reform where questionnaires were distributed to teachers and administrators, and official documents were analyzed; findings showed that these policies are not reflected in classroom practices and new learning materials. Korkmaz (2008) evaluated the elementary school curriculum at Turkey from the perspectives of teachers using open-ended questions surveys, and results showed that teachers consider the language curriculum at the elementary level enjoyable and lead to meaningful learning. Another study was conducted in China in 2010. Zhang (2010) interviewed Chinese teachers to determine if the curriculum motivates students and improves their communication skills; findings showed that teachers believe that this curriculum is interesting for students and is able to improve their learning skills. Justice, Mashburn, Pence, and Wiggins (2008) conducted an experimental study that evaluates the ability of the new curriculum in Virginia on improving the expressive language skill of preschool students; when linguistic skills (percentage of complex utterance, number of nouns used) were tested, findings showed that there is a growth of students' expressive language skills. Lebanese teachers' perspectives, toward textbooks that were designed in 1997, and are part of the curriculum, were studied in a conference that was organized by the Lebanese Association of Educational Sciences in 2005. High school teachers reported that high-school text books designed by CERD are improving through the years; however, they still have many disadvantages and not all learning objectives are assigned in them (Al-Kawwas, 2005).

Rationale of the Research Problem in the Context of Literature

This study explored the design process of the currently designed grade one

Lebanese official Arabic curriculum, and the content of the currently applied grade one Lebanese official Arabic curriculum. A review revealed both theoretical and empirical literature that guided the development of a framework. Clements (2007) believes that curriculum frameworks provide a coherent structure for evaluation and analysis because they allow researchers to discover if the curriculum was designed based on research.

The review of literature allowed the researcher to include in the criteria a definition of the curriculum, the processes that are used to develop the curriculum, the design models that are used to develop the curriculum, and the components of the curriculum. Moreover, literature review allowed the researcher to identify twenty first century criteria, language arts criteria that are used to develop the curriculum, and the aim of including twenty first skills and different areas of language arts in the curriculum. These criteria were included in the framework.

When reviewing the literature, we could not identify studies that describe the design process and content of the Grade One Lebanese Arabic curriculum based on these international criteria of goodness that were used in this study. That is, none of these mentioned criteria were used to explore the design process of the Lebanese curriculum. Curriculum studies were conducted in different contexts. Literature review allows us to identify many studies that describe the language curriculum in different countries; however, a study that describes the design process of language curriculum designed in Lebanon in 2009 couldn't be identified. A study was conducted by the Lebanese Association of Educational Sciences to evaluate the content Lebanese Curriculum that was designed by CERD in 1997; however, this study didn't investigate the coverage of different areas of language arts and twenty first century skills. Therefore, this study extends previous

research since it answered different research questions, and was conducted in different context.

Purpose of the Study

This study is an exploratory qualitative study that explored the design process of the currently designed Grade One Lebanese Arabic curriculum, and content of the currently applied Grade One Lebanese Arabic curriculum. The study: a) explored the design process of the currently designed grade one Arabic Curriculum, and determined to what extent it matches theoretical models, b) explored the content of the currently applied grade one Arabic Curriculum, and determined to what extent it covers language arts areas (reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, viewing, visual representation, and spelling) proposed by Cox (2008), and c) explored the content of the currently applied grade one Arabic Curriculum, and determined to what extent it covers twenty first century skills (digital literacy, communication skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and social and cultural skills) proposed by Voogt and Roblin (2012).

A framework was generated for this aim. This framework included criteria for description derived from literature review. The first part of the framework is concerned with the design process of the curriculum. It included criteria to determine to what extent the design process of the curriculum matched theoretical models. The second and the third part of the framework were concerned with the content of the studied curriculum. The second part included criteria that the content of the curriculum was compared to in order to determine to what extent it covers language arts areas proposed by Cox (2008). The third section included criteria that the content of the curriculum was compared to in order to

determine to what extent it covers twenty first century skills proposed by Voogt and Roblin (2012).

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the design process of the currently designed Grade One Arabic curriculum, developed by CERD, match theoretical models of curriculum design (forward design, central design, backward design)?
2. To what extent does the content of the currently applied Grade One Arabic Curriculum, developed by CERD, cover language arts areas (reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, viewing, visual representation, and spelling) proposed by Cox (2008)?
3. To what extent does the content of the currently applied Grade One Arabic Curriculum, developed by CERD, cover twenty first century skills (digital literacy, communication skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and social and cultural skills) proposed by Voogt and Roblin (2012)?

Significance of the Study

Curriculum designers and evaluators can refer to the criteria developed in this study to evaluate the design process and content of the curriculum. Moreover, curriculum designers can refer to this study to avoid the weakness found in the design process and content of this curriculum when they want to design a new language curriculum.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Curriculum design involves a myriad of complex processes that involve different steps. There is no agreement among researchers on a single design model or a best set of strategies that can be followed to ensure the quality of the designed curriculum (Richards, 2013). Theoretical and empirical literature document a set of best practices and recommends different areas and skills that need to be covered in the curriculum, and outline a variety of different approaches, criteria and techniques that are used to evaluate it (Richards, 2013). In this chapter, different models of curriculum design are described, and different approaches that are used to design the curriculum are introduced. Moreover, the chapter introduces the language arts areas and twenty first century skills be integrated in the curriculum and the purpose behind including them. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that formed the basis for exploring and describing both the design process and the content of the studied curriculum.

Defining the Curriculum

Examination of the literature reveals different perspectives on how curriculum was defined and the nature of its components that evolved since the 19th century. Before the twentieth century, the curriculum was conceived to consist of a set of subjects that students need to learn, and the time allotted for every subject (Gibson, 2013). This view changed and developed over time. Nowadays, researchers view the curriculum as a set of learning competencies, a set of learning material in line with these competencies that need to be mastered by learners, with some viewing it as the design of learning experiences that

take place through school life. Niculesco (2009) believes that the term curriculum is used to refer to learning materials; and based on this belief, he defines it as the syllabus that includes details of a specific subject that will be transmitted to students. Richards (2011) also views the curriculum from this perspective and defines it as a plan that describes how a specific set of course objectives is translated into practical teaching and learning processes so that the goals of this course are achieved.

On the other hand, others' definitions go beyond the learning outcomes and rather bring in focus the learning experiences that students go through during school life. Squirres (2009) defines the curriculum as an extensive written plan that covers content to be taught, assessment tools, alignment to standards, staff development, techniques for improving students' achievement, and time needed to cover it. Similarly, Taylor (2004) believes that the curriculum needs to include learning experiences that students encounter in their broader school setting in addition to the learning outcomes that need to be achieved. Keating (2011) even contends that a curriculum has to include also activities that educators and students engage in outside the formally assigned curriculum that focus typically on additional aspects specific to a certain subject matter. Wiles (2009) also adopts the definition that views the curriculum as a set of goals or values that lead students to successful learning experiences. Such definitions go beyond the content of a certain subject, and focus on experiences that students' go through as part of school life.

Therefore, two approaches are used to define the curriculum; the first approach views it as a set of learning outcomes for a certain subject, while the other approach goes beyond learning outcomes to all experiences that take place throughout the school life. In this study, curriculum designers who were involved in designing grade one

Arabic curriculum were interviewed and asked about the definition they adopt regarding the curriculum. Their answers were analyzed against the backdrop of the approaches that are recognized in literature.

Curriculum Design

Storey (2007) states that many researchers consider curriculum design process as a complicated process since it involves different steps, needs much research and often requires extended periods of time to be completed. Keating (2011) defines curriculum design as an on-going decision making process that involves different phases such as initiation, design, implementation, and evaluation. It consists of a multilevel extensive process. Brown (1995) views curriculum design as a sequence of activities that aims at the growth of teachers, students, and administrators. These activities need to provide teachers with a framework that guides the choice of activities that help students learn, and ensures that this learning is efficient and effective in a certain situation. Ainsworth and Anderson (2013) believe that in order for the curriculum to lead to best outcomes, the design process needs to include continuous improvement through both the design process and application.

Based on the theoretical descriptions of the design process introduced above, we can conclude that this process needs to be an ongoing process of planning, monitoring and improvement, in order for it to lead best outcomes. Therefore, in this study curriculum designers were asked what process they adopted when they designed grade one Arabic curriculum.

Curriculum Design Models

Erickson (2002) believes that choosing a curriculum design model leads to a coherent and balanced curriculum that develops sophistication in knowledge, since it involves identifying learning outcomes, content that will be delivered, processes that will ensure quality performance, and quality assessment. Wiggins and McTighe (2006) believe that putting a plan for curriculum design, instead of listing topics and skills, leads to effective learning and teaching, identifies which learning activities and assessments lead to desired results, and makes students' performance explicit. However, as researchers do not agree on a definition for the curriculum, they, as well, do not agree on a common model that is used to develop the curriculum. We can identify three different models that describe the design of language arts curriculum: the forward design, the central design, and the backward design (Richards, 2013).

The forward design. Richard (2013) developed his definition to this approach, and states that the forward design is a model that starts stating what to teach followed by developing resources and teaching methods, and ends with identifying assessment tools that will test achievement.

The central design. A different design that can be used when designing the curriculum is the central design. It is a model that focuses on teaching activities since these are first identified in this design. Richards (2013) states that it is a model that involves identifying teaching activities, teaching techniques and methods, identifying a detailed syllabus and learning objectives, and setting assessment tools.

The backward design. This model is referred to Wiggins and McTighe (2005) who state in the first step of this design, essential questions and enduring understandings are identified; in the second step, designers are asked to think as assessors since they identify assessment tools that match these understandings, and the last step involves preparing teaching procedure that best fit these essential questions. Richards (2013) describes it as a design process that starts with setting learning objectives as the first step, followed by developing assessment tools and learning materials.

Needs Analysis: A step that Precedes Curriculum Design

Curriculum design models mentioned above do not recognize needs analysis as a step that precedes curriculum design; however, Brown (1995) recognizes it as essential step that precede any design of a curriculum. Brown (1995) states that “needs analysis includes all activities that are involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students” (p.35). Many researchers other than Brown describe this step as essential before proceeding with curriculum design. Hauer and Quill (2011) describe it as the first step in the process of curriculum design that identifies the status of the learners. Parikh and Parker (2001) view it as a step that precedes curriculum design and provides educators with knowledge about which information will be relevant to students. Thampy (2013) believes that learning changes the practices of learners when it is stemmed from an assessment of learning needs. Thampy (2013) describes learners’ needs assessment as a systematic process that closes the gap between what the learners know and what they need to know in order to achieve the learning competencies. Richards (2001) believes that needs analysis is conducted to: identify linguistic skills learners need to acquire, determine the gap between

what students know and what they need to know, gather data about learning problems students face, and identify if learning materials meet students' needs.

Literature provides empirical evidence that proves that positive impact of needs analysis on learning. For example, Lieff (2009) reports that when students in the University in Toronto were involved in curriculum change based on their needs, their motivation, ability to communicate and understand the content of the program increased. Keister and Grames (2012) report that distributed surveys to students to analyze their needs before developing the curriculum; these surveys provided an evidence of the opinions and priorities of the students regarding what to include in the curriculum. Rachal, Daigle and Rachal (2007) distributed surveys to university students to identify their academic needs, and analyzed results by relating them to theoretical research; this helped in developing teaching strategies that proved to help those students overcome their challenges, and achieve better academic results. Kawari and Hosseini (2011) found that there is a significant gap between job requirements and theoretical education and that students lack practical skills; this is due to the lack and ignorance of conducting needs analysis. Kusumoto (2008) analyzed the needs of Japanese homeroom teachers before developing the training program; analysis of results succeeded in providing implications for curriculum developers to develop an effective training program that helped teachers to succeed in using English Language with their learners.

Therefore, there is considerable agreement that views needs analysis as a first step to be taken prior to proceeding with curriculum design in order for the designed curriculum to address the needs of the target audience; moreover, it introduces empirical evidence regarding its positive impact on learning. Thus, for this study, when discussing

the design process of grade one Arabic curriculum, needs assessment was considered as a necessary step and designers were asked if they conducted needs analysis and for what purpose.

Needs Analysis Tools

Different tools can be used to conduct needs analysis. Brown (1995) states that it is conducted through reviewing existing literature, designing tests that determine the proficiency levels of a certain group of students, observing a certain group of students, and conducting structured and semi- structured interviews with the concerned group of teachers and students. Parikh and Parker (2001) state that designers use different tools to support their work when conducting needs analysis such as interviews and questionnaires. Therefore, a curriculum designer can design number of tools like tests, questionnaires and interviews that can be used in order to identify the needs of the target group.

Language Arts Curriculum

This section defines language arts curriculum and introduces its components. Richards (2001) defines the Language Curriculum as an organized course of language instruction where teachers invest a lot of their energies to develop and implement it, and students spend a lot of effort to master it. Graves (2008) describes the Language Arts syllabus as the syllabus that includes specific information about what to teach in Language and how to teach it. As for the areas that need to be covered in the Language Arts curriculum, recent trends in language learning do not just focus on memorization, but rather on developing the cognitive and creative thinking skills of the learners (Coskun, 2002). Therefore, researchers invite curriculum designers to consider different language

areas to be covered in the language arts curriculum. Cox (2008) states that the areas of language are: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visual presentation, spelling and grammar. Each of these areas has a rationale behind including it in the curriculum, and literature provides us with empirical evidence regarding its impact on the academic achievement of students.

Areas of Language Arts Curriculum

Reading area. Cox (2008) believes that reading skills need to be covered in the language curriculum where students need to construct meaning by making and conforming predictions, connecting their ideas and background to the reading pieces, and comprehending texts they read. As for reading skills for the first grade, Honig (2001) states that reading in first grade takes place through teaching students to decode words, and teaching them word recognition. Denton (2002) believes that first graders are supposed to recognize all letters of alphabet, understand letter-sound relationship, understand that the print has meaning, and recognize text events. Resnick and Hampton (2009) state that first graders should learn to read books that have themes and episodes, answer comprehension questions, describe cause effect relationships, and make connections between the book and their personal experience.

In many empirical studies, reading proves to be an essential skill to teach. Oueni, Nabahani, and Bahous (2008) report that reading improves vocabulary acquisition since 34 out of 54 students, who served as the sample, used vocabulary acquired from reading activities in journal writing, and most students gave correct definitions of 37 out of 38 words learned during reading activities. In addition to improving vocabulary and writing skills, reading activities have an impact on reading fluency. Chang

(2012) conducted a study to investigate the impact of repeated reading activities on reading fluency, and proved that due to repeated reading activities, reading fluency of the participating students improved 49% after measuring the number of words that students were able to read per minute.

The impact of reading skills included in the curriculum, extends beyond the school life as well. Graham and Herbert (2011) describe reading as a critical skill and essential skill for the twenty first century that students need to master in order to succeed in their social and occupational life since new jobs need strong reading skills. Therefore, literature provides us with empirical evidence that support the claim of Cox that reading needs to be covered in Language Arts curriculum, since reading activities are able to improve reading comprehension performance of students.

Writing area. According to Cox (2008), writing needs to be covered in a Language Arts curriculum. Cox (2008) believes that writing in elementary classes takes place by helping students to discover new ideas through free writing, and put down the ideas they know and want to discover not only through words and phrases but also through scribbles, images and drawings that help them to engage in the writing process. Rose (2001) states that first graders are supposed to hold writing tools properly, form letters correctly, separate words by spaces, produce a piece of writing that has at least three sentences that are related to the same topic, and use descriptive and emotion words in these writing pieces. Fingeret, Pressel, Mohan, Reffitt, and Bogaret (2007) believe that first graders are expected to plan for writing by producing several drafts and being able to proofread and edit them by following proofreading skills that they learned.

Researchers explored the impact of writing on other linguistic skills,

and reached conclusions of its positive impact hence supporting Cox's claim. Lee (2011) believes that writing allows students' minds to become healthy and think properly; thus, he compared the writing pieces of students before and after teaching writing skills, and proved that post pieces were more specific and unique, and they included students' experiences and thoughts. Wall (2008) believes that writing improves reading comprehension skills; thus, he reports he introduced different writing activities to his students throughout the scholastic year, and analyzed their writing pieces. Wall (2008) finds out that as the year progressed, students were able to write more sophisticated pieces of writing, acquired more grammatical concepts such as punctuation rules and compound sentences; moreover, the writing pieces proved to be longer and more complex. In a meta-analysis on the impact of writing on reading comprehension, Tierney and Shanahan (1991) cited in Graham and Herbert (2011) see that when learners' ability to compose a text is enhanced, their ability to comprehend a text is enhanced. In this meta-analysis. Graham and Herbert (2011) looked for articles to answer the question if reading instruction is able to improve reading; 21 studies proved to have positive effect size. Therefore, writing appears to have a positive impact on reading and other linguistic skills as mentioned in the above studies. This supports the claim of Cox that writing needs to be covered in Language Arts curriculum.

Listening area. Cox (2008) describes listening as an area that needs to be covered in the Language Arts curriculum. Literature provides us with empirical evidence that support this claim. Gillam and Reutzel (2013) believe that first grade learners are expected to: remember and recall heard information, ask for clarifications when heard information isn't comprehended, understand and follow simple oral instructions, represent

heard information by drawings or other visual displays, and ask and answer questions about details and events of oral presented and read aloud texts.

Thompson, Leintz, Nevers, and Witkowski (2004) believe that listening is the base of critical thinking. Cross (2009) examined if teaching listening strategies improves students' ability to comprehend videotexts; dependent t-test for experimental group showed the results of post tests were higher than the results of the pre-tests and that the difference in the results was significant. Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) examined the impact of teaching listening teaching strategies on students' listening comprehension abilities; the experimental group who was subjected to these strategies and activities outperformed the control group in the post test and that is what ANCOVA analysis showed.

Therefore, research provides support to the claim that listening leads to developing improved comprehension skills of learners, which substantiate Cox's claim that listening needs to be covered in a Language Arts curriculum.

Speaking area. Cox (2008) considers speaking as an area that needs to be covered in a Language Arts curriculum. Resnick and Snow (2009) explains that first graders are supposed to: talk about own writings, tell logical stories with five or six well-sequenced events about themselves and others, explain their work to classmates using correct content-related words, produce rhyming words, act out stories, ask and answer oral questions about stories they read or hear, and engage in book talks.

Literature introduces different studies that present the importance of teaching speaking in Language classes. Zhang and Head (2010) believe that when learners develop their speaking skills, they become confident language users. Allen and Berkwitz

(1999) report that research results show that when students were taught speaking and argumentation skills; surveys results show that instructors agreed that speaking improve critical thinking skills. Tsou (2005) examined the impact of engaging students in speaking activities such as asking and answering questions, and discussing ideas in groups; t- test scores proved that experimental group had significant higher scores in motivation, and speaking skills proficiency.

Thus speaking is viewed to be able to allow learners to use language confidently. Research provides us with evidence that speaking activities are able to develop the critical other linguistic skills of learners. Therefore, speaking could be considered to be included as an area of the language arts curriculum if we want to help students think critically.

Viewing and visual representation area. Cox (2008) considers viewing and visual representation as an area that needs to be covered in a Language Arts curriculum. Alyeiri (2010) believes that in primary grades, viewing and visual representation takes place through asking students to: define meanings of words through referring to visual aids, act out verbally and none verbally the stories through dramatic representations, and write and illustrate their own books. Squez and Hansen (2010) believe that in primary grades, viewing and visual representation take place through showing students concept maps that are age level appropriate and asking them to interpret them, and by asking students to construct their own concept maps.

Cakir (2007) believes that activities related to viewing and visual representation are able to facilitate linguistic skills of learners and contribute to language learning. Literature also provides us with empirical evidence on the impact of viewing and

visual presentation on learning. Fingeret (2009) reports that when the teacher replaced the reading text by a video in a KG class, results of multiple observations, post-tests and pre-tests showed that learners acquired a big amount of information about the subject. In a case study that he conducted, Jylha-Laide (1994) states that a Finnish girl was able to acquire English language through watching English cartoon videos, and without any other types of instructions. In those studies, viewing and visual presentation prove to have positive impact on Language learning. This could support the claim of Cox that viewing and visual representation is an area that needs to be covered in a Language Arts curriculum.

Spelling area. Cox (2008) states that spelling is an area that needs to be covered in the Language Arts curriculum. Migliaccio (2011) believes that first graders are expected to spell high frequency words correctly, write commonly misspelled words correctly by referring to the words list, and use sound-letter relationship to correctly spell words.

Literature provides us with studies that show the positive impact of teaching spelling on language learning. Graham, Harris, and Frink-Chorzempa (2002) conducted a study to investigate the impact of spelling activities on writing and reading fluency, and results of the study showed that students who were subjected to the spelling program showed a significant improvement in their writing and reading fluency. McMurray (2006) conducted a study to investigate the impact of spelling activities on independent writing, and results indicated that the control group showed a significant improvement in their independent writing results.

Grammar area. Cox (2008) states that grammar is an area that needs to

be covered in the Language Arts curriculum. Taffe and Smith (2013) believe that first graders are supposed to: use punctuation rules correctly, distinguish singular from plural, use verbs to convey sense of time, and use prepositions correctly.

Researchers conduct different studies to prove for educators the impact of teaching grammar. Graham and Herbert (2011) believe that if we teach students the techniques of combining simple sentences into compound ones, learners will be able to comprehend such types of sentences when reading them. Moreover, Lunds and Light (2003) note that when students have problems in syntax, they will face problems in their communication skills. Andrews et al (2006) conducted a meta-analysis on the importance of teaching sentence combination on the writing composition skills of students. They found eighteen studies that examined the relation between teaching sentence combination and the quality of writing composition. Andrews et al. (2006) report that all eighteen studies showed that the relation between teaching sentence combination and quality writing is positive. As for the effect of teaching grammar on comprehension skills. Zhang (2012) reports that he measured the impact of teaching grammar on comprehension; results proved that there is a significant positive relation between grammatical knowledge and reading comprehension performance.

Research studies provide evidence that grammar allow students to produce better pieces of writing, where writing is able to prove reading comprehension skills as mentioned before. Such research could support the claim of Cox that grammar is an area that needs to be covered in the Language Arts curriculum.

All the areas that Cox mentioned as essential areas that need to be covered

in the Language curriculum find considerable support from research that shows their positive impact on developing students' linguistic skills. Thus, when exploring the content of grade one Arabic curriculum, the content will be checked to determine if it covers those areas.

Curriculum Development and Twenty First Century Skills

At the wake of the 21st century, educators all around the world shifted their attention to determining the competencies that are needed by their graduates as they grow into adults into the new century. The term 21st century skills became widely used especially in the educational circles and among scholars working on developing curricula that covers the competencies that are deemed necessary to prepare graduates for the 21st century. For example, Wan (2011) believes that students need a curriculum that includes the twenty first century skills so that they can enter the workforce successfully, meet society challenges, and refresh the economies of their countries. Runte (2001) believes that a twenty first century curriculum will allow students to get involved in positive change, feel empowered, and become more knowledgeable and able to debate in a constructive way. Many studies were conducted to identify the twenty first century skills. In the meta-analysis that Voogt and Roblin (2012) conducted, they found that different competencies were common between different studies and were described as twenty first century competencies that need to be covered in the curriculum. These competencies are: digital literacy, communication skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and social and cultural skills. Each of these skills is essential for different reasons, and literature provides us with empirical evidence concerning the impact of each skill on students and society.

Twenty First Century Skills That Need to be Covered in the Curriculum

Digital literacy. Hague and Pyton (2011) define digital literacy in classroom as giving students the chance to use different means of technology in a creative and critical way. Reksten (2000) explains that first graders are expected to: use word processing programs to write their names and simple words, copy sentences and short paragraphs using keyboard correctly, illustrate own stories or stories learned using age appropriate illustration programs, and record their readings and stories on computers and other tools. Murphy, Depasquale, and McNamara (2003) believe that students in primary grades are expected to use word processing programs, and work with their teachers to create pictures, videos, texts, and concepts that they learned.

Research provides us with empirical evidence on the impact of digital literacy on the learning process, and describes the importance of such skills in our world. Kirkwood and Price (2005) state that students need to acquire digital literacy skills because many universities nowadays provide remote learning through the web, and learning is becoming technology mediated; thus, the acquisition of such skills is essential for students. Moore (2011) describes digital literacy as an essential skill for the twenty first century because all jobs nowadays need computers and networks to increase productivity and performance. Thus, students need to learn technology in order to become ready for university work and workplace demands. Deaney, Ruthven, and Hennesey (2003) interviewed students to investigate their perspectives towards using technology in their classes; data analysis found that technology allowed students to carry tasks more quickly and easily, produce creative pieces of writing and high standards work, and feel

motivated towards learning. In another study, Smeets (2005) distributed surveys to 331 teachers to investigate the impact of using information communication technology on learning environments; analysis of these surveys showed that teachers believe that ICT was a main contributor to effective learning.

Communication skills. Jonson (2002) believes that elementary school students are expected to learn the following communication skills: work in groups, and discuss opinions and share ideas with teachers and other students.

Giessler, Edison and Wayland (2012) state that most employers complain nowadays because their employees lack communication skills, that are essential for the workplace. Many studies were conducted to show the relation between teaching students communication skills and their ability to deal with the challenges of today's society. Erozkan (2013) distributed communication skills and problem solving skills surveys to elementary students; data analysis proved that communication skills were significantly related to problem solving skills. Alkandari (2012) examined the reaction of students toward communication in classroom through surveys; data analysis showed that when students communicate in the classroom, they become more motivated to learn, and improve their critical thinking and intellectual skills. Communication skills prove to be essential to learn in schools due to their positive impact on students' other skills and workplace.

Problem solving and collaboration skills. Synder and Synder (2008) explain that in order for students to be effective in their lives and work place, they need to acquire problem solving and collaboration skills. Celebioglu, Yozgan, and Ezentas (2010) explain that problem solving skills taught in first grade are: looking for a pattern, acting out

a problem, and solving simple problems. Vermette, Harper and DiMillo (2004) explains that collaboration skills taught in elementary classes are: proper dialogue strategies, proper group work strategies, and reaching an agreement.

Kloppenborg and Baucus (2004) cited in Joham and Clarke (2012) believe that engaging students in problem solving learning allows them to collaborate, share their knowledge and solutions with others and reach to high quality solutions for real life situations.

Researchers conducted empirical studies to investigate the impact of teaching such skills on the learning process and students' lives. Weshah (2012) studied the impact of problem based learning on reflective thinking; data analysis showed a significant difference between reflective thinking pre-tests and posttests. Doghonadze and Gorgiladze (2008) examined the impact of teaching problem solving skills on students' vocabulary, writing, and grammar; data analysis showed that experimental groups achieved higher results in post-tests than in pre-test in grammar, writing and vocabulary.

Creativity and critical thinking skills. McGregor (2007) explains that early elementary years students are engaged in critical and creative thinking activities when they are asked to, make predictions and reason them, use evidence and different criteria when answering questions about opinions, distinguish fact from opinion, and relate cause and effect.

Empirical studies were conducted to examine the impact of these skills on the learning process, students' thinking and linguistic skills, and ability of students to adapt real life situations. Klimovienė, Urbonienė, and Barzdžiukienė (2006) examined the impact of teaching critical thinking strategies on students' ability to practice critical thinking skills through an intervention program; data analysis showed that 68% of students improved their

questioning skills, 58% wrote effective summaries, and 55% improved their communication skills. Therefore, this study provides additional evidence that critical thinking strategies have a positive impact on students' learning and thinking. As for the impact of teaching critical thinking skills on linguistic skills, Alizamani, Khodabandehlou, and Mobashernia (2003) examined the impact of teaching critical thinking skills on students' reading comprehension performance; data analysis showed that the reading comprehension ability of the experimental group students improved. Such study shows the positive impact of teaching critical thinking strategies on reading comprehension which is viewed as an essential linguistic skill to succeed in today's social and occupational life as explained before.

Social and cultural skills. Social and cultural skills are described as essential skills for the twenty first century, and there are several methods to include them in classroom instructions. Jonsons (2002) explains that cultural skills are taught the in early elementary grades through discussing similarities and differences between groups, and talking about others cultures (legends, believes, and costumes). Cartledge and Klee (2009) believe that early elementary grades students learn social skills when they: name their feelings and express them properly, name others feelings after listening to them, work in groups and respect the rules of group work, use courtesy words when speaking with others, and ask for help when they need it.

Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, and Schellinger (2011) conducted a meta-analysis to review studies that examined the impact of teaching social skills on students' behaviors and attitudes; many of these studies proved that students who were taught these skills showed significant improvement in their attitudes and social behavior,

and improved their academic performance. Dereli (2009) investigated the impact of teaching social skills to six years students on their ability to solve social problems through an intervention program; experimental group post-test results showed that there is a significant improvement in students' ability to solve social problems. Solving problems is viewed to be an essential skill for the twenty first century as described above.

As for cultural skills, although they are recognized as essential for the twenty first century, searching databases does not provide us with empirical evidence that shows the impact of teaching students such skills on their learning and future lives.

Background of Lebanese Curriculum

The Center of Educational Research and Development in Lebanon[CERD] is responsible for developing the curriculum that is used in schools in Lebanon. In 1997, CERD developed a curriculum for different grade levels and all subject matters, and this curriculum was applied in different schools. In this curriculum, grade one learners had to take seven Arabic sessions per week, and use classical Arabic as a language of learning and communication. Students are supposed to learn to read and write all Arabic letters, read small texts about different themes, use words in full and meaningful sentences, and learn different parts of speech.

The whole curriculum that was developed by CERD and implemented since 1997 was evaluated by the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies [LAES]. LAES (2007) reports that the Arabic curriculum proved to have major problems in its design, and the content is very heavy compared to allotted time; there was stereotyping for specific social classes, and a difference between the content of textbooks and objectives of curriculum. However, it is not specified in LAES study if Grade One Arabic Curriculum

covers different areas of Language Arts and twenty first century skills that are referred to in this study. In 2009, CERD prepared a new curriculum that will be used in different grade levels and for different subjects in schools in the upcoming years; however, this curriculum is still not published. CERD (2009) report that this curriculum is a competency based curriculum that takes into consideration society needs, presents a student-centered approach for teaching and learning, and trains students on communication, critical thinking, and problem solving skills. The design process of the 2009 Grade One Arabic Curriculum, and the content of the 1997 Grade One Arabic curriculum were described in this study.

Studies on the Arabic Language Teaching/Curriculum Design and Curriculum Analysis

Many studies that were conducted in Jordan, Malaysia, Palestine, and Emirates to analyze the content of the Arabic Language Curriculum. Al-Kukhon and Yanes (2011) conducted a study in Jordan where they observed teachers, and analyzed different documents to examine if the applied Arabic Grammar curriculum matches the designed curriculum; results indicated that the designed curriculum matches the applied curriculum. Al-Baheer and Al-Waely (2008) analyzed the weight of the speaking skills in grade seven Jordanian Arabic curriculum; after computing the frequency of these skills, results indicated that speaking skills had the highest weight in the curriculum. Al-Jaafreh (2009) analyzed Jordanian Arabic textbooks to identify if the included questions cover the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domain; results indicated that the highest percentage was for the cognitive domain. Shatnawi, Bin Abdulghaniand, and Jei Nouh (2013) evaluated the content of Malaysian Arabic textbooks from the perspectives of students through questionnaires; results indicated that the level of language used in the textbooks is inappropriate for students, and that there needs to be more than one textbook. Al-Lahham

(2010) identified if the Linguistic skills found in the Arabic Curriculum at Ghazza meet curriculum standards; thus, a list of criteria based on previous research and views was prepared, and results showed that in the tenth grade, standard were met at the highest rate. Ahmed (2010) reports that United Arab Emirate students think that learning the Arabic curriculum is not interesting since the skills of this curriculum are a set of facts that do not lead to creativity.

Thus, many studies were conducted to describe and analyze the Arabic curriculum in different contexts, and researchers had different aims and used different tools. Such studies give us a background on the research that was conducted to evaluate Arabic Curricula from different perspectives. Based on those studies, it can be concluded that the Arabic Curriculum in those countries varies in its quality, the approaches that are used to evaluate it, and that the purposes behind curriculum studies are different.

Concerning the studies that were conducted to evaluate the thinking levels, studies prove that Arabic curricula in some of those countries lack competencies that address high levels of thinking. For example, Emirate students think that their curriculum does not lead to creativity (Ahmed,2010), and most questions in Arabic textbooks in Jordan are at low level of thinking (Al-Jaafreh,2009). As for meeting the standards or the designed curriculum, studies that were conducted from this approach reached the conclusion that the applied curriculum meets the standards and the designed curriculum. In other studies, the curriculum proves to address communication skills (speaking and writing) at the highest level, while in other studies it proves to be difficult and does not match with the level of students. Therefore, the nature of the Arabic

curriculum differs among Arabic countries. In some countries, the Arabic Curriculum proves that it faces problems, while in others it proves to achieve its objectives and meets the standards. As the nature of the curriculum differs among these countries, the parties involved and approaches used to evaluate the curriculum in those countries are different. Teachers, students, and experts in the field were involved in those studies. The approaches used were content analysis (Al-Baheer & Al-Waely), (Al –Jaafreh,2003) and (Al-Lahham,2010), investigating the perspectives of teachers (Al-Kukhon& Yanes,2011), and investigating the perspectives of students (Ahmed,2010).

Approaches to Curriculum Studies

Over the past years, many studies were conducted to explore the Language Arts Program in many countries over the world. Researchers were interested in exploring the curriculum for different purposes. Hussain et al. (2011) believe that curriculum studies take place to judge the effectiveness of a certain curriculum, and to decide if this program needs to be modified or not; different techniques and tools such as questionnaires, interviews with stakeholders, experiments, and discussions are used. Cellante and Donne (2013) state that “the such studies provides constructive information for decision making, and serves to facilitate a program’s development, implementation, and improvement by examining its process and outcomes (p.3).

Framework for Exploring Grade One Lebanese Official Arabic Curriculum

Curriculum design can be described as complicated processes that involves different steps and strategies. In this study, a framework was constructed, based on data from literature review to describe the design process of the currently designed Grade one Lebanese Arabic Curriculum, and the content of the currently applied Grade one

Lebanese Arabic Curriculum. This framework was developed based on the available theoretical and empirical knowledge base related to curriculum design and content presented above. Specifically, the chosen definitions of curriculum, Richards (2013) models of curriculum design, language arts curriculum proposed by Cox (2008), and Voogt and Roblin (2012) meta-analysis of the twenty first century skills formed the foundations of the exploration framework.

Exploring the Design Process

Researchers do not agree on a common understanding of the dimensions that form a curriculum design, and there is no empirical evidence that proves the effectiveness of a definition over the others. Therefore, this study adopted what is found as common aspects among different definitions, and the description used these common aspects as a frame of reference for comparison. As for the models that outline the processes used to design the curriculum, Richards (2013) recognizes the forward, the central and backward design as the models that are followed in designing a Language curriculum. Despite the variety of available models that are used to design the curriculum, a close examination indicates that all models include the following steps: identifying learning outcomes, setting assessment tools, and planning teaching procedures. Moreover, and despite their widespread use in practice, a review of available empirical studies evaluating the effectiveness of these models led no results. Most publications on these models focus on providing description of these models rather than empirical evidence on which model leads to better academic achievement.

Therefore, in this study, none of these models was adopted, as the

ideal model from which criteria were derived to analyze the design process of grade one Arabic curriculum. Instead, an inductive approach of collecting data from those who were involved in the design inquiring from them about the steps that they followed when designing the curriculum. Their answers were used to develop a model grounded in their experience. This model was discussed against the backdrop of the design models that are recognized in literature. As for needs analysis, Brown (1995) considers needs analysis as an essential step that needs to precede curriculum design, and literature provides empirical evidence on its effectiveness. Therefore, in this study, needs analysis was considered as an essential step that needs to precede the curriculum design.

Curriculum designers from CERD who were involved in designing grade one Arabic curriculum were interviewed in order to determine their understanding of what a curriculum entails, the design model that they used to develop the curriculum, and if they conducted needs analysis before designing the curriculum. Their answers were analyzed and compared with what literature provides us in order to describe the design process of this curriculum.

Exploring the Content

In this study, areas of Languages Arts proposed by Cox (2008) were adopted to describe the content of the 1997 Grade One Arabic curriculum since empirical evidence was provided to prove the effectiveness and importance of every area. That is, the content of the curriculum was checked to determine to what extent it covers different areas of a language arts curriculum proposed by Cox (2008). The content of 1997 Grade One Arabic curriculum, as well, was described to verify if twenty first century skills are covered in it because it is used in the twenty first century, will be used in the twenty first century, and

students who are learning it will be the employees of the twenty first century, and because literature provides us with empirical evidence regarding the necessity and importance of teaching and acquiring such skills. In this study, twenty first century skills proposed by Voogt and Roblin (2012) were adopted to describe the content of the curriculum, since empirical evidence was provided to prove the effectiveness of every skill. That is, the content of the curriculum was checked to determine if they cover the different areas skills.

Criteria of Curriculum Exploration

The Design Process

Curriculum definition. To what extent did the curriculum designers' perspective on what constitutes a curriculum matches the following definition: The curriculum is a set of learning competencies that need to be mastered by students; it covers the content that needs to be taught, teaching methodologies, assessment tools, and professional development aspects (Squirres,2009). It extends outside the school to encounter experiences that students encounter outside the school setting (Taylor,2004).

Needs analysis. In what ways and to what extent did the curriculum designers conduct needs analysis before designing the curriculum?

Design model. To what extent did the curriculum designers follow a clearly defined design model? What design map did they follow? To what extent did their design cover the following elements: learning competencies, assessment tools, and teaching methodologies? To what extent did the followed design model match the design models introduced in literature?

The Content of the Curriculum.

Language arts areas. In what ways and to what extent did the content of

the 1997 Grade One Arabic curriculum cover the following areas:

Reading. that is, decoding and recognizing words (Honig,2001), recalling all letters of alphabet, understanding letter-sound relationships, understanding that print has meaning, recognizing text events (Denton,2002), reading books that have themes and episodes, answering comprehension questions, describing cause-effect relationships, and making connections the book and personal experiences (Resnik and Hampton, 2009).

Writing. that is, holding writing tools properly, forming letters correctly, separating words by spaces, producing a piece of writing that has at least three sentences that are related to the same topic, using descriptive and emotion words in these writing pieces (Rose,2001), planning for writing by producing several drafts, and being able to proofread and edit them by following proofreading skills that they learned (Fingeret et al.,2007).

Listening. that is, remembering and recalling heard information, asking for clarifications the heard information is not comprehended, understanding and following simple oral instructions, representing heard information by drawings or other visual displays, and answering questions about details and events of oral presented and read aloud texts (Reutzel,2013).

Speaking. that is, talking about own writings, telling logical stories that include five or six well- sequenced events about themselves and others, explaining own work to classmates, expressing self using correct content-related words, being able to produce rhyming words, acting out stories, answering oral questions about stories read or heard, and engaging in book talks (Resnick and Snow 2009).

Spelling. that is, spelling high frequency words correctly, writing commonly

misspelled words correctly by referring to the words list, and using sound-letter relationship to correctly spell words (Migliaccio 2011).

Viewing and Visual presentation. that is, defining meanings of words through referring to visual aids, acting out verbally and none verbally the stories through dramatic representations, and illustrating own books (Aleyeri 2010), and interpreting and constructing concept maps that are age level appropriate (Squez and Hansen 2010).

Grammar. that is, using punctuation rules correctly, distinguishing singular from plural, using verbs to convey sense of time, and using prepositions correctly (Taffe and Smith 2013).

Twenty first century skills.

Digital literacy. that is, using word processing programs to write their names and simple words correctly, copying sentences and short paragraphs using the keyboard correctly, illustrating stories using age appropriate illustration programs, using computers and other tools to record readings and stories (Reksten 2000), working with teachers to create pictures, videos, texts, and concepts (Murphy, Depasquale, & McNamara 2003).

Communication skills. that is, working in groups, sharing ideas with others, discussing opinions with teachers and other students, and providing students with feedback (Jonson 2002).

Problem solving and Collaboration skills. that is looking for a pattern, acting out a problem, solving simple problems (Celebioglu, et al., 2010), using proper dialogue strategies, using proper group work strategies, and reaching an agreement (Vermette, et al., 2004).

Critical Thinking and Creativity Skills. that making predictions and reasoning them, using evidence and different criteria when g when answering questions about opinions (such as did you like the story? Why?), distinguishing fact from opinion, and relating cause and effect (McGregor2007).

Social and Cultural skills. that is, discussing similarities and differences between groups, talking about others cultures, (Jonsons 2002), naming feelings and expressing them properly, naming others' feelings after listening to them, working in groups and respecting the rules of group work, using courtesy words when speaking with others, asking for help when needed, and negotiating faced conflicts (Cartledge & Klee 2009).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents with the methodology that was used to explore the design process and content of grade one Lebanese Official Arabic Curriculum. The review of literature on curriculum reveals different models that can be used to evaluate, describe, and explore the curriculum. In this study, a framework adopted for exploration was constructed by the researcher based on the results and recommendations from the available international literature on curriculum design and approaches and competencies for language teaching. The study followed the qualitative approach and methods. In this chapter, the research questions are identified, qualitative and exploration studies are defined, and the rationale behind choosing them is presented. Then the exploration criteria derived from the framework is presented, sources of data and, tools of data collection methods of data analysis are described, and finally the quality criteria for qualitative inquiry is explained.

Research Questions

This qualitative evaluative study answered the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the design process of the currently designed Grade One Arabic curriculum, developed by CERD, match theoretical models of curriculum design (forward design, central design, backward design)?
2. To what extent does the content of the currently applied Grade One Arabic Curriculum, developed by CERD, cover language arts areas (reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, viewing, visual representation, and spelling) proposed by Cox (2008)?

3. To what extent does the content of the currently applied Grade One Arabic Curriculum, developed by CERD, cover twenty first century skills (digital literacy, communication skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and social and cultural skills) proposed by Voogt and Roblin (2012)?

Qualitative Research

Merriam (2009) explains that in qualitative studies, researchers aim to understand the meaning that people construct about their experience, while simultaneously accounting for the nature of the context that constitutes the setting for the studies phenomena. The process of this research is inductive where the researcher, who is the main source of data, gathers data and analyzes it, deriving categories, concepts, theories, and hypotheses aiming at deep understanding. In contrary to the quantitative research, it does seek to generalize cause and effect relations (Litchman, 2006). The product of such study is descriptive where the researcher uses mainly narratives with words and pictures instead of numbers to convey the findings. Strauss and Corbin (1998; 2008) believe that qualitative research seeks deep understanding, generates theories that are used to deeply and better understand a phenomenon which is little known, and can produce new perspectives of already known concepts. It is used to understand how and why things happen, and to understand limited cases in depth (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Qualitative research can involve observations in social settings, document analysis and in depth interviews.

The research questions of this study aim to investigate in depth how the curriculum was designed, to gain a deep understanding of the experiences that occurred when designing the curriculum from the perspectives of the people who were closely

involved in this process. It does not aim to test or prove a hypothesis, or study a relationship among variables. Therefore, the qualitative methodology was the methodology of choice.

Exploratory Research

Salkind (2010) defines exploratory research as the research that occurs when little is known about a certain event or phenomenon. Babbie (2010) believes that exploratory studies occur to satisfy the curiosity of the researcher about a certain topic, to examine the feasibility of conducting further studies, and to develop the methods that will be used in further studies. Rubin and Robbie (2010) believe that exploratory research is mandatory when the researcher is breaking new ground, and it is a source for grounded theory. Slack and Parent (2006) explain that forming a theoretical framework- derived from literature- in such studies, could guide the research design since it provides the researcher with its key concepts, and serves as a guide for data collection and analysis. In this study, a conceptual framework was constructed based on literature review in order to answer the three research question, and criteria were derived from it. These criteria were used to explore the design process and content of the curriculum.

Exploring the Design Process of the Curriculum

The curriculum design process was explored, through interviews with the designers, to determine the components that it covers and to examine the extent the curriculum designers included the components of the curriculum as specified in the adopted models from the literature, these address, learning competencies, assessment tools, and teaching methodologies. Similarly, the design process was explored to determine the steps and their sequence that the designers followed in the process of building the design. In

other words, the study examined which elements the designers specified first, second and third, and to what extent does this sequence match the sequence of the design models introduced in literature, which are the forward design, the central design, and the backward design (Richards, 2013). The design process was also examined to determine the manner in which and the extent to which needs analysis, which is considered as an essential step before designing the curriculum (Brown, 1995), and empirical evidence proves this, was conducted before designing the curriculum.

Exploring the Content of the Curriculum

The content was explored to determine to what extent it covered language arts areas proposed by Cox (2008), and twenty first century skills that were recognized in Voogt and Roblin (2012) meta-analysis of studies on twenty first century skills.

Methods of Data Collection.

The three research questions were answered using data collected through qualitative methods. The first research question was answered through individual group interviews conducted with the curriculum designers from CERD who were involved in designing grade one Arabic Curriculum. The second and third research questions were answered through document analysis that were guided by a checklist based on the criteria that were derived from literature and adopted in the previous chapter.

Criteria for Exploration

In the previous chapter, a framework for curriculum design was developed based on literature review and empirical evidence, and criteria for examination were extracted. Boujaoude (2002) study on evaluating the Lebanese Science curriculum to investigate the balance of scientific literacy themes, Stein and Kinder (2004) study on

evaluating the mathematics curriculum, and Baker (2003) study on evaluating internet-based distance learning course to determine if different levels of Bloom's taxonomy are addressed in it were reviewed and informed the design of the process of examining the curriculum that was used in this study. The study tried to identify the framework that the designers based the curriculum design on; both for content and process. Marsh (2004) cited in Al-Jardani (2012) believes that curriculum evaluation frameworks allow the curriculum to become more coherent, lead to a high quality curriculum development, and allow the addition of new content to the curriculum.

For the purpose the data analysis was guided by a framework that the researcher constructed based on literature review where specific topics were formed in order to address the evaluation points as in Stein and Kinder (2004) study, or specific model such as Bloom's taxonomy in Baker's (2003) study or Chiapetta et al. (1991) model that was used in Boujaoude (2002) study. Then the researcher compared the criteria to the content of the curriculum. As per the qualitative interpretive approach the researcher held the theoretical categories provisionally, and added to the theoretical criteria any theme or category that emerged.

The framework developed in this study includes three sets of criteria.

The first set of the criteria is concerned with the design process of the curriculum, and was used to examine data related to the design process. The criteria of design are included in Appendix A. The second and third set of the developed criteria were developed to examine data concerning the content of the curriculum. The second section of criteria, presented in Appendix B, was concerned with exploring the presence of language arts area proposed by Cox (2008) in the curriculum. The third section of the criteria, presented in Appendix C,

was concerned with exploring the presence of twenty first century skills proposed by Voogt and Roblin (2012). The content of the curriculum was compared to these criteria and evidence from the curriculum was included. Expert in the field were consulted to examine the clarity as well as the comprehensiveness of the criteria and their feedback was used to refine these criteria.

Sources of Data

In this qualitative study, different sources of data were used in order to answer the three research questions and get relevant data. The sources of data for the first research question were curriculum designers from CERD who were involved in designing Grade One Arabic Curriculum. The sources of data for the second and third research questions were the curriculum documents collected from CERD.

Curriculum Designers

The first source of data was the curriculum designers who were responsible for designing grade one Arabic Curriculum. They were interviewed in order to receive data from them related to curriculum definition, conducting needs analysis, and the design process that was followed to design this curriculum. There is no documentation that indicates who was involved in the process, the researcher interviewed six CERD members who formed the committee of designing Grade One Arabic Curriculum.

Curriculum Documents

The second source of data that were used to answer the second and third research questions were the curriculum documents collected from CERD. These curriculum documents are: the curriculum document that includes learning objectives, the textbook, the workbook, teachers guide, and assessment guide.

Tools for Data Collection

Two different tools were used in this study in order to collect data and answer the three research questions.

Interviews

In order to answer the first research question, semi- structured individual interviews were conducted with curriculum designers from CERD who were involved in designing Grade One Arabic curriculum to make inquiries about the design process that was used to design this curriculum. Seidman (2012) believes that interviews serve as a basic mode of inquiry, and that they are used to understand others' experiences and perspectives, and the meaning they construct from these experiences. Bgoyce and Naele (2006) believe that interviews provide detailed information, and are used to explore the experiences, processes and outcomes of a specific program; they are useful when there is a need for in-depth information, and they offer a complete picture of what happened in a program.

These six individual semi-structured interviews allowed the designers to share their perspectives of the experience they went through when designing the curriculum. Bloom and Crabtree (2006) describe semi-structured interviews as a basic source of data in qualitative research; they can take place with an individual or group, where the group members share their experiences and knowledge about a subject. The interview questions were derived from the research question and guided by the first section of the criteria, related to the design process that was developed for this study. That is, curriculum designers were asked: to give their perspective on what components constitute a quality curriculum design, then they were asked about the process they followed to design and the

reason behind choosing the approach they followed. They were also asked if they conducted needs analysis before designing the curriculum and what instruments did they use, what elements did they include in the curriculum, and if they adopted a specific design model to design this curriculum. During the interview, the interview protocol developed by Harrell and Bradely (2009) was adopted. The individual interview questions are presented in Appendix D.

At the second stage, focus group interviews with the designers who were interviewed individually were decided to take place and the researchers was to present her findings on the same questions and ask for their input and invite a discussion to validate the data received from all the individual interviews. Rabiee (2004) describes focus group interviews as in-depth interviews where the selection of participants is purposeful. This interview did not take place based on interviewed curriculum designers' recommendations.

Developed Criteria as Guidelines for Content Analysis

The theoretical framework and the criteria developed for this study served as guidelines for the content analysis to direct the researcher of what data to look at when reviewing the content of curriculum. That is, when the researcher was checking the curriculum documents to determine if the areas of language arts adopted by Cox (2008) are covered in it, she was using the second section of criteria as guidelines that were leading her to determine if those areas are covered and if they are covered according to these criteria. The same process was used concerning the coverage of twenty first century skills in the curriculum.

Data Analysis

Interpretive analysis was used to analyze data collected for this research

study. According to Elliot and Timulak (2005), in interpretive analysis data received from interviews and other sources are prepared, and then transcribed; after that, the researcher delineates and process meaning units, that is, divide data into distinctive meaning units, which are parts of data that provide meaning to the reader. Elliot and Timulak (2005) add that those meaning units are then shortened where the researcher finds an overall organizing structure for the data. The grounded theory guided the data analysis in this study. At the first stage, theoretical categories were derived from data and compared to theoretical models in literature. At the second stage, the theoretical framework was adopted to code and categorize the data.

Analysis of Data Received from Interview.

The grounded theory methodology as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) guided analysis of the data obtained from the interviews. Charmaz (2006) defines grounded theory method for qualitative data analysis as systematic and flexible guidelines that are used to collect and analyze qualitative data in order to construct theoretical categories and propositions that are grounded in these data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that grounded theory is used in qualitative research to discover or build a theory through data analysis; the first step is data collection, then data is marked then with codes extracted from it and grouped into categories that allow theory construction. Suddaby (2006) states that Glaser and Strauss (1967) define the grounded theory as “a practical method for conducting research that focuses on the interpretive process by analyzing the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings” (p.633).

The analysis of data included three stages: in the first stage, open coding

took place where all data received from interviewees were categorized into core categories and subcategories, in the second stage, the selective coding stage, categories were organized by relationships and linked to each other, and in the last stage, the data sorted under the categories were compared with what is offered in literature (Jones & Alony, 2011). Hence, in this study, after interviewing the curriculum designers, data obtained was transcribed. The researcher then categorized it into previously developed categories derived from the framework developed for this study, and other categories emerged during the process. Then those categories were linked to each other and compared with the criteria that was developed to describe the design process of the curriculum.

Analysis of Content.

The content of the curriculum was examined based on the criteria that were developed from Cox (2008) areas of language arts and Voogt and Roblin (2012) meta-analysis of studies on twenty first century skills. Two checklists were developed for this purpose. The first checklist was designed to examine to what extent every language arts area is covered in the content of the curriculum, and the second was designed to examine to what extent every twenty first century skill is covered in the content of the curriculum. Each item of the checklists was ranked on a scale from one to three where one is “full evidence”, two is “partial evidence”, and three is “is no evidence”. If the skill is included in all documents, it was considered that there is full evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. If the skill is absent from at least one document, it was considered that there is partial evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. If the skill is not covered in any of the curriculum documents, it was considered that there is no evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. Descriptive notes were recorded for each criterion as evidence

to support the decision in order to ensure comprehensive and accurate results. Data that do not correspond to one of the categories were recorded and analyzed for additional themes. Checklists make judgment explicit, answer “how good” questions, increase the credibility and use of evaluation, make the judgment defensible, and sharpen the practice of evaluation (King, Mckegg, Oakden, & Wehipeihana, 2013). The checklists were prepared by the researcher. Experts in the field were consulted to ensure the quality of the checklist items. The checklist of language arts area is presented in Appendix B, and that for twenty first century skills is presented in Appendix C.

Quality Criteria

In order to evaluate the quality of the qualitative data collected and analyzed, the two researchers involved in the study coded the data to validate the results obtained, and validated the coding. The results were only reported when the two researchers agreed on every result reported, and used evidence, by referring to literature, in order to support the research findings. Moreover, a framework for evaluating the quality of qualitative data was adopted. Spencer (2003) states that he reviewed literature and the 29 available qualitative evaluation frameworks to develop a framework that ensures that policy makers and evaluators will have a tool that allows them to use high quality qualitative research with confidence. A set of guidelines compiled from Spencer (2003) were used in this study to ensure the quality of the study design and results. These guidelines are presented below.

Study Findings

Appraisal Questions	Quality Indicators (possible features for consideration)
<p>How credible are the findings?</p>	<p>Findings/conclusions are supported by data/study evidence (the reader can see how the researcher arrived at his/her conclusions; the ‘building blocks’ of analysis and interpretation are evident). Findings/conclusions make sense and have a coherent logic. Findings/conclusions are resonant with other knowledge and experience (this might include peer or member review). Use of corroborating evidence to support or refine findings (other data sources have been used to examine phenomena; other research evidence has been evaluated).</p>
<p>How has knowledge/ understanding been extended by the research?</p>	<p>Literature review (where appropriate) summarizing knowledge to date/key issues raised by previous research.</p> <p>Aims and design of study set in the context of existing knowledge/understanding; identifies new areas for investigation (for example, in relation to policy/practice/ substantive theory).</p> <p>Credible/clear discussion of how findings have contributed to knowledge and understanding (program or theory being reviewed); might be applied to new policy developments, practice or theory.</p> <p>Findings presented or conceptualized in a way that offers new</p>

	insights/alternative ways of thinking.
	Discussion of limitations of evidence and what remains unknown/unclear or what further information/research is needed.

How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purpose?	<p>Clear statement of study aims and objectives; reasons for any changes in objectives.</p> <p>Findings clearly linked to the purposes of the study and to the initiative or policy being studied.</p> <p>Summary or conclusions directed towards aims of study.</p> <p>Discussion of limitations of study in meeting aims (are there limitations because of restricted access to study settings or participants, gaps in the sample coverage, missed or unresolved areas of questioning; incomplete analysis; time constraints).</p>
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Scope for drawing wider inference.	Discussion of what can be generalized to wider population from which sample is drawn and case selection has been made.
How well is this explained?	<p>Detailed description of the contexts in which the study was conducted to allow applicability to other settings/contextual generalities to be assessed.</p> <p>Discussion of how hypotheses/ propositions/findings may relate to wider theory; consideration of rival explanations.</p> <p>Evidence supplied to support claims for wider inference (either from study or from corroborating sources).</p> <p>Discussion of limitations on drawing wider inference (re-examination of sample and any missing constituencies:</p>

	analysis of restrictions of study settings for drawing wider inference).
How clear is the basis of evaluative appraisal?	<p>Discussion of how assessments of effectiveness/evaluative judgments have been reached (whose judgments are they and on what basis have they been reached?)</p> <p>Description of any formalized appraisal criteria used, when generated and how and by whom they have been applied.</p> <p>Discussion of the nature and source of any divergence in evaluative appraisals.</p> <p>Discussion of any unintended consequences of intervention, their impact and why they arose.</p>
How defensible is the research design?	<p>Discussion of how overall research strategy was designed to meet aims of study.</p> <p>Discussion of rationale for study design.</p> <p>Convincing argument for different features of research design (e.g. reasons given for different components or stages of research; purpose of particular methods or data sources, multiple methods, and time frames.)</p> <p>Use of different features of design/data sources evident in findings presented.</p> <p>Discussion of limitations of research design and their implications for the study evidence.</p>

Sample

How well defended is the sample design/target selection of cases/documents?	<p>Description of study locations/areas and how and why chosen.</p> <p>Description of population of interest and how sample selection relates to it (typical, extreme case, diverse constituencies)</p> <p>Rationale for basis of selection of target sample/settings/documents (characteristics/features of target sample/settings/documents, basis for inclusions and exclusions, discussion of sample size/number of cases/setting selected).</p> <p>Discussion of how sample/selections allowed required comparisons to be made.</p>
Sample composition/case inclusion. How well is the eventual coverage described?	<p>Detailed profile of achieved sample/case coverage.</p> <p>Maximizing inclusion (language matching or translation; specialized recruitment; organized transport for group attendance).</p> <p>Discussion of any missing coverage in achieved samples/cases and implications for study evidence (through comparison of target and achieved samples, and comparison with population).</p> <p>Documentation of reasons for non-participation among sample approached/non-inclusion of selected cases/documents.</p> <p>Discussion of access and methods of approach and how these might have affected participation/coverage.</p>

Data

How well was the data collection carried out?	<p>Discussion of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• who conducted data collection• procedures/documents used for collection/recording• checks on origin/status/authorship of documents <p>Audio or video recording of interviews/discussions/conversations (if not recorded, were justifiable reasons given?)</p> <p>Description of conventions for taking field notes (to identify what form of observations were required/to distinguish description from researcher commentary/analysis).</p> <p>Discussion of how fieldwork methods or settings may have influenced data collected.</p> <p>Demonstration, through portrayal and use of data, that depth, detail and richness were achieved in collection.</p>
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Analysis

How well has the approach to and formulation of the analysis been conveyed?	Description of form of original data (use of verbatim transcripts, observation or interview notes, and documents). Clear rationale for choice of data management method/tool/package. Evidence of how descriptive analytic categories, classes, labels etc. have been generated and used (either through explicit discussion or portrayal in the commentary). Discussion, with examples, of how any constructed analytic concepts/typologies have been devised and applied.
Contexts of data sources: How well are they retained and portrayed?	Description of background or historical developments and social/organizational characteristics of study sites or settings. Participants' perspectives/observations placed in personal context (use of case studies/vignettes/individual profiles, textual extracts annotated with details of contributors). Explanation of origins/history of written documents. Use of data management methods that preserve context (facilitate within case description and analysis)
How well has diversity of perspective and content been explored?	Discussion of contribution of sample design/case selection in generating diversity. Description and illumination of diversity/multiple perspectives/alternative positions in the evidence displayed. Evidence of attention to negative cases, outliers or

exceptions.

Typologies/models of variation derived and discussed.

Examination of origins/influences on opposing or differing positions.

Identification of patterns of association/linkages with divergent positions/groups.

How well has detail, depth and complexity of the data been conveyed?

Use and exploration of contributors' terms, concepts and meanings. Discussion of explicit and implicit explanations.

Detection of underlying factors/influences.

Identification and discussion of patterns of association/conceptual linkages within data.

Presentation of illuminating textual extracts/observations.

Reporting

How clear are the links between data, interpretation and conclusions? How well can the route to any conclusions be seen?

Clear conceptual links between analytic commentary and presentations of original data (commentary and cited data relate; there is an analytic context to cited data, not simply repeated description).

Discussion of how/why particular interpretation/significance is assigned to specific aspects of data – with illustrative extracts of original data.

	<p>Discussion of how explanations/ theories/conclusions were derived, and how they relate to interpretations and content of original data; whether alternative explanations explored.</p> <p>Display of negative cases and how they lie outside main proposition/theory/ hypothesis etc.; or how proposition etc. revised to include them.</p>
<p>How clear and coherent is the reporting?</p>	<p>Demonstrates link to aims of study/research questions. Provides a narrative/story or clearly constructed thematic account. Has structure and signposting that usefully guide reader through the commentary.</p> <p>Provides accessible information for intended target audience(s).</p> <p>Key messages highlighted or summarized.</p>

Reflexivity and Neutrality

How clear are the assumptions/theoretical perspectives/values that have shaped the form and output of the evaluation?

Discussion/evidence of the main assumptions/hypotheses/theoretical ideas on which the evaluation was based and how these affected the form, coverage or output of the evaluation (the assumption here is that no research is undertaken without some underlying assumptions or theoretical ideas).

Discussion/evidence of the ideological perspectives/ values/ philosophies of research team and their impact on the methodological or substantive content of the evaluation (again, may not be explicitly stated).

Evidence of openness to new/ alternative ways of viewing subject/ theories/assumptions (discussion of learning/ concepts/ constructions that have emerged from the data; refinement restatement of hypotheses/theories in light of emergent findings; evidence that alternative claims have been examined).

Discussion of how error or bias may have arisen in design/data collection/analysis and how addressed, if at all.

Reflections on the impact of the researcher on the research process.

Ethics

What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues?	Evidence of thoughtfulness /sensitivity about research contexts and participants. Documentation of how research was presented in study settings/to participants (including, where relevant, any possible consequences of taking part). Documentation of consent procedures and information provided to participants. Discussion of confidentiality of data and procedures for protecting. Discussion of how anonymity of participants/sources was protected. Discussion of any measures to offer information/advice/services at end of study. Discussion of potential harm or difficulty through participation, and how avoided.
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CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study was designed to explore the design process and content of Grade One Arabic Curriculum. The study has three purposes: (1) identify to what extent does the design process of the currently designed grade one Arabic curriculum match theoretical models of curriculum design generated from literature review (forward design, central design, backward design); (2) identify to what extent do competencies covered by the currently used Grade One Arabic curriculum match all components of language arts (reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, viewing, visual representation, and spelling) proposed by Cox (2008); and (3) identify to what extent does the content of the currently used Grade One Arabic curriculum cover the following skills: digital literacy, communication skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and social and cultural skills that are described as essential for the twenty first century (Voogt and Roblin ,2012).

The following chapter reports the findings under three sections. The first section describes the design process that was used by curriculum designers to design the 2009 Grade One Arabic Curriculum. The second section describes the presences of language arts areas in the 1997 Grade One Arabic Curriculum; and the third section describes the presence of twenty first century skills in the 1997 Grade One Arabic Curriculum.

The Design Process of the Curriculum

According to data retrieved from CERD, eight people formed the committee

that was responsible for Grade One Arabic Curriculum. The researcher contacted them and was able to take the approval of six designers to conduct an interview with them. The six designers were interviewed following the individual interview protocol presented in Appendix D. It will be referred to interviewees as: interviewee A, interviewee B, Interviewee C, Interviewee D, interviewee E, and interviewee F.

Data received from interviews was transcribed and categorized into previously developed categories derived from the framework adopted for this study. Data was then compared to criteria presented in Appendix A to describe interviewees understanding of a curriculum and the design process that was used to design the 2009 Grade One Arabic Curriculum. When the criterion was stated in all interviewees responses, it was considered that there is full evidence in the responses of interviewees. If the criterion was absent from at least one document, it was considered that there is partial evidence in the responses of interviewees. If the criterion is not covered in any of the responses, it was considered that there is no evidence in the responses of interviewees. What follows is a presentation of the results of the study.

The Definition of the Curriculum

This study adopted the following definition of the curriculum. The curriculum is a set of learning competencies that need to be mastered by students; it covers the content that needs to be taught, teaching methodologies, assessment evidence, and professional development aspects. (Squirres,2009); it extends outside the school to encompass experiences that students encounter outside the school setting (Taylor,2004).

Table 1

Curriculum Designers Definition of Curriculum

Criteria	Full evidence in responses	Partial evidence in responses	No evidence in responses
Learning competencies.	6 interviewees		
Content.	6 interviewees		
Assessment tools.	6 interviewees		
Professional development			0 interviewees
Extends outside school.		2 interviewees	

The curriculum is learning competencies that need to be mastered. There is full evidence in the responses of the interviewees that the curriculum is viewed as comprising a set of learning competencies that should be covered. The six interviewees gave this definition to the curriculum. They believe that the main component of any curriculum is its competencies and the major focus when developing any curriculum should be on the competencies that will help the students to build knowledge. For example, interviewee A believes that the learning objectives constitute the main component of the curriculum. Therefore, the effective design process of the curriculum should include designing learning objectives”. Interviewee B believes that in order to design any curriculum, you need to set first the learning competencies that are the major component of any curriculum.”

All other interviewees mentioned in their responses that learning competencies

or objectives that students need to master are a major component of any curriculum, and that curriculum designers should think thoroughly of these competencies when designing any curriculum.

The curriculum covers the content that needs to be taught. There is full evidence in the responses of the interviewees that the curriculum needs to cover the content that needs to be taught to the students and described this content as textbooks and other books that students need to use inside the classroom. They believe that after the curriculum designers set the learning competencies, they need to develop the content that needs to be taught. That is, the committee responsible for designing the curriculum should meet to choose themes that need to be covered, and develop lessons related to these themes. For example, interviewee F stated:

“After curriculum designers set the learning competencies that need to be covered in the curriculum, their role becomes developing the content where they choose themes according to grade level and develop content related to them; this content is reflected through textbooks and other learning materials such as the educational guide and workbooks. This content should reflect real life situations and reflect the culture of the society”.

All other interviews share the same opinion. For example, interviewee C explained that designing the curriculum is a complex procedure where developing the content should be one of its steps.

The curriculum covers assessment tools. There is full evidence in the responses of the interviewees that the curriculum has to cover assessment tools. All six interviewees mentioned that assessment evidence are a part of the curriculum. Interviewee

A believes that assessment tools that need to be used with students are part of the curriculum. He stated:

“When the committee responsible for designing the curriculum meets to set the curriculum, designers need to agree on the assessment tools that need to be developed for this curriculum in order to measure students’ abilities in achieving the competencies of the curriculum.”

The curriculum covers professional development aspects. There is no evidence in the responses of the interviewees that the curriculum needs to cover professional development aspects. None of the interviewees mentioned in their answers that professional development needed to be part of the curriculum. They did not state that topics or processes of professional development need to be covered in the curriculum when designing it.

The curriculum extends outside the school. There is partial evidence in the responses of the interviewees that the curriculum extends outside the school to include experiences that students face outside their school setting. Two out of six interviewees believe that the curriculum needs to cover topics that students need in their life and to face real life situations. Those interviewees believe that the content of the curriculum should focus on real life situations in order for students to face life successfully. For example, interviewee F stated that curriculum need to cover issues related to our society in order to train students to deal with them. Interviewee A shares the same perspective, and believes that the curriculum needs to be based on real life situations. It is not just a set of learning competencies. The content should allow students to face real life situations”.

Conducting Needs Analysis before Designing the Curriculum

The theoretical basis adopted for this study indicates that curriculum designers need to conduct needs analysis before designing any curriculum, and that there are specific tools such as questionnaires and interviews that they need to use in order to conduct this analysis. Thus, when curriculum designers involved in this study were interviewed, they were asked if they conducted a needs analysis before designing the curriculum and what tools they used.

Table 2

Curriculum Designers' Views on Conducting Needs Analysis

Criteria	Full evidence in responses	Partial evidence in responses	No evidence in responses
Designers conducted needs analysis.	6 interviewees		
Designers used tools recognized in literature to conduct needs analysis.	6 interviewees		

The curriculum designers conducted needs analysis. There is full evidence in the interviewees' responses that curriculum designers conducted needs analysis before designing the curriculum. All six interviewees mentioned that they conducted needs analysis before they started in designing the curriculum. For example, interviewee B stated that the committee agreed to conduct needs analysis to identify teachers' needs by asking questions and distributing questionnaires; and found that teachers

are insisting on including social aspects in the curriculum in addition to academic aspects. Interviewee A stated that before designing this curriculum needs analysis was conducted and the content of this curriculum based on the needs analysis results.

Tools recognized in literature were used to conduct needs analysis. There is full evidence in the interviewees' responses that curriculum designers used tools recognized in literature such as interviews and questionnaires in order to conduct needs analysis. Three out of those curriculum designers are trainers from CERD who train public school teachers on different concepts. Thus, during those training they interviewed teachers to understand their needs and distributed prepared questionnaires that focus on inquiring about the needs and the concerns of the teachers regarding the curriculum. The questionnaires were prepared by the curriculum design committee. Interviewee F stated:

“The training sessions that we conduct for teachers helped us in identifying their needs concerning the topics they want to include in the curriculum and others they want to eliminate. During these trainings we interviewed teachers to identify their needs and concerns, and for the sake of designing this curriculum, we distributed questionnaires that focus on analyzing their needs. Teachers stated that they need to work with a curriculum that addresses real life situations that students face, and to use language and include stories that make sense to students”.

The Design Process of the Curriculum

It was explained in this study that literature recognizes three different models for designing a language curriculum: the forward design, the central design, and the backward design (Richards, 2013). However, all these three curriculum design processes agree that designers need to set learning objectives of the curriculum, its content and

teaching methods, and the assessment tools. Thus, in this study, curriculum designers were asked if they included these elements when involved in the design process, and which component they included first, next and third.

Table 3

Curriculum Designers' Responses- Curriculum Design Process

Criteria	Full evidence in responses	Partial evidence in responses	No evidence in responses
Learning competencies.	6 interviewees		
Teaching methodologies.	6 interviewees		
Assessment tools	6 interviewees		

Competencies, assessments and teaching methodologies are included.

There was full evidence in the interviewee's responses that they included learning competencies, assessment evidence, and teaching methodologies when they were designing the curriculum. All interviewees explained that they started by setting the learning competencies of the curriculum, then they started developing the content of texts books and teachers guide that focuses on teaching methodologies, and they are in the process of designing the assessment guide. Interviewee A stated that the design process of the curriculum started by setting the learning competencies and objectives, designers developed then the content, and are now in the process of designing the assessment guide.

Design Steps Unique to the Lebanese Context

Analysis of the responses of the curriculum designers revealed aspects of the

curriculum design process that were not addressed in the Western theoretical model reviewed for this study. These unique aspects are presented below under the following emerging categories.

Consulting Western curricula: During the interview, interviewee D mentioned that Western Curricula were reviewed before developing this curriculum in order to enrich the curriculum design experience in Lebanon. Interviewee F also mentioned that the whole content of this curriculum is translated from models collected from a western country, She explained that the process of designing the curriculum involved adapting this model to fit the Lebanese culture.

Reviewing previous curriculum to avoid its gaps and misconceptions. It was evident in all interviewees responses that the current used curriculum was reviewed before starting to design the 2009 curriculum in order to identify all weaknesses and gaps and work on avoiding them in the newly designed curriculum. For example, interviewee C stated that 1997 curriculum was reviewed in order to identify its gaps, and it was noticed that it does not recognize real life situations and its very far; thus, work is done to avoid this gap in the newly design curriculum.

Including social and psychological aspects. It was clear during the interviews that curriculum designers worked on including social and psychological aspects in the new curriculum that were missed from the old curriculum. Interviewee E stated that one of the main aims of the new curriculum was including social and psychological aspects that allow first graders to interact successfully with their society.

It is concluded that the curriculum designers who were involved in

designing the currently designed Grade One Arabic Curriculum agree that the curriculum is a set of learning competencies that students need to master. They also viewed that the content needs to reflect these learning competencies, and the assessment evidence to measure if these skills are acquired. However, none of them recognized that professional development aspects are a section of the curriculum, and they all do not believe that the curriculum needs to extend outside the school setting to cover real life situations. Moreover, it was clear in all interviewees' responses that the design process of this curriculum included needs analysis where teachers were interviewed and questionnaires were distributed to them in order to study their needs and take them into consideration when designing the new curriculum. It was evident that the curriculum designers followed the curriculum elements that are mentioned in literature when designing any curriculum; these are: learning competencies, teaching methodologies, and assessment evidence. The curriculum designers started working on the curriculum by first assessing the needs. They then set the learning competencies, and followed this step by developing learning methodologies, and finally they prepared the assessment evidence. This implies that they used the forward design in designing the curriculum. In the central design, curriculum designers set learning objectives first, then learning methodologies, and finally assess outcomes (Richards,2013).

It was also clear that this newly designed curriculum accounted for the social and psychological aspects which were not included in the 1997 curriculum. Curriculum designers also reviewed the 1997 curriculum to avoid the gaps in this newly designed curriculum.

The Content of the Curriculum: Coverage of Language Arts Areas

The content of the 1997 Grade One Arabic Curriculum was reviewed to determine if it covers language arts areas proposed by Cox (2008). These are: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and visual representation, spelling and grammar. Curriculum documents were collected from CERD (the curriculum document that includes the learning objectives, the textbook that includes stories and reading comprehension questions, the workbook, the assessment guide that includes samples of assessment sheets, and a workbook that includes preparatory exercises that are supposed to be done at the beginning of the academic year before starting with the curriculum). These documents were examined, their content was analyzed and compared to the criteria of exploring the content of the curriculum presented in Appendix B. If the skill is included in all documents, it was considered that there is full evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. If the skill is absent from at least one document, it was considered that there is partial evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. If the skill is not covered in any of the curriculum documents, it was considered that there is no evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum.

Reading

First graders are supposed to acquire the following reading skills: decode words (Honig,2001), recall all letters of alphabet, understand letter-sound relationships, recognize beginning and end sounds, understand that print has meaning, recognize text events (Denton,2002), read books that have themes and episodes, answer comprehension questions, retell the events of the story, answer prediction questions, describe cause effect

relationships, and make connection between the book and personal experiences (Resnik and Hampton, 2009).

Table 4

Reading Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	No Evidence
Decode words.	X		
Recall all letters of alphabet.	X		
Understand letter-sound relationships.		X	
Recognize beginning and end sounds.			X
Understand that print has meaning.	X		
Recognize text events.	X		
Read books that have themes and episodes.		X	
Answer comprehension questions.	X		
Retell the events of the story.		X	
Answer prediction questions.			X
Describe cause effect relationships.			X
Make connection between the book and personal experiences.		X	

Decode and recognize words. Honig (2001) explains that decoding words happens when a student converts a printed word into a spoken form, and students are trained to decode words through asking them to read. There is full evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. Although the curriculum does not present explicitly an

explanation of how decoding words will be achieved in the first grade, there are learning objectives in the curriculum document that are related to decode words since students are asked to read the words aloud. For example, the following objective is included under the reading section in the curriculum document: الوصل بين الكلمات في أثناء قراءة الجملة. In order for students to connect between the words to read the sentence, they need to decode these words. Moreover, the educational guide includes a section that explains to the teacher the strategies that need to be followed during reading classes. One of the activities that are suggested for teaching reading: يكتب المعلم الكلمات على اللوح ويطلب من تلاميذه أن يقرأوها. Thus, those students will be decoding those words in order for them to read it. As for the textbook, every lesson includes a set of sentences that address a certain topic. Moreover, the workbook and assessment guide include questions that students need to read independently in order to answer, as explained in the educational guide. In the educational guide, it is explained under the teaching strategies that students are supposed to read these sentences, and since Honig (2001) asserts that decoding words occurs when students are asked to read this competency is considered covered in the curriculum.

Recall all letters of alphabet. There is full evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. The curriculum document includes learning objectives that ask students to recognize letters of alphabet: التعرف إلى الحروف بصرياً أو في صورة. / كتابة الحروف. Schultze (2008) explains that وأصواتها القصيرة والطويلة، منفصلة ومتصلة وبحسب موقعها في الجملة. teaching letters of alphabet occurs when children read stories that target these letters. In the textbook, every story is coupled with a letter that students are supposed to learn, and most of the words in the story include this letter. Under teaching strategies in the educational guide, it is stated that students need to learn this letter with its sounds and shapes from the

التعرّف بالحرف (س) وأصواته القصيرة والطويلة سمعًا ولفظًا وشكلًا وكتابةً من خلال جمل: words of the story: القصة وكلماتها. Indeed, the workbook includes a set of learning activities about letters of alphabet. For example, students are asked among other things to write the letter with its sounds, fill in the blanks with its correct shapes (words are taken from stories in textbook), circle the letter in the word (words are taken from stories in textbook).

Woods and McLemore (2001) explain that students learn the letters of alphabet when they name them, write them, and match letters to their sounds. In the workbook, there are sufficient activities where students are asked to write the letters, and match words to the appropriate sounds. In every lesson in the workbook, there is a question where students are asked to write the letter with its long and short sounds and fill in the blanks with the appropriate shape of the letter. Examination of the curriculum's documents show that all the letters of the alphabet are covered.

Understand letter-sound relationships. Balajthy and Wade (2003)

explains that teaching sound-letter relationships occurs when teachers choose a reading selection that has words that include the letter to be taught and read it, then ask students to locate words that include this letter or pattern and read it. There is partial evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. There are learning objectives in the curriculum document that ask students to relate letter to their sounds. سماع أصوات الحروف ولفظها وتمييز صورها. إعطاء كلمات يعرفها تحتوي الأصوات المطلوبة، ثم تمييز هذه الأصوات في كلمة موجودة في جملة قصيرة. تحديد موقع الصوت من الكلمة ورسمه

These learning objectives are reflected in the textbook, educational guide and workbook. The textbook includes different reading selections, and with every reading selection there is a letter that students are supposed to learn. In the educational guide, it is explained that

teachers are supposed to read this selection and explain about the letter to the students, and then ask students to read it. Moreover, the workbook includes exercises where students are asked to match between sounds of a specific letter and words that include these sounds. For every letter, there is this kind of activity. This activity is repeated in every single lesson in the workbook. Such activities are not included in the assessment guide.

Recognize beginning and end-sound. Rhyner (2009) explains that teaching this skill occurs when: students are asked to sort pictures or words according to their beginning or end sounds, teachers spell words and ask students to write their beginning or end sounds, and when teachers give students beginning or end sounds and asked students to form words that include them. There is no evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. There is no learning objective that explains that students are asked to recognize the beginning and end sounds. Moreover, the workbook, textbook, and assessment guide do- not include any activity where students are asked to recognize the beginning and end sound. Activities that ask students to sort words based on their beginning or end sounds, form words based on the beginning or end sounds, or to specify the beginning or end sounds of a word are not evident. The educational guide as well does not include explanation that show that teachers are supposed to do such activities.

Understand that print has meaning. Burke(2010) explains that children become able to understand that print has meaning when they are engaged in reading and writing activities. There is full evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. The curriculum includes learning objectives that target reading and writing, and they are reflected through different activities in other curriculum material. The curriculum document includes the following learning objectives under the reading and writing

sections:

التعبير بجملة عن المعنى الذي فهمه من القصة التي قرأها.

كتابة جملة انطلاقاً من مدلول صورة.

الرّبط بين الصّورة واسمها. These objectives are reflected in activities in the workbook, where first graders are asked to answer questions related to the story they read in the textbook, match between the picture and the correct sentence, and write sentences that express a picture. Orlando (2010) believes that children understand that print has meaning when they are exposed to different forms of print such as texts, visuals, and symbols and interpret them; and when they start using these prints to convey their messages. In the examined curriculum, first graders are required to read texts in their textbooks, interpret them by answering the reading comprehension questions that follow them, interpret pictures by writing sentences that express them, and use sentences and drawing to express themselves. There are activities in both workbook and assessment guide that ask students to draw pictures and write sentences that express their feelings, thoughts, and interests.

Recognize text events. Almasi (2003) states that students are able to recognize text events when they answer questions related to identifying characters, settings, problems and their solutions, and goals of characters. There is full evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. Stories or texts in the textbooks are followed by comprehension questions that target characters and problem of the story. The workbook includes these questions as well. Moreover, the educational guide includes questions that focus on characters, settings, problems and their solutions, and goals of characters. In fact, it is explained in the educational guide that students are expected to answer those questions correctly when the teacher is reading aloud the stories and texts in the textbooks and

explaining them. The assessment guide includes texts that students or teachers need to read and are followed by questions that focus on characters, problem of the story, setting.

Examples of such questions are:

من هي منى؟ وكيف تعود إلى بيتها؟

ماذا قرّرت هالة أن تكون في المستقبل؟

Read books that have themes and episodes. There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The curriculum document, textbook, workbook, assessment guide, and educational guide do not suggest titles of stories and books that have themes and are episodic that first graders are supposed to read. It is explained in the educational guide that first graders are supposed to read texts in their textbooks and in the assessment guide. The textbook includes eight units. Each unit has the title of a theme, and each unit include up to five or six stories that discusses a theme. However, the stories of the same unit are not episodic. Each story has different settings and characters, and discusses different topics that focus on the same theme. Episodic stories use the same characters and settings (Ames, 2012). For example, the first unit which is titled البيئة والغذاء includes different stories. The main characters of the first story are “Sary and Waddad” and they go in a trip to the valley. The main characters of the characters of the second story are two different children and the story takes place in the house of one of them.

Answer comprehension questions. Fredericks (2010) explains that comprehension questions are those questions that ask students to bring different bits of information in the text and put them in one group or category, rather than recalling information. Fredericks (2010) adds that such questions require giving descriptions, using

own words, discussing, explaining, and comparing. There is full evidence that this skill is evident in the curriculum. The curriculum document includes a learning objective that asks students to answer questions related to a text correctly: الإجابة عن أسئلة النَّصِّ إجابة تامة وصحيحة.

This skill is reflected in the other curriculum documents: the textbook, workbook, assessment guide and educational guide. Those questions require students to: describe, use their own words, compare and discuss as indicated by Fredericks (2010).

Examples of such questions from the textbook are لماذا تسلّم نبيل الدّكان وحده؟

Examples from the assessment guide are:

هل أعجبتك أعمال أمّ سامر؟ ما الذي أعجبك فيها؟

كيف عرفت أنّ نبيل هو الخبّاز؟

The answers of these questions require students to synthesize in order to give explanations because answers are not located directly in the texts.

Retell the events of the story. Bergeron and Wolff (2002) explain that teachers train their students to retell story events by asking them to fill charts that tackle story events, or by rearranging the story events through puzzles or other activities. There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. Although there are learning objectives that ask students to retell the events of the story, these objectives are not reflected in any other curriculum document. The following three learning objectives are stated in the curriculum document: إعادة رواية حكاية سمعها المتعلّم.

إعادة ترتيب قصّة مصوّرة قرأها على بطاقات بحسب تسلسل أحداثها.

إعادة سرد قصّة قرأها في ثلاث جمل. The curriculum documents (textbook, workbook, educational guide and assessment guide) do not include any activity where students are asked to fill charts related to story events, or to rearrange story event through an activity.

Answer prediction questions. McGee and Morrow (2005) explain that prediction questions are those that are asked during reading when students need to predict upcoming events in the story, predict behavior of characters and what they will do beyond the story, and infer what characters are thinking and feeling. There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The curriculum document does not include any learning objective that asks first graders to answer prediction questions. The term أسئلة التّوقّع is not included in any learning objective in the curriculum. The educational guide does not explain that the teachers need to stop during reading and ask students to predict upcoming events in the story, predict behavior of characters and what they will do beyond the story, and infer what characters are thinking and feeling. The textbook, workbook, and assessment guide as well lack questions that allow students to predict.

Describe cause-effect relationships. Johnson (2008) explains that describing a cause-effect relationship occurs when students are giving a cause and asked to identify its effect or vice versa. Cohen and Cowen (2011) explain that children can describe cause-effect relationships by locating clue words such as because, as a result of, and reason for. There is no evidence that this skill is being targeted in the curriculum. The curriculum document does not include any evidence that students are asked to relate a cause to its effect or vice versa. There is no learning objective that asks students to: يربط بين السّبب والنتيجة. Moreover, the textbook and the workbook do not offer students the opportunity to answer questions where they can identify a cause or an effect by locating clue words, and the educational does not explain to teachers that they need to train their students to locate clue words in order to answer cause-effect relationships. There are no questions in the textbook, workbook, and assessment guide such as: يبيّن السّبب الذي أدّى إلى.... / حدّد نتيجة.... The

educational guide does not include a section that explains to teachers about the strategies they need to teach to their students in order to describe cause-effect relationships.

Make connections between book and personal experiences. Benson (2008) explain that making connection between the book and personal experience occurs by relating the content of the text to personal knowledge; it occurs when teachers ask their students to discuss experiences they encountered and compare them to similar experiences of story's characters. There is partial evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. This objective is not stated explicitly in the curriculum document; however, the teaching procedures that are explained in the educational guide give students the opportunity to achieve this skill.

In the educational guide, there is a section titled خطوات الدرس that explains how each lesson should be explained. This section includes a sub section titled محادثة تمهيدية which includes a set of questions that the teacher needs to ask to the students. These questions are related to the topic of the lesson and at the same time to the experiences of the learner. For example, in a story titled في بستان العم رشيد which talks about children's trip to a garden to explore the fruits that are planted there, the section محادثة تمهيدية offers the following questions:

ما هي أصناف الفاكهة التي تحب؟

هل سبق أن زرت بُسْتَانًا؟ أخبرنا عن ذلك. In such types of questions, the teacher would be exploring students' background and their personal experiences which are related to the topic of the story.

In addition to those skills, the reading comprehension section in

the curriculum document includes a subsection titled: المحفوظات والاستظهار. It includes learning objectives that asks students to memorize a poem and recite it using an appropriate voice tone and body gesture. Poems are included at the end of the textbook. Moore and Wright (2009) explain that poetry helps early grade students to develop reading for pleasure and listening skills; it improves their understanding of language and using words effectively. This allows us to say that if these poems are taught in the classroom, first graders will gain the skill of reading for pleasure, understand language, and use words effectively.

In sum, the criteria used for exploring the content of this curriculum includes twelve reading skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. Nine out of these twelve skills were proved to be covered in the studied curriculum. That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 75% of the reading comprehension skills that it is supposed to cover. These skills are related to phonics, phonemic awareness (decode words, recognize letters of alphabets, understand letter sound relationships) and comprehension (understand that print has meaning, recognize text events, answer comprehension questions).

Writing

Based on the criteria selected for this study, first graders are supposed to acquire the following writing skills: hold writing tools properly, form letters correctly, separate words by spaces, produce a piece of writing that has at least three sentences that are related to the same topic, use descriptive words in the writing pieces, use emotion words in their writing pieces (Rose ,2001), plan for writing by producing several drafts, and proof read and edit writing by following learned proofreading skills (Fingeret et al., 2007).

Table 5

Writing Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	No Evidence
Hold writing tools properly.		X	
Form letters correctly.	X		
Separate words by spaces.		X	
Produce writing piece with three sentences.		X	
Use descriptive words.		X	
Use emotion words.			X
Plan for writing by several drafts.			X
Proof read and edits writing.			X

Hold writing tools properly. Flora (2006) explains that teachers are urged to train their preschool and first grade students to hold writing tools properly; teachers need to use the following techniques with their students: use pencil grips, align papers parallel to the side of the hand that the student uses to write, help students in holding the pencil between the right fingers. There is partial evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. The curriculum document includes the following learning objective: *يمسك القلم بطريقة صحيحة* under the writing section; however, this skill is not reflected in any other curriculum document. The educational guide does not include a section or activity that explains to the teacher how to help students achieve this skill. Moreover, there is no

activity in the workbook, textbook, or assessment guide that models to students the proper use of the pencil or any other writing tool.

Form letters correctly. Foster (2010) explains that students are trained to form letters correctly when they are taught to copy the letters correctly and are supervised while doing this activity. Foster (2010) states that students learn this skill when they read the letters. There is full evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. The following two objectives are mentioned under the writing section in the curriculum document, and reflected as well in the workbook:

- كتابة الأحرف وأصواتها كتابة صحيحة.

- تمييز الحروف ورسمها رسمًا صحيحًا.

In every lesson in the workbook, the students are asked to write the letter that they learned with its long and short sound. For example, أَكْتُبُ سَ سِ سٌ سْ سَا سُو سِي. All Letters of the alphabet are covered in the workbook. Moreover, the workbook includes activities where students are asked to fill in the blanks with the appropriate shape of the letter. Such activities are included in the assessment guide as well. The textbook includes reading passages, and each reading passage targets a letter from the alphabet. It includes different words that include the target letter with its different shapes and sounds, and first graders are supposed to read these passages as explained in the educational guide.

Separate words by spaces. Gentry and McNeel (2014) explain that teachers can use several techniques to teach students to separate words by spaces; some of these techniques are: emphasize space between the words when reading texts, use space holder and explain about it, and show them how to leave space by writing on the board. There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The following learning

يكتب الحروف بتناسق وتناسب بين الأحجام والمسافات

However, the educational guide does not include a section or activity that explains to the teacher how to help students achieve this skill. Moreover, there is no activity in the workbook, textbook, or assessment guide that models to students how to leave spaces between words when writing.

Produce writing piece with three sentences on the same topic. There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The curriculum document includes the following two objectives, under writing, which are related to the following skill:

كتابة جمل مترابطة حول موضوع واحد.
كتابة جملة انطلاقاً من مدلول صورة.

This skill is also reflected in activities included in the workbook and assessment guide. For example, in the workbook there are exercises where there are three pictures that are related to the same topic, and students are asked to write a sentence that represents each picture. In other exercises in the workbook, students are asked to form a story from three to four sentences based on a set of pictures.

In the assessment guide, there are activities in which the students are asked to represent a picture using three sentences. The textbook does not include such activities and the educational guide does not explain to teachers how to train their students to apply this skill.

Use descriptive words in the writing pieces. Stone (2007) explains that students learn to use descriptive words when they are asked to produce writing pieces where they describe a picture, a location, or a character. There is partial evidence that this

skill is targeted in the studied curriculum. The curriculum document does not include a learning objective that asks students to use descriptive words in their writings or to write descriptive pieces of writing. However, there are exercises in the workbook and assessment guide that reflect it. There are many exercises in which students are asked to write sentences based on what they see in the picture. Thus, they are describing the picture. The textbook does not include such activities and the educational guide does not explain to teachers how to train their students to apply this skill.

Use emotion words in the writing pieces. Belshaw and Rice (1997)

explain that students learn to use emotive words in their writing pieces when various emotions are discussed in the classroom and students are asked to write about them, or writing about their emotional experiences that are related to them. There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. There is no learning objective in the curriculum document that asks students to write about their emotions or the emotions of others. Moreover, none of the themes in the textbook discuss topics related to emotions. The educational guide as well does not include teaching strategies or questions that urge teachers to discuss emotions with their students. There are no pictures in the textbook, workbook or assessment guide that expresses emotions in order for students to write sentences that express them.

Plan for writing by producing several drafts. Cole (2008) explains

that teachers allow students to produce several drafts of writing pieces when they provide them with feedback, plan writing conferences with them, and follow writing processes such as drafting, revising and editing. Cole (2008) adds teachers need to model the writing process for their students depending on the grade level. There is no evidence that this skill

is targeted in the studied curriculum. Planning for several writing drafts is not recognized in any learning objective in the curriculum. Moreover, reviewing the educational guide does not allow us to locate any teaching procedure that explains to teachers how to provide their students with feedback, arrange for writing conferences, or train them to follow the writing processes. As for the writing exercises that are presented in the workbook and assessment guide, students are not asked to produce a first draft, then produce a second one based on the comments that they received from their teacher.

Proof read writing following learned proofreading skills. As

explained earlier, students learn to proof read and edit their writings when they follow the writing process and receive feedback from their teachers. The writing process, feedback, writing conferences, and producing several drafts is not recognized in the curriculum. There is no section in the educational guide that explains to teachers how to train their students to proof read and edits their writings. There is no evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum.

The learning objectives that are mentioned in the curriculum document under the writing section differ from those mentioned in the analysis criteria adopted for this study. According to this curriculum, students are expected to: write a sentence using a specific word, complete a sentence by the correct word, answer a question by using a complete sentence, remove a word that is intruder in a sentence, and arrange words in a sentence. While in the adopted criteria, students are asked to learn how to write following the writing process, how to describe using writing, and the essential writing skills. The criteria used to analyze this curriculum includes eight writing skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. Five out of these eight skills were proved to be covered in the

studied curriculum. That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 62.5% of the writing skills that it is supposed to cover. These skills are related to essential writing skills (holding pencils correctly, forming letters appropriately), and producing descriptive pieces of writing (use descriptive words in their writings; write three sentences about a topic). However, there are no skills that are related to the writing process (produce several writing pieces, proof read and edit their writings).

Listening

First graders are supposed to acquire the following listening skills: remember and recall heard information, ask for clarification if heard information is not comprehended, understand and follow simple oral instructions, represent heard information by drawings or other visual displays, and answer questions about details and events of oral presented and read aloud texts (Reutzel,2013).

Table 6

Listening Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	No Evidence
Remember and recall heard information.	X		
Ask for clarification if heard information is not comprehended.			X
Understand and follow simple oral instructions.			X
Represent heard information by drawings or other visual displays.			X
Answer questions about details and events of oral presented and read aloud texts.	X		

Remember and recall heard information. Munro (2011) explains that students are trained to remember and recall heard information through being engaged in such activities: retelling the story that they heard, answering different types of comprehension questions about the stories that they heard, select pictures or verbal descriptions about stories that they heard, and retell the characters and event of the story. There is full evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. In the educational guide, it is explained that students are asked to recall and remember heard information when the teacher reads a story aloud and the students are expected to answer comprehension question related to this story:

خطوات الدرس: This is explained in the section titled:

تروي المعلمة القصة التالية.

The story is presented in the educational guide and followed by questions in a section story questions. It is explained that students are supposed to answer these questions. The assessment guide includes a section titled: الإجابة عن أسئلة تتعلق بنصّ مسموع لغته: This section includes a set of activities where the teacher has to read a story and students have to answer different types of questions related to it: choose the correct answer, fill in the blanks with the missing word, and answer direct questions related to the story.

For example:

أكمل الجملة بحسب ما سمعته من القصة.

These questions are related to story events and characters. The textbook includes stories followed by questions. It is explained in the educational guide that the teacher needs to read the story aloud and ask these questions to the students. Such questions are also available in the workbook, where students need to write their answers after the teacher reads to them the story as explained in the educational guide.

Ask for Clarification if heard information is not comprehended. Palmer (2014) explains that teachers allow their primary grade students to ask for clarification about heard information when they ask them questions that target their understanding, and by asking them if they have questions about what they heard. There is no evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. In the curriculum document itself, there is not learning objective, suggested activity, or comment that explains that the students are encouraged to ask for clarifications if they were not able to comprehend heard information. Moreover, the educational guide does not present explanation for

teachers on how to encourage their students to ask for clarifications if they were not able to comprehend the information that they heard.

Understand and follow simple oral instructions. Munro (2011) explains that teachers can simply teach their students to follow oral instructions by asking them to perform a task through giving them the instructions that are needed to perform the task, and letting the students follow them. There is no evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. None of the curriculum documents presents a learning objective, activity, or assessment where students are asked to follow simple oral instruction. For example, such skill is not mentioned in the curriculum document. The educational guide does not explain to teachers how engage their students to follow their instructions. Moreover, in the assessment guide, textbook and workbook, there is no activity where students are asked to perform an activity based on instruction they receive from their teacher or anyone else.

Represent heard information by drawings or visual displays. Smith (2014) explain that teachers allow their students to represent heard information by drawings or other visual displays by asking them to listen to the story because they are going to draw a picture that represent it all, parts of it, or its events. Smith (2014) adds that when students finish their drawings, teachers need to reread the story and let students compare their drawings with the story, and give them the chance to review them. There is no evidence that this skill is present in the studied curriculum. The curriculum document does not include any learning objective, suggested activity, or comment that asks students to represent visually what they hear. The educational guide as well does not introduce activities or teaching procedures that explain to teachers how to help their students to draw

story they heard. Such activities are included as well neither in the assessment guide nor in the workbook. There is no activity in any of the documents where students are asked to hear a story or any other text, and represent its events or part of it by a drawing, or any other mean of visual display.

Answer questions about events of oral presented and read aloud text.

The reading comprehension section includes the skill “recognize text events”. It is explained that there is full evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum.

The curriculum document does not include a section for listening. All skills that are evident are included in the reading comprehension and oral communication sections. However, the assessment guide includes listening activities under a section called *نصوص مسموعة* where students are supposed to listen to a text and answer questions related to it.

The criteria used to describe this document include five listening skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. Based on the results of this study, only two out of these five skills were covered in the studied curriculum. That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 40% of the listening skills that the criteria selected specify that they need to be covered. Casey (2008) describes listening as a core curriculum skill that plays a vital role in language acquisition, and it leads to developing students’ social and intellectual skills. In this curriculum, there is no section for listening and only two skills related to listening are covered in documented planned activities of the curriculum.

Speaking

First graders are supposed to acquire the following speaking skills: talk about own writings, tell logical stories that include five or six well- sequenced events about themselves and others, explain own work to classmates, express oneself using correct

content-related words, produce rhyming words, act out stories, answer oral questions about read and heard stories, and engage in book talks (Resnick and Snow, 2009). The curriculum document includes a section titled *المحادثة والتعبير الشفهي*. This section is divided into themes and the learning objectives are stated under those themes and are related to them. For example, one of the themes is *الغذاء*. Examples of objectives included under this theme are: *تسمية بعض أنواع الفاكهة والخضار التي يفضلها مع ذكر صفاتها*.

Table 7

Speaking Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	No Evidence
Talk about own writings.			X
Tell logical stories.		X	
Explain own work to classmates.			X
Express self with content-related words.	X		
Produce rhyming words.			X
Act out stories.		X	
Answer oral questions.	X		
Engage in book talks.			X

Talk about own writings. Moss and Highberg (2004) explain that students gain the chance to talk about their writings when they present them to their classmates, work in writing groups, and talk about what they wrote with their teachers during conferences. There is no evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum.

The curriculum document does not include a learning objective that asks students to talk about their writing pieces to others. Moreover, the educational guide does not include any section that explains to teachers how they can allow their students to talk about their writings. Writing groups and writing conferences are not mentioned in this guide. Moreover, all activities that are related to writing in the workbook or assessment guide end by producing the writing piece. None of them asks students to present their writing piece to their classmates after producing it.

Tell logical stories about themselves and others. Haven (2000)

states that teachers allow their students to tell logical stories when they introduce them to storytelling processes, apply story telling games such as improvisation, apply theater games, and have them present their stories to their classmates. There is partial evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. Although the curriculum document does not include a learning objective that allows students to tell stories about themselves and others, and the teacher guide does not explain to teachers how to apply storytelling games, there are questions found in the textbook that allow students to talk about their own experiences. It is explained in the educational guide that teachers need to ask these questions to the students, and students need to answer them orally. Such questions are:

كيف تلعب على التلج؟/هل تحبّ التلج؟ لماذا؟

ما الأشجار التي رأيتها فيه؟/ماذا أعجبك في البستان؟ /أين يقع هذا البستان؟ /من منكم زار بستاناً؟ /

Explain own work to classmates. Weyer (2006) believes that students

will acquire speaking skills when they are given the opportunity to explain own work to classmates, when they can prepare posters and projects or simply stand in front of their classmates and talk about a piece of work that they produced. Weyer (2006) adds that even

when students work in groups, every group member should have the chance to talk about his/her own task. There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The curriculum document does not include a learning objective that states that students need to explain own work to classmates. Moreover, the educational guide does not explain that students need to present their work through posters or projects. Moreover, it does not state that students are expected to stand in front of their classmates and talk about a piece of work that they produced. Moreover, we could not locate an exercise that asks students to perform a task and present it to their classmates neither in the educational nor in the assessment guide.

Express one-self using correct content-related words. Locke (2013)

states that students become able to express themselves using correct content-related words if they are expected to complete vocabulary and reading exercises that target enriching their vocabulary. Locke (2013) believes that if students have rich vocabulary, they won't have problems in expressing themselves using the right words. There is full evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The curriculum document includes learning objectives that ask students to present themselves, and talk about their feelings and interests. Moreover, it is explained in the educational guide how these learning objectives need to be achieved. For example, it is explained that when teachers ask students to introduce themselves, they need first to explain for them this processes through showing them puppets that are talking about themselves. Thus, students will imitate these puppets and use the same vocabulary. Questions that allow students to talk about themselves, feelings and interests are included in the textbook, workbook, and assessment guide. Students are asked to answer questions such as:

هل تحبّ... لماذا؟/ ما هو الفصل المفضّل لديك؟

Produce rhyming words. McGee and Morrow (2005) explain that teachers allow their students to produce rhyming words when they read rhyming words books, emphasize on these words, explain that these words have the same ending sound, and finally give two or three rhyming words and ask students to complete the chain. Based on the document analysis, there is no evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. The term rhyming words is not mentioned in any of the curriculum documents. None of the learning objectives or learning activities asks students to produce rhyming words. Moreover, it is not explained in the educational guide that teachers need to read rhyming words books and explain about these words to students.

Act out stories. Brown and Tomlinson (2008) believe that speaking skills are developed through designing activities where students are asked to act out stories; this can be achieved through introducing creative drama activities such as story theater, reader theater, puppets, and improvisation. Based on the review of the curriculum documents, there is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The following learning objective is included in the curriculum document:

تمثيل دور معين من أدوار أشخاص القصة; however, it is not reflected in any learning activity included in other documents. For example, it is not explained in the teaching procedures in the educational guide that the teacher is expected to ask students to act a story. Activities such as story theater and reader theater are completely absent. Moreover, the textbook includes more than fifty stories; however, none of them is followed by a question that asks students to act this story, and it is not even explained in the teachers' guide that students

need to act this story. The assessment guide as well does not suggest an assessment that examines the students' ability to act a story.

Answer oral questions about read and heard stories. There is full evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. It is explained in both the reading and listening section that there is full evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum.

Engage in book talks. Brown and Tomlinson (2008) state that book discussions occur when teachers read aloud books or stories, then ask open ended questions to students and ask them to share their points of view about topics related to the story read. There is no evidence that this skill is addressed in the curriculum. The curriculum document does not include a learning objective that falls under book talks. In the curriculum document, it is explained that students are expected to choose books from the classroom library. It states that:

التّردد إلى مكتبة الصّفّ لاختيار كتاب مزين بالصّور.

However, it is not explained what learners are expected to do with these books, and what activities to be engaged on. Moreover, the educational guide does not suggest in the teaching procedures that students are asked to read books and engage in talks about them. There is no suggestion of names or themes of books that students are encouraged to read. Students are only expected to answer questions related to stories in their textbooks.

The criteria for exploring the content of the curriculum developed in this study includes eight speaking skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. Four out of these eight skills were proved to be covered in the studied curriculum. That is, Grade

One Arabic curriculum covers 40% of the speaking skills that it is supposed to cover. These skills give first graders the chance to answer questions related to stories, and use content related words; however, they do not give them the chance to present their work or explain it to others.

Viewing and Visual Representation

First graders are supposed to acquire the following viewing and visual representation skills: define meanings of words through referring to visual aids, act out verbally and none verbally the stories through dramatic representations, write and illustrate their stories (Alyeiri, 2010), interpret pictures, concept maps or videos that age level appropriate, and construct concept maps that are age level appropriate (Squez and Hansen, 2010).

Table 8

Viewing and Visual Representation Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	No Evidence
Define meanings of words through referring to visual aids.			X
Act out verbally and none verbally the stories through dramatic representations.		X	
Write and illustrate their stories.		X	
Interpret pictures, concept maps or videos that age level appropriate.	X		
Construct concept maps that are age level appropriate.			X

Define meanings of words through referring to visual aids. Kujawa

(2000) explains that defining meanings of words through referring to visual aids takes place when students build their own picture dictionaries, or try to match a word with a corresponding picture.

Clark (2004) explains that picture cards can be used in order to define meanings of words through referring to visual aids, where one student draws a picture of an explained vocabulary word on a card, and another student needs to guess the word by looking at the card. There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the studied curriculum. First, there is no learning objective that asks first graders to refer to visuals in order to define words. Moreover, it is not explained in the educational guide that students

need to prepare picture dictionaries or vocabulary picture cards. In vocabulary activities in the workbook, first graders are only expected to write the synonyms or antonyms of certain words by referring to the text. There are few exercises where students need to match the word with the correct picture; however, they seem to be included more for variety than to develop a targeted skill for students.

Act stories through dramatic representations. It is explained in the speaking section that there is partial evidence that there is partial evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum.

Write and illustrate their stories. Moore (2011) states that in order for teachers to help their students write and illustrate their stories, they need to explain for them the steps of story writing, do story writing activities where they first teach them to identify characters, setting, and conclusion, and equip their classes with story writing centers. There is partial evidence that this skill is addressed in the curriculum. Although there are exercises in the workbook where students are given a set of pictures that are related to one theme, and asked to create their own story based on these pictures, it is not explained in the teachers; guide how teachers need to assist their students in the process of story writing. Moreover, it is not explained in the educational guide that teachers need to equip their classes with story writing centers.

Interpret age level appropriate pictures, maps or videos. Throop (1999) believes that interpreting pictures, concept maps or videos that are age level appropriate takes place when teachers ask their students to describe what's going in these visual, and encourage them to predict, analyze, and develop stories from them. There is full evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. Regardless of concept maps, these two

learning objectives are included in the curriculum:

كتابة جمل انطلاقاً من مدلول صورة.

انتقاء الجملة المناسبة لرسم معيّن.

These objectives are evident in both the assessment guide and workbook, where there are activities that ask students to: write a sentence or number of sentences that represent a picture, write a story based on a set of pictures, and match between the picture and correct sentence. In the textbook, there are pictures that precede the stories, and the educational guide includes questions related to them. As for the videos, we can locate in the educational guide a video that falls in a lesson called Independence Day. It is explained in the section of teaching strategies that students are asked to watch this video and interpret it through answering a set of questions related to it.

Construct concept maps that are age level appropriate. Vodovozov

and Raud (2015) define concept maps as “as graphical representations of knowledge comprised of concepts with their relationships” (p.4). There is no evidence that this skill is covered in the curriculum. We could not locate the term “concept maps” in any of the curriculum document, and we cannot locate any concept map as well. Moreover, we cannot locate any activity or teaching procedure that allows first graders to construct a concept map. The curriculum document does not include a section titled viewing and visual presentation. The learning objective that are evident in this section are included under the writing section in the curriculum document.

The criteria used as guidelines for exploring the content of the curriculum used to analyze this curriculum includes five viewing and visual representation skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. Three out of these five skills were covered in

the studied curriculum. That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 60% of the viewing and visual representation skills that it is supposed to cover. These skills allow first graders to interpret visual aids; however, they do not give the chance to construct their own concept maps or use picture cues to analyze a text or understand the meaning of words.

Spelling

First graders are supposed to acquire the following spelling skills:

spell high frequency words correctly, write commonly misspelled words correctly by referring to the words list, and use sound-letter relationship to correctly spell words

(Migliaccio 2011).

Table 9

Spelling Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	No Evidence
Spell high frequency words correctly.			X
Write commonly misspelled words correctly by referring to the words list.			X
Use sound-letter relationship to correctly spell words.		X	

Spell high frequency words correctly. Wagstaff (1999) explains

that students learn to spell high frequency words correctly through word walls and being engaged in interactive writing activities. There is no evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. The curriculum document does not include any learning objective that recognizes high frequency words. Moreover, it does not include a list of high frequency words that first graders are expected to learn. In the textbook, workbook, and assessment guide, there is no section for spelling or list of high frequency words. The educational guide does not explain to teachers how to prepare word walls, or how to use interactive writing activities to teach students to spell high frequency words correctly.

Write commonly misspelled words correctly by referring to the words list. Schuefer (2001) states that teachers prepare word lists by grouping words according to topics or specific rules, and hang them in their classrooms. Schuefer (2001) adds that teachers need to explain the purpose of these words lists to their students. There is no evidence that this skill is addressed in the curriculum. Word lists and misspelled words are not recognized in any learning objective. Moreover, the educational guide does not include any activities nor does it provide any explanation on preparing words lists and using them in the classroom.

Use sound-letter relationship to correctly spell words. Roe, Smith, and Burns (2011) believe that when children understand the sound-letter relationship, they transfer this understanding to using this sound-letter relationship in spelling. It is explained in the reading section that there is partial evidence that this skill is addressed in the studied curriculum.

The curriculum document includes a section titled الإملاء والنسخ. The

learning objectives under this section ask students to write the letters of the alphabet with their different shapes and sounds correctly, write words correctly, and copy sentences correctly.

The criteria adopted in this study include three spelling skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. One out of these three skills was covered in the studied curriculum. That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 33.3% of the spelling skills that it is supposed to cover. These skills allow first graders to write the letters of alphabet correctly; however, they do not teach first graders the skill of referring to word walls or use high frequency words to spell words correctly.

Grammar

First graders are supposed to acquire the following grammar skills: use punctuation rules correctly, distinguish singular from plural, use verbs to convey sense of time, and use prepositions correctly (Taffe and Smith, 2013).

Table 10

Grammar Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	No Evidence
Use punctuation rules correctly.			X
Distinguish singular from plural.		X	
Use verbs to convey sense of time.		X	
Use prepositions correctly.		X	

Use punctuation rules correctly. Runday (2013) suggests that teachers can

teach their students to use punctuation rules correctly through: showing them showing them examples of these rules by pointing to sentences that reflect these rules in stories and books; asking them to search in stories for examples about punctuation rules; explaining and showing how meanings of sentences differ with different punctuation rules; and asking them to write their own sentences using punctuation rules.

There is no evidence that indicates that this skill is addressed in the studied curriculum. The curriculum document does not include a learning objective, under the grammar section, that asks students to use punctuation rules correctly. Moreover, in the workbook there is no activity or exercise that asks students to write sentences using punctuation rules, or place punctuations in sentences correctly. The educational guide does not present a teaching strategy or activity that allows teachers to explain punctuation rules to students. The assessment guide as well does not include an assessment where students are supposed to use punctuations.

Distinguish singular from plural. Johnson (2010) explains that students distinguish singular from plural through: performing activities that include picture cards about singular and plural, creating charts to classify words into singular and plural, changing words from singular to plural, and sorting pictures and objects into singular and plural classes. Analysis identifies partial evidence that this skill is addressed in the curriculum. It is reflected only in the workbook where there are exercises that ask students to change words from singular to plural.

Use verbs to convey sense of time. Dourfman and Daughtery (2014) believe that teachers can help their students to use verbs to convey sense of time by: picking sentences that convey time from stories and asking students to pick verbs from them, and

by asking students to identify the verbs and tenses in sentences they write. There is partial evidence that this skill is addressed in the studied curriculum. The following learning objective is stated under grammar section in the curriculum document:

ملاحظة زمن الفعل: حاضر، ماضٍ. This objective is reflected in the workbook where students are asked to use two kinds of verbs:

الماضي (حصل سابقاً)

الأمر (أطلب تنفيذه)

In such exercise, students will be able to know that if they want to tell about something that happened in the past, they need to use the past tense. الفعل الماضي. If they want to ask someone to perform a task now, they need to use. الفعل الأمر.

In such exercise, students are writing their own sentences and identifying the proper tense that needs to be used. Such activities are not included in the assessment guide, and strategies for teaching this skill are not included in the educational guide.

Use prepositions correctly. Liu (2015) believes that students learn to use prepositions correctly when teachers: use pictures or maps in order to introduce prepositions, explain the meanings of prepositions to students, have students use prepositions in their sentences and phrases, and let students do prepositions focused exercises. There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The curriculum document does not include a learning objective, under the grammar section or any other section that asks students to use prepositions correctly. However, the workbook, in the last two units, includes exercises where students are asked to fill in the blank using the correct prepositions.

The curriculum document includes many other grammatical skills that are

not included in this framework. In addition to the skills mentioned here, first graders are supposed to:

التَّعَرَّفَ إلى نوعي الكلمة: فعل، اسم

محاكاة أساليب الإثبات والنفي والاستفهام والطلب الأكثر تداولاً

However, reviewing literature does not indicate that first graders are supposed to distinguish between verb and noun and to be taught negative and imperative sentences. This raises a question mark on what did curriculum designers based their work when designing this curriculum and addressing skills that literature does not refer to them as essential for a specific grade level.

The criteria used in this study to analyze the curriculum cover four grammar skills that need to be addresses in Grade One curriculum. Three out of these four skills were covered in the studied curriculum. That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 75% of the grammar skills that it is supposed to cover. These skills allow first graders to use prepositions and verbs correctly, and distinguish between singular and plural.

The Content of the Curriculum: Covering Twenty First Century Skills

The same curriculum documents that were reviewed to explore the coverage of Language arts areas were also reviewed to answer the third research question, and determine to what extent twenty first century skills are covered in the curriculum. The same process that was used to explore the content regarding language arts areas was used to explore the presence of twenty first century skills.

Digital Literacy

First graders are supposed to acquire the following digital literacy skills:

use word processing programs to write own names and simple words correctly, copy sentences and short paragraphs using the keyboard correctly, illustrate own stories or stories learned using age appropriate illustration programs, use computers and other tools to record readings and stories (Reksten, 2000), work with teachers to create pictures, videos, texts, and concepts using computers, and find answers to questions using websites with the help of the teachers (Murphy, Depasquale, & McNamara, 2003).

Table 11

Digital Literacy Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	No Evidence
Use word processing programs to write own names and simple words correctly.			X
Copy sentences and short paragraphs using the keyboard correctly.			X
Illustrate own stories or stories learned using age appropriate illustration programs.			X
Use computers and other tools to record readings and stories.			X
Work with teachers to create pictures, videos, texts, and concepts using computers.			X
Find answers to questions using websites with the help of the teachers.			X

None of the digital literacy skills are reflected in the curriculum. The criteria used as guidelines that was used to explore the presence of twenty first century skills in the curriculum includes six digital literacy skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. Zero out of these six skills were covered in the studied curriculum. The curriculum document does not include any learning objective that asks students to use the computer, a technological tool, or the web. The textbook and workbook do not include any activity that asks or encourages students to use the computer or the web. The assessment guide does not include assessments where students are supposed to use the computer or the web. As for the educational guide, it does not suggest learning strategies that allow teachers to use the computer, a technological tool, or web with their students and it does not include activities that give students the chance to use the web or any other technological tool. The word computer is only mentioned once in this curriculum under the tools that teachers are supposed to use with first graders. However, as explained above, there is no activity that reflects the use of the computer.

The criteria used in this study as guidelines to explore the presence of twenty first century skills in the curriculum includes six skills related to digital literacy. None of these skills are covered in the curriculum. Thus, this curriculum covers 0% of the skills that it is supposed to cover under digital literacy.

Communication Skills

Based on the criteria selected for this study, first graders are supposed to acquire the following communication skills: work in groups, and discuss opinions and share ideas with teachers and other students (Johnson, 2008).

Table 12

Communication Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	Not Evidence
Work in groups.		X	
Discuss opinions and share ideas with teachers and other students.	X		

Work in groups. Cohen and Lotan (2014) believe that group work takes place when teachers assign a task, divide the class into groups, and ask students to complete this task by allowing them to interact with each other, struggle, do mistakes and find solutions to their mistakes.

There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum.

The curriculum document does not include any learning objectives that mentions the term “group work”, or any other objective that asks student to work together. In the educational guide, group work is recognized many times under the teaching strategies that the teacher is asked to use. For example, there is a lesson titled *غرفة صفّي* in the textbook where students are expected to learn how to take care of their classroom and its material. In the educational guide, it is explained under teaching strategies that the teacher is expected to divide the class into four groups, give each group a collection of pictures to decorate their class, and the group members should agree where to place the pictures they have. It is explained that the objective of this activity is:

تنمية روح العمل الفريقي.

Activities that allow students to be divided into groups, and perform a certain task are mentioned several times in the educational guide under the teaching strategies that need to be followed by the teacher in different lessons. However, we cannot locate any activity that allows group work in any other curriculum document.

Discuss opinions and share ideas with teachers and students. Popp (2005) states that students gain the opportunity to share their ideas and opinions when they answer reading comprehension questions, answer open ended questions, work in groups, and relate what they read to their personal experiences. There is full evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The curriculum document includes a learning objective that asks students to answer comprehension questions. الإجابة عن أسئلة النص إجابة تامة وصحيحة.

In the educational guide, it is explained under خطوات التدريس that teachers should ask the students the reading comprehension questions, and the students should reply. Moreover, the educational guide includes open ended questions, comprehension questions, and questions that allow students to relate what they read to their personal experiences. In fact, relating what is read to personal experience, and answering different types of questions was proved evident under the reading section. These questions are included in the textbook and workbook as well. Every lesson in the textbook is followed by a set of reading comprehension questions that students are supposed to answer, and those questions are included in the workbook as well. The assessment guide also includes comprehension questions that first graders are supposed to answer after reading or listening to a passage. Examples of such questions are:

هل تحب أن تصبح حدّادًا؟ لماذا؟/ماذا علينا أن نفعل لنحافظ على سلامة أسناننا؟ /هل تحب أن تزرع الملفوف؟ لماذا؟

Moreover, it is explained in the introduction of the educational guide that

the aim of classroom discussions, group works, and answering and asking questions is to prepare those learners to become good communicators in their societies.

The criteria that was used to explore the presence of twenty first century skills in the curriculum includes two communication skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. These two skills are proved to be covered in the studied curriculum. That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 100% of the communication skills that it is supposed to cover. These skills allow first graders to work in groups and discuss their opinions with their teachers and friends.

Problem Solving and Collaboration Skills

First graders are supposed to acquire the following problem solving and collaboration skills: look for a pattern, act out a problem, solve simple problems, (Celebioglu, et al., 2010), use proper dialogue strategies, use proper group work strategies, and reach an agreement (Vermette, et al., 2004).

Table 13

Problem Solving and Collaboration Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	Not Evidence
Look for a pattern.		X	
Act out a problem.		X	
Solve simple problems.			X
Use proper dialogue strategies.			X
Use proper group work strategies.			X
Reach an agreement.		X	

Look for a pattern. Schlemmer and Schlemmer (2011) explain that students learn to look for and complete patterns through activities that target patterns; it takes place through activities that ask them to identify a specific pattern in a certain situation and to complete a given pattern. There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum.

The curriculum document does not include any learning objective that asks students to recognize or complete patterns. However, the workbook titled الأنشطة التمهيديّة, which is supposed to be used at the beginning of scholastic year before starting with the textbook as a kind of revision, includes several activities where students are asked to recognize a pattern and complete a drawing using a specific pattern. Activities that ask students to recognize or complete a pattern are not included in any other curriculum document.

Act out a problem. Elliott (2005) explains that students learn to act out problems when they read stories that include problems, adopt character roles related to these problems and act out the dialogues of these situations. There is partial evidence that this skill is included in the studied curriculum. The curriculum document includes a learning skill that asks students to act out the role of a story character تمثيل دور معين من أدوار. However, this skill is not reflected in any other curriculum document. The textbook, workbook and assessment guide do not include any activity that asks students to act a role of a character or a problem, and the educational guide as well does not include any activity or teaching strategy related to this skill.

Solve simple problems. Frogan (2003) suggests that teachers can help their

students to learn problem solving by referring to literature where they: ask them to locate problems in stories; ask them to analyze and find solution to these problems; ask them reading comprehension questions that focus on characters' problems, ask them to share their problems and offer strategies to solve, and propose simple problems and model their solution.

There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. Learning objectives that are related to problem solving are not evident in the curriculum document. For example, we cannot locate a learning objective that asks students to offer a solution to a problem they, someone else, or a character in a story faced. Moreover, we cannot locate a reading comprehension question, activity or exercise that asks students to propose a solution for a problem in any of the curriculum documents.

Use proper dialogue strategies. Alcantara, Cabanilla, Espina, and Villamin. (2003) explain that students learn dialogues when their teachers read dialogues for them, explain the structure of dialogues, ask them to answer questions about heard dialogues, and ask them to perform a dialogue. There is no evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. The curriculum document does not include any learning objective targeted at promoting students' ability to prepare or use a dialogue. Moreover, none of the activities under the teaching strategies in the educational guide asks students to have a conversation, or suggest the dialogue strategies that teachers are expected to teach their students. The reading comprehension questions that follow stories do not suggest preparing a dialogue. The same case applies to the workbook and assessment guide.

Use proper group work strategies. Cohen and Lotan (2014) explain that

students learn to use proper group work strategies when they are trained to ask for their group members opinions, and contribute to the effort of the group. Cohen and Lotan (2014) add that teachers need to set group work rules and introduce them to students through different activities such as games.

There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum.

Although it is mentioned above that there is evidence that group work is partially targeted in this curriculum, evidence related to developing specific group work strategies is not evident in this curriculum. In the teaching strategies in the educational guide, it is mentioned that the teacher needs to divide the class into groups and give a task for every group. However, it is not explained that the teacher needs to explain to students group work rules, and it is not mentioned what strategies of group work the teachers should teach their students and encourage them to use. Moreover, other curriculum documents do not include activities that require group work or invite students to apply proper group work strategies.

Reach an agreement. Forget (2004) believes that small group discussions and tasks allow students to be trained to reach an agreement in order to perform the group task.

There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum.

Reaching an agreement is not a learning objective that is stated literally in the curriculum document. The textbook, workbook, and assessment guide do not include content explaining group activities that allow students to perform a task through reaching an agreement. However, in some of the group work activities that are mentioned in the educational guide, students are supposed to reach an agreement in order to perform the required task. For example, in one of the group work activities, the teacher is supposed to

divide the class into groups, give pictures to students, and members of every group are supposed to agree where to place these pictures. The criteria that was used to explore the presence of twenty first century skills in the curriculum includes two problem solving and collaboration skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. Three out of these skills were found to be covered in the studied curriculum.

That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 50% of the problem solving and collaboration skills that it is supposed to cover. Those skills allow first graders to look for patterns, act out problems and reach agreements, however, first graders are not gaining the chance to learn proper strategies of reaching agreements or solving problems.

Critical Thinking and Creativity Skills

First graders are supposed to acquire the following critical thinking and creativity skills: make predictions and reason them, use evidence and different criteria when answering questions about opinions, distinguish fact from opinion, and relate cause and effect (McGregor, 2007).

Table 14

Critical Thinking and Creativity Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	No Evidence
Make predictions and reason them.			X
Use evidence and different criteria when answering questions about opinions.		X	
Distinguish fact from opinion.			X
Relate cause and effect.			X

Make predictions and reason them. This skill is also included under the reading comprehension section and it was mentioned that there is no evidence that it is addressed in the studied curriculum. Students gain the chance to answer prediction question when they need to predict upcoming events in the story, predict behavior of characters and what they will do beyond the story, and infer what characters are thinking and feeling (McGee and Morrow, 2005). The curriculum document does not include a learning objective that asks first graders to answer prediction question; the educational guide does not include teaching strategies that explains to teachers how to help their students to ask prediction questions, and these questions are not evident in the textbook, workbook, assessment guide, and educational guide.

Use evidence and criteria when answering opinions questions. Zweirs (2008) explains that students learn to justify their answers to opinion questions when their teachers follow these opinion questions by clarification ones such as: define, what do you mean, clarify the meaning, and can you explain. There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. In some of the reading comprehension questions that follow the stories and texts in the textbook, students are asked to justify their opinion by giving a clarification through the question لماذا.

هل تحبّ الثلج؟ لماذا؟

أذكر العيد الذي تنتظر قدومه بشوق. لماذا تفضّل هذا العيد؟

However, the curriculum document does not include a learning objective that targets developing students' ability to support their opinion by evidence, and the educational guide does not include activities that explain this, some of the reading comprehension questions do.

Distinguish fact from opinion. Rogers and Simms (2014) believe that students learn to distinguish fact from opinion when teachers explain what fact are, what opinions are based on certain criteria, give students examples of both, and ask students to distinguish between them. There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. Distinguishing a fact from an opinion is not a learning objective that is mentioned in the curriculum document. Other curriculum documents, as well, do not present an evidence for this skill. For example, some of the stories in the textbook include sentences that represent a fact and others that represent an opinion.

Fact عندما ينزل الثلج تصبح الأزهار مشجرة.

Opinion. ما أجملك يا ثلج.

However, there is no question that asks students to distinguish between a fact and opinion, or to extract a sentence that represents a fact or opinion. Similarly, the educational guide does not explain that students are asked to distinguish facts from opinion, and does not suggest an activity or a teaching procedure that allows students to distinguish a fact from an opinion. The statement “distinguishing a fact from an opinion” is not even mentioned in any of the pages of the educational guide. The workbook and assessment guide do not offer activities for this skill as well. Students are not given these two types of sentences and asked to distinguish between them.

Relate cause and effect. This skill is also included under the reading comprehension section and it was mentioned that there is no evidence that it is addressed in the studied curriculum. Students relate cause and effect when they explain that children can describe cause-effect relationships when they locate clue words such as because, as a result of, and the reason for (Cohen and Cowen, 2011). The curriculum

document does not include a learning objective that asks first graders to relate cause and effect. Relating cause and effect questions and activities are absent from all other curriculum documents.

In sum, the criteria that was used to explore the presence of twenty first century skills in the curriculum includes four critical thinking and creativity skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. One out of these skills were proved to be covered in the studied curriculum. That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 25% of the critical thinking and creativity skills that it is supposed to cover. Those skills allow first graders only to base their opinions on evidence but not to develop other critical thinking skills.

Social and Cultural Skills

First graders are supposed to acquire the following social and cultural skills: discuss similarities and differences between groups, talk about others cultures such as legends, believes, and costumes. (Jonsons, 2002), name feelings and express them properly, name others feelings after listening to them, work in groups and respect the rules of group work, use courtesy words when speaking with others, and ask for help when needed (Cartledge & Klee 2009).

Table 15

Social and Cultural Skills Covered in the Curriculum

Skill	Full Evidence	Partial Evidence	Not Evidence
Discuss similarities and differences between groups.		X	
Talk about others cultures.			X
Name feelings and express them properly.	X		
Name others feelings after listening to them.			X
Work in groups.		X	
Respect the rules of group work.			X
Use courtesy words/			X
Ask for help when needed.			X

Discuss similarities and differences between groups. Silver (2010) believes that students learn to compare and contrast when their teachers provide them with techniques that they need when comparing and contrasting, and by introducing visual organizers that are used for such activities and teaching those students how to use them. There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The following learning objective is stated in the curriculum document: *المقارنة واكتشاف بعض الفروقات في الشكل واللون والحجم والزّائحة.* However, this objective is not reflected in other documents. For example, there are no teaching strategies in the educational guide that explain to teachers how to help students learn how to identify differences in shape, color, size, or smell as stated in the

curriculum document. Moreover, the textbook, workbook and assessment guide do not include activities that allow students to identify similarities and differences. For example, there is no activity where students are expected to fill a Van diagram, arrange items into groups, spot differences between images or groups.

Talk about others cultures. Rader and Sitting (2003) explain that learning about others cultures occurs when the classroom library includes different resources that talk about other cultures, and when teachers plan for activities that talk about these cultures. There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The curriculum document does not include any learning objectives that expects students to be introduced to others cultures.

Moreover, in the textbook, there are no legends. All stories or text fall under the realistic fiction genre since they present situations that every child can experience in his real life. All stories took place in the Lebanese society. The names of the characters are familiar in the Lebanese society. Even the illustrations present kids and adults who are from the Lebanese society. There is no integration for characters from other societies in these stories as well. Moreover, none of the characters of those stories traveled to another country and discovered it.

We can't identify any story that talks about traditions, costumes, or believes that represent other societies. For example, there is no story that took place in the Gulf or America, and there is no illustration or names of character that represents these other cultures. None of the teaching procedures that are included in the educational guide asks the teacher to talk with the students or to do activities about other cultures.

Name feelings and express them properly. Gootman (2008) believes

that teachers teach their students to express their feeling through role play activities, games such as charades, answering questions about their feelings, and through writing and drawing about their feelings. There is full evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. The following learning objectives that ask students to express their feelings are mentioned in the curriculum document: التعبير عن عاطفته نحو من يحب.

التعبير عن مشاعره نحو الطقس واختيار ما يريده لحماية نفسه.

استخدام بعض أنماط لغوية مناسبة في التعبير عن عواطفه ومشاعره تجاه الطبيعة مشافهة وكتابة.

These learning objectives are reflected in many of the reading comprehension questions in the educational guide and textbook. In many of these questions, students are asked to express their feelings. Examples of such questions are:

هل تحبّ الثلج؟ لماذا؟

هل تحبّ أن تعتني بأشجاره وتسقيها؟

ما هي اللعبة التي احبّها؟

Examples of statements mentioned under teaching strategies in educational guide:

تشجّع المعلمة أكبر عدد من التلاميذ عن التحدّث عن مشاعرهم وهم في سيارّة المدرسة.

Name others feelings after listening to them. Gootman (2008) explains that students learn to talk about others feelings through looking at videos and pictures that express feelings and talk about them, and answering questions about story characters' feelings. There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. This skill is not stated in the curriculum document, and there are no statements or strategies in the educational guide that suggest that students should be capable for naming others feelings. Moreover, we cannot locate activities or reading comprehension questions that ask students to talk about others feelings.

Work in groups. Students gain the chance to work in group when teachers assign a task, divide the class into groups, and ask students to complete this task by allowing them to interact with each other, struggle, do mistakes and find solutions to their mistakes (Cohen and Lotan ,2014). There is partial evidence that this skill is covered in the studied curriculum. Under the teaching strategies of some lessons in the educational guide, teachers are asked to divide their classes into groups and assign tasks to these groups. For example, it is explained under the teaching strategies in a lesson called غرفة الجلوس that the teacher needs to divide the class in to groups and assign a task for every group. The curriculum document does not include any learning objective that states that first graders need to know how to work in groups. Moreover, the textbook, workbook, and assessment guide does not include any activity that invites students to work in groups.

Respect the rules of group work. Students learn to respect group work rules when teachers set group work rules and introduce them to students through different activities such as games (Cohen & Lotan ,2014). There is no evidence that this skill is addressed in the studied curriculum. Although the educational guide invites teachers to apply group work in the classes, it does not explain to them how to set the rules for this work. Moreover, the curriculum document does not state a leaning objective related to respecting group work rules. Activities related to group work and its rules are totally absent from the textbook, assessment guide, and workbook.

Use courtesy words when speaking with others. Opelawski and Unkovich (2011) explain that teachers are asked to train their students to use the following words: please, thank you, you are welcome, pardon me, I am sorry, and excuse me. There is no evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. Using courtesy words is not a

learning objective that is mentioned in the curriculum document. According to the curriculum document, students are asked to respect the works of others. Many of the stories in the textbook include dialogues between the characters; however, courtesy words are not explicitly evident in these dialogues. The educational guide does not include teaching strategies that ask teachers to train their students to use these words. Moreover, there is no activity in the workbook or assessment guide that asks students to use these words.

Ask for help when needed. Conolly (2011) believes that students are encouraged to ask when their teachers do not judge their questions, encourage them to ask orally or write their questions, and modeling questions to them. There is partial evidence that this skill is targeted in the curriculum. In the curriculum document, under the comments sections, it is stated that students are expected to ask for help when they need it: طلب مساعدة الآخرين عند الحاجة. However, it is not explained in this document how to tell students to ask for help. Moreover, the educational guide does not present any teaching strategy or guidelines that explain to teachers how to train their students to ask for help. For example, it is not explained how to train students how to ask if they were not able to perform a specific task, comprehend details of a story, answer a question. Also it is not explained to teachers how to help students who need help in performing their tasks, thus modeling to them this behavior.

The criteria that was used to explore the presence of twenty first century skills in the curriculum cover eight social and cultural skills that need to be covered in Grade One curriculum. Three out of these skills were proved to be addressed in the studied curriculum. That is, Grade One Arabic curriculum covers 37.5% of the social and cultural skills that it is supposed to cover. Those skills allow first graders only to work in groups

and express their feelings; however, they do not allow them to use proper working techniques with others.

It is concluded that many skills related to language arts areas are covered in this curriculum while many others are not. The same applies to twenty first centuries. Those covered skills give students and teachers many chances for learning and developing different types of skills. Because of missing language arts and twenty first century skills in the studied curriculum, first graders might miss many chances of enhancing their development and learning.

The tables below present the percentage of skills covered under each language arts area and twenty first century skills.

Table 16

Percentage of Skills Covered Under each Language Arts Area

Language Arts Area	Percentage of Skills Covered Under it
Reading	75%
Writing	62.5%
Listening	40%
Speaking	40%
Viewing and Visual Representation	60%
Spelling	33.3%
Grammar	75%

Table 17

Percentage of Skills Covered Under each Twenty First Century Skill

Twenty First Century Skill	Percentage of Skills Covered Under it
Digital Literacy	0%
Communication Skills	100%
Problem Solving and Collaboration Skills	50%
Critical Thinking and Creativity Skills	25%
Social and Cultural Skills	37.5%

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study uses qualitative research methodology and design to collect and analyze data in order to explore the design process and content of Grade One Lebanese Official Arabic Curriculum. The study has three purposes: (1) identify to what extent does the design process of the currently designed grade one Arabic curriculum match theoretical models of curriculum design generated from literature review (forward design, central design, backward design); (2) identify to what extent do competencies covered by the currently used Grade One Arabic curriculum match all components of language arts (reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, viewing, visual representation, and spelling) proposed by Cox (2008); and (3) identify to what extent does the content of the currently used Grade One Arabic curriculum cover the following skills: digital literacy, communication skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and social and cultural skills that are described as essential for the twenty first century (Voogt and Roblin ,2012).

A group of six curriculum designers who participated in designing Grade One Arabic Curriculum were interviewed to identify the design process that they used to design the curriculum, and their answers were compared with criteria derived from literature. As for exploring the content of Grade One Arabic Curriculum concerning the coverage of language arts areas and twenty first century skills, the content was compared with criteria derived from literature.

This chapter discusses the research questions' results and presents implications for practice and research. The first section discusses the quality of the design process and content of the studied curriculum. The second section presents a comparative analysis of results obtained from this study with other studies and publications that analyze and explore the 1997 Arabic curriculum. The third section reflects on the used methodology used in this study and what was it able to identify. The chapter concludes with limitations of the study and recommendation for research and practice.

Discussion of the Quality of the Curriculum

The participants in this study, who are curriculum designers from CERD, shared their understanding of what a curriculum is and the design process they followed to design the 2009 Grade One Arabic Curriculum. The content of the 1997 Grade One Arabic Curriculum was reviewed to understand the coverage of language arts areas and twenty first century skills. This section discusses the quality of the design process and content of the studied curriculum.

The Quality of the Design Process of the Curriculum

Results received from interviews with curriculum designers showed that they used the following process to design the curriculum. CERD trainers, who train Arabic teachers, and who served as members in the committee that designed the studied curriculum reported during the interviews that they assessed teachers' needs during trainings. They reported that they received informal feedback from teachers on difficulties they face implementing the currently used curriculum and what concepts they need to include in the newly designed curriculum. Curriculum designers added that they distributed questionnaires to teachers that target their needs. This questionnaire was not shared with

the researcher. Thus, it could not be determined to what kind of needs do these surveys inquire about, and what scope of these needs it covered. Moreover, there was no mention during the interviews on how the data collected was analyzed or how its results were used while developing the curriculum. As described, the process of needs assessment seemed to be disorganized relying mostly on a semi-informal rather than a systematic and participative process of data collection that solicit the opinions of all stakeholders. Its narrow scope relied solely on soliciting the impressions of teachers on what to include in the curriculum, rather than on a thorough and purposeful evaluative procedure with clear criteria. In fact, needs analysis needs to be designed as a procedure where curriculum designers collect information from different sources (teachers, students, parents, administration) using different tools (meetings, interviews, questionnaires, lesson plans from teachers, students' assessments) in order to serve as a base for developing the curriculum; it is a process that includes collecting and analyzing information needed to satisfy the needs of specific group in a specific context for a specific purpose (Chegeni and Chegeni, 2013).

Curriculum designers shared with the researcher the steps they followed to design the curriculum and the order of these steps. Their responses to the interview questions showed that a committee of Arabic Language experts was formed by CERD director and the head of Arabic department. This committee was assigned the task of deciding what to teach in grade one, and writing the learning competencies first. After reviewing the learning competencies and approving them, committee members were then asked to develop the learning materials that reflect these learning competencies; they developed students' textbook and workbook, and teacher's guide that explains the teaching

methodologies that need to be implemented by the teacher. Finally, they were asked to develop assessment tools and booklet that allows the achievement and measurement of learning competencies. Following this order to design curriculum allow us to conclude that the main components of curriculum addressed as the main elements of curriculum in literature were respected when designing the curriculum; all language curriculum design models include learning objectives, content and methodology, and assessments (Richards,2013). Moreover, it is concluded that the forward design model was used to design the curriculum. In forward design goals are first set based on needs, teaching resources and methodologies are then developed, and finally evidence for achieving learning objectives is developed.

However, the data collected through the interviews did not include the rationale behind choosing this approach to curriculum design. The respondents, who participated in the process, were not able to go beyond describing the process and did not share reflective thoughts that show their awareness of the approach to curriculum design that was chosen, nor the reasons that justify this choice. Moreover, the designers interviewed did not identify that they reviewed literature to look for language design models and adopted a practice that fits their mode of work. During the interviews conducted with them, curriculum designers mentioned that it was that the tasks that they were responsible for were more “executive” by nature, where the role of the committee role was to meet on regular basis to discuss the process of the work and assign tasks to execute the directives of the Head of Arabic Department at CERD. Thus, curriculum designers seem to consider the process of designing the curriculum more like a task, that involves different steps, rather than a complex process that targets learners. Petrina (2007) warns

that unless designers look at the curriculum design process as more than an exercise where they set goals, assessments and activities, they won't be able to specify what type of learners they want to prepare, nor manage to find the best strategies to develop this learner. Curriculum designers who were interviewed did not reflect on the type of learners they want to prepare when they were performing every task in designing the curriculum, nor were they aware of the strategy they are following and the rationale behind it. Though they followed the universal steps agreed on as part of the curriculum design process, the thoroughness and formality of the curriculum design process remain questionable.

The Quality of the Content of the Curriculum

The following section discusses that quality of the content of the curriculum. It explains whether every language arts area and twenty first century skill is: fully covered, partially covered, or not covered in the curriculum, and discusses the impact of the level of coverage on the quality of learning.

Covering language arts areas. In order to discuss the presence or absence of every single language arts area and the skills under it, and to show the impact of this presence or absence on the learning process, a checklist, presented in Appendix E, was developed to analyze the coverage of language arts areas in the curriculum. Each item of the checklist was ranked on a scale from one to three where one is “area fully covered in the curriculum”, two is “area partially covered in the curriculum”, and three is “area is not covered in the curriculum”. Percentages calculated in the previous chapter, reflecting the percentage of skills covered under each language arts area, were used in this checklist. Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007) state that scores of categories can be transformed into percentages and these percentages can be transformed into quality points such as excellent,

very good, good. Shrum and Glisan (2009) explain that ranges of percentages can be used to divide checklists into levels. If 33.3% or below of the skills of certain area are met, then the studied curriculum will be judged as not including this area. If between 33.4% and 66.6% of the skills are met, then the curriculum will be considered to partially include this area. If 66.7% or above of the skills of certain area are met, then the studied curriculum will be considered to fully include this area.

Table 18:

Analysis of Coverage of Language Arts Areas in the Curriculum

Area	Fully Covered	Partially Covered	Not Covered
Reading	X		
Writing		X	
Listening		X	
Speaking		X	
Viewing and Visual Representation		X	
Spelling			X
Grammar	X		

It is concluded that certain skills related to reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visual presentation and grammar are covered in this curriculum while others are not. By covering reading and grammar for a great deal, this curriculum is allowing first graders to understand materials given in different subjects other than language arts, learn about a variety of topics, and enjoy reading (Shanahan et al, 2010). It is allowing them to become better speaker and writers in their social context (Cox,2008). By partially covering writing, listening, speaking and viewing and visual representation, the curriculum allows first graders to improve their communication skills, enjoy writing, and gain skills needed later for work place since it includes writing skills (Smithson,2008). By missing skills related to speaking and listening, the curriculum might not give learners enough chances to be independent users of language who make things done alone, make sense of experiences in life, and use language as a tool of thinking; learners who miss listening and speaking skill will always seek the help of their teachers (Dawes and Mercer, 2007). When a curriculum misses skills related to viewing and visual representation in a world full of media, learners will miss chances to understand this media and to communicate in social contexts (Cox,2008).

Based on the results of the study, reading covers both phonics and comprehension skill. Pressely (2001) explains that primary grade students best achieve reading skills through phonics and comprehension strategies, that is they need to learn out sounds and letters of alphabet, and determine if the words sound out in the context they are reading; they can achieve this when they learn comprehension strategies. The writing section covers skills related to writing techniques (holding writing tools properly, separating words by spaces...); however, it does not cover skills that are related to the writing process. It might be concluded that this curriculum is not giving first graders the opportunity to become independent writers who have a

high level of writing ability since it is not giving them the chance to follow the writing process. Zampardo (2008) explains that studies showed that students who were taught to produce pieces of writing using writing the writing process had a higher writing ability than students who were asked to produce writing pieces without following this process; moreover, following the writing process helps learners to become independent writers.

As for listening, the studied curriculum does not include a section titled listening, and it was found that only two skills that are related to listening are covered in this curriculum. That is, this curriculum might not give first graders the opportunity to develop their comprehension skills through listening. Eidger and Rao (2004) explains that listening activities need to be varied in the classroom in order for the students to be entertained and to acquire comprehension skills; when listening activities are limited, student will get bored and miss many opportunities for learning comprehension skills.

The speaking skills covered in this curriculum allow first graders to employ essential skills to answer questions, and teachers to assess students' understanding. Rog (2000) believes that when students answer questions orally, teachers will gain the chance to assess students understanding. Moreillon (2007) believes that it helps students to stay engaged and employ strategies that help them to answer questions. However, they are not giving students the opportunity to gain better understanding of their work since it is not giving them the chance to present it. Weyers (2006) believe that when students gain the chance to present their work or talk about it, they become able to view different and multiple approach to complete a task, take pride in their work, and become more encouraged to learning. Baum and Viens (2005) believe that when students present their work, they gain better understanding of it.

Viewing and visual representation skills covered in this curriculum give first graders the chance to interpret visual aids; however, they do not give them the chance to create their own or use picture cues to understanding meaning. Thus, first graders might be missing the opportunity to ensure an ownership of their learning, and further develop their critical thinking skills and ability to develop as independent life-long learners. Farrell (2007) believes that students should participate in constructing visual aids instead of just interpreting them in order to become more involved in the learning process, and ensure greater ownership of their learning. Dhiman (2008) believes that teaching students to refer to visual aids to understand meaning is a way that helps students to develop their critical thinking skills.

The spelling skills covered in the studied curriculum allow first graders to write the letters of alphabet correctly; however, they do not teach first graders the skill of referring to word walls or use high frequency words to spell words correctly. This might not allow first graders to transfer their knowledge about spelling to other language arts areas. Bergeron and Wolff (2003) indicate that posting words on word walls and teaching students to spell high frequency words, does not just allow students to spell words correctly during spelling activities, but transfer their knowledge to other literacy activities which encourages their independence in reading and writing since they become able to recognize words automatically.

As for grammar, the skills covered in the curriculum allow first graders to use prepositions and verbs correctly, and distinguish between singular and plural. Horton and Bingle (2014) believe that when students learn grammatical skills such as using verbs correctly, they become able to understand meanings of texts and to use these skills to convey the meaning through sentences or texts they write.

Covering twenty first century skills. Another checklist was developed to

analyze the coverage of twenty first century skills in the curriculum. This checklist is presented in Appendix E. The same process that was followed to analyze the presence of language arts areas was applied here.

Table 19:

Analysis of Coverage of Twenty First Century Skills in the Curriculum

Skill	Fully Covered	Partially Covered	Not Covered
Digital Literacy			X
Communication		X	
Problem Solving and Collaboration		X	
Critical thinking and creativity			X
Social and cultural skills		X	

The studied curriculum proved not to cover digital literacy skills. It proved to partially cover the following skills: communication skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and social and cultural skills. When those skills are covered partially, the curriculum will not give first graders enough opportunities to interact with peers, contribute in group work, and use proper behavior when dealing with others (Morreale, Osborn, and Pearson, 2000). Moreover, when a curriculum misses skills related to the 4Cs (problem solving and critical thinking communication, collaboration and creativity) students miss opportunities to develop deep thinking and analysis, contribute successfully in teams, and produce unselfish visions that help the world to become a better place (National Education

Association, 2002). In order for the curriculum to allow students to transfer the required social skills to settings outside the classroom, it should include these social skills, explain to teachers how to model them, and encourage students to reflect on them (Steedley, Schwartz, Leven, and Luke, 2008).

When digital literacy skills are absent, students miss many chances to relate what they are doing in the classroom to a society full of technology, and not to be confident and independent when using technology outside the classroom context (Hague and Payton, 2010). While technologies are becoming cultural forms; and when a curriculum does not cover digital literacy skills, students will lose the chance to mediate and represent the world, as well as communicating with this world (Buckingham, 2006).

Communication skills covered in this curriculum give first graders the opportunity to work in groups and discuss their opinions. Such skills allow first graders to be actively engaged in learning. In empirical studies, group talks and discussions prove to have significant social benefits on students, and teachers view it as a way to support children's learning as well as their own professional practice (Christie, 2004).

Problem solving and collaboration skills covered in the studied curriculum allow first graders to look for pattern, act out problems, and reach agreements. Teaching students to solve problems and reach agreements helps them to explain their perspectives persuasively and take others points of view into consideration; this helps them to make the most progress (Biddle, Good, and Goodson, 2013). However, those problem solving and collaboration skills do not give them the opportunity to learn strategies of performing certain tasks, where providing students with strategies to

perform tasks allows them to become self-regulatory and independent learners (Guzetti, 2009).

Critical and creative thinking skills are not covered in the studied curriculum. Gaol, Mars, and Saragih, (2014) describe critical thinking and creativity skills as important metacognitive skills that allow students to become efficient users of their cognitive skills who deal with different types of problems, and they allow learning to become student-centered. As such learners taught based on this curriculum will most likely miss valuable opportunities to develop these skills.

Finally, social and cultural skills cover group work and expressing ideas skills; however, they do not teach first grades to: use courtesy words, respect group work rules, and know about others cultures. Mayesky (2002) explains that multicultural education during early years allows children to promote healthy cognitive and social development, where they can successfully act and cooperate in culturally diverse word.

Comparing the Study Findings with Findings of Language Curriculum Studies

In this section, the findings of this study will be discussed in comparison with the findings of regional and international studies that were conducted to investigate the presence of language arts areas and twenty first century skills in elementary language curriculum. The findings of this study will be compared, as well, by studies and publications that examined the 1997 Lebanese Arabic Curriculum.

Comparing Study Findings with Studies Findings that Examined 1997 Arabic Curriculum.

The results of the current study showed that the 1997 Arabic curriculum covers reading skills related to phonics and comprehension and it was explained that when readers learn both skills, they achieve reading best practices (Pressely, 2001). Interestingly, studies that investigate the presence of reading skills in the 1997 Arabic

Curriculum could not be identified in literature knowing that reading is the first area addressed in the curriculum document, and is heavily addressed in most sections of the teachers' guide. Absence of such studies might be related to the fact that curriculum evaluators and researchers are aware that reading is thoroughly covered in the curriculum, and that it is allowing the type of learning that students need to achieve.

Studies that explore the presence of writing skills in the language arts areas in the 1997 Arabic Curriculum could not be identified in literature. Thus, findings concerning those language arts areas could not be compared with other studies, and curriculum researchers and evaluators evaluation to the curriculum regarding those language arts areas could not be understood. However, when reflecting on the absence of such studies allow us to ask about curriculum researchers and evaluators understanding of those language arts areas, and whether those studies are absent because curriculum researchers and evaluators view them as fully covered in the curriculum and there is no need to evaluate their presence and impact on learning or whether they do not view them as essential language arts areas that need to be covered in the curriculum.

On the Other hand, two studies that explore the presence of grammar skills in the curriculum, and that share contradicting findings, were identified in literature. Jabbour (2002) shares the same results of this study and explains that this curriculum covers grammar skills and allow students to achieve them. However, Elias (2007) contradicts the results of this study, and discusses that grammar is not covered in this curriculum and many of this skills are omitted. None of these two studies explain how the presence or absence of grammar would affect learning. Such contradicting findings let us question what type of criteria are curriculum researchers and evaluators using to investigate the presence or absence of certain language arts areas, what

understanding do they share for every language arts area, and whether they share the same or different indicators of success for every language arts areas.

With respect to skills related to listening and speaking, there are studies that share the same findings with this study and other that contradict them. Jabbour (2002) explains that this curriculum helps students to develop their listening and speaking skills without identifying what skills are covered and which ones are absent. Bou Orm (2014) believe that this curriculum gives great importance to oral communication skills. Other studies contradict these findings. Zeinnedine (2002) explains that the 1997 Arabic Curriculum lacks listening skills and many other skills related to speaking. It is recommended that Grade One Arabic textbook needs to give more attention to oral communication skills (The FiFth Educational Islamic Conference, 1999). Sayyah (2014) explains that the curriculum does not cover oral communication skills.

This contradiction of findings leads us to question again how do curriculum researchers and evaluators evaluate the presence of language arts areas in the curriculum, and based on what criteria; as well as the level of agreement among them when it comes to their understanding of what skills should be covered under each language arts areas. It is concluded that there is no shared understanding of the currently used curriculum since some studies that discuss prove that it covers specific language arts skills while other studies prove that these same skills are absent.

Studies that investigate the presence of twenty first century competencies in the 1997 Arabic Curriculum were located. Those studies described whether a skill is covered or not in the curriculum, but not how the presence or absence of a specific skill affects learning as discussed in this study.

One study that shares this finding was identified in literature. Digital literacy

skills could not be located in the Lebanese Curriculum before grade seven, and is learned as a separate subject, its skills are not integrated in content areas (Lebanese Parliament and UNDP, 2002). The current study proved that many skills related to communication, problem solving and collaboration, critical thinking and creativity, and social and cultural skills are partially covered in the curriculum. Studies that discuss the 1997 Arabic Lebanese curriculum share these findings. Abou Nahra (2002) explains that self-learning and collaboration are covered in the curriculum and that the curriculum allows students to apply them. Fraiha (2003) explains that when the curriculum was designed, the holistic educational approach was followed, and this allowed the integration of social and collaboration skills in it. Joumaa (2002) explains that the 1997 curriculum is planned in a way that helps students to acquire social and cultural skills. It is evident here that studies that investigate the presence of twenty first century skills share the same findings of this study, and the findings of each other.

Comparing Study Findings with Findings of Studies on Language Art Areas and Twenty First Century Skills

This section compares the findings of this study with other studies that investigate the presence of language arts areas and twenty first century skills in language curricula and reflects on them. Many regional and international studies were conducted to investigate the presence of some of the language arts areas and twenty first century skills addressed in this study.

Reading skills. Reading skills covered in this curriculum proved to focus on phonics and comprehension strategies, and to allow first graders to achieve reading best practices. Similarly, Turkish Language curriculum is found to cover reading skills that allow students to practice reading techniques and comprehension strategies at different grade levels (Erdem, 2010). Reading curriculum in primary grades in

Singapore asks students to employ phonics and comprehension skills, the same applies to other countries such as United States of America, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Qatar in order to help students achieve skills that are essential for learning (Ismail, Al-Awidi & Almekhlafi, 2012). It is concluded that Western and Arabic Curricula share the same understanding of reading in primary grades, and the Lebanese Curriculum developers share this same understanding but do not share same understanding of other skill as will be explained below.

Writing skills. Other studies were conducted to investigate the presence and type of writing skills covered in first grade language curriculum. Mohammad (2008) explains that grade one Kuwaiti language curriculum covers technical writing skills such as writing direction, tracing and coloring, but not skills that allow students to produce writing pieces. Mohammad (2008) adds that reviewing Kuwaiti curriculum documents explains this finding by grouping reading and writing as written language skills that are achieved at a later stage after the achievement of oral language skills which are listening and speaking. Absence of writing process skills in Lebanese Curriculum might be related to the fact that Lebanese Curriculum designers share the same understanding. Writing skills proved to be very poor in the Emirati Language Curriculum (Mullis et al., 2012). In another study on the Turkish Language Curriculum, writing area in different grade levels covers writing techniques and writing processes, the same is found in the Ireland Language Curriculum (Erdem, 2010). Findings of those study show that Arab and Western societies share different understanding of writing skills in the elementary level; something that leads the researcher to question the applicability of language art curriculum standards across cultures.

Spelling Skills. The studied curriculum proved to cover spelling skills related to writing letters correctly but not to other skills that are described as essential in

grade one (spell high frequency words correctly, and refer to word walls to spell words). Grade one Saudi Curriculum asks students to write letters of the alphabets correctly regarding spelling, and activities that allow the achievement of this skill are available in the workbook (Al-Jarf, 2007). Spelling activities related to writing, tracing and copying letters are addressed in the Kuwaiti curriculum since mastering the alphabet is essential in this grade, whereas skills related to writing words and sentences in early grades are not (Mohammad, 2008). However, spelling skills that ask student to spell letters and high frequency words are recognized in the primary language curriculum in England (retrieved from: <http://www.cie.org.uk/qualificatons/academic/primary/cipp>) . Thus, it is concluded that Lebanese curriculum developers share a common understanding of spelling with Arab curriculum designers, but not with Western designers and literature.

Listening and Speaking Skills. The studied curriculum does not include a section for listening, and misses targeting many speaking skills. Western curricula give a great focus to listening and speaking in primary graders. Malta first grade language curriculum is divided into four sections that are reading writing, listening and speaking where every learning session needs to start with listening and speaking activities where students are asked to express themselves in order to allow transition to reading and writing; the same applies to Singapore Curriculum, Qatar Curriculum, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Curriculum (Mullis et al., 2012). It is concluded that Lebanese curriculum developers do not share a common understanding on the importance and the nature of acquiring listening and speaking skills in grade one with Western and Arabic curriculum. This allow us to question what is the base of their understanding to these two language arts areas and how do they plan to promote them among learners.

Grammar skills. Skills related to grammar proved to be fully covered in

the studied curriculum. Similarly, many language Curricula consider teaching grammar. Netherland curriculum includes specific learning materials for teaching grammar since primary grades, the Emirati's Curriculum teaches grammar from primary grades, the same applies to other countries such as Singapore, and Oman (Mulliset al., 2012). Although, the Lebanese curriculum focuses on teaching grammar as many other language curricula do, it is not understood if this is due to a specific rationale or an adoption of the standards of other curricula.

Viewing and Visual Representation Skills. Studies that investigate the presence of viewing and visual representation skills in Arabic Language Curricula are not identified in literature. However, Erdem (2010) discusses that reading and constructing visuals are evident skills in the Turkish and Ireland Curriculum, and Mullis et al. (2012) discuss that they are presented in the Singaporean Curriculum. The rationale behind including those skills in the curriculum is not discussed.

Digital literacy. Digital literacy skills are not covered in the studied curriculum, and the rationale behind this omission is not indicated in any of the curriculum documents. Other Western and Arabic curricula proved to cover digital literacy skills and rationalize its presence to living in a digital age where those skills need to be mastered by every citizen. Digital literacy skills are covered in the elementary Language Emirati's curriculum since computers are used as the main source and tool to teach reading and writing (Ismail et al., 2012). Digital Literacy is also integrated in the Language Curriculum in the Kingdom of Morocco since 1999 and the use of ICT was integrated in all public schools (Mullis, et al., 2012). The New Zealand curriculum focuses on equipping students with digital literacy skills by training teachers and students to use e-resources through their learning process (Mullis et al., 2012). Similarly, information technology is integrated in language teaching in Omani schools

where computers and tablets are used to teach reading and writing (Mullis et al., 2012). It is clear that different Western and Arabic Curricula share a common understanding on the importance of preparing digital literate students, while the Lebanese curriculum does not, and that there is no rationale in the curriculum that justify this oversight. So we are not able to understand if these digital literacy skills were absent from the curriculum due to the lack of the understanding of their impact on learning or due to specific policies.

Problem solving and collaboration, critical thinking and creativity, and social and cultural skills. Those skills were merged under one section because most studies investigate their presence in the curriculum at the same time, and relate them to each other. Problem solving and collaboration skills covered in the studied curriculum focused on product rather than process where they ask students to work in groups and reach agreements but not to learn strategies that allow them to perform these tasks. Critical thinking and creativity skills were not evident in the studied curriculum. Some of the social and cultural skills were evident in the studied curriculum while others were not. Studies that investigate the presence of twenty first century skills as one component in the Arabic language curriculum could be identified in literature. For example, El Nashar (2012) discusses that the Egyptian Curriculum does not cover twenty first century skills, and recommends to reform the educational system to include them. Allamnakhrah (2013) explains that those skills are not covered in the currently used curriculum in KSA, but there is a plan to fully cover those skills by the year 2026. Tawil (2001) explains that there is a paradigm shift in different regions around the world such as Latvia, Poland, and Switzerland to integrate cultural skills, problem solving and collaboration, critical thinking and social competencies in the curricula. The presence of different studies that recommend the

integration of these skills rather than investigating their presence in the curriculum might allow us to say that recent trends in research are recommending the presence of these skills in the curriculum, and justify their absence from the studied curriculum.

Researcher's Note: Reflection on the Implementation of the Study Procedures

This study used a qualitative research methodology to answer its research questions. Semi-structured interviews were used to answer the first research question, and explore the design process that was used by curriculum designers to design the 2009 Grade one Arabic Curriculum. Document analysis was used to answer the second and third research question, and explore the presence of language arts areas and twenty first century skills in the 1997 Grade One Arabic Curriculum. This section reflects on the used research methodology and what was the research able to unravel through using it.

Although the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the curriculum designers succeeded in helping the researcher to explore the steps that curriculum designers followed to design the curriculum, those interviews did not allow the research to identify curriculum designers' understanding of the curriculum design processes identified in literature. Those interviews did not probe the designers to reflect on the process that they used, and share their understanding of this process and why was it chosen. Through these interviews, curriculum designers only shared the steps followed to design the curriculum, but not the rationale behind choosing these steps; whether it is because these steps are adopted from literature, or it is a process followed by CERD every time a new curriculum is designed. Those interviews also allowed curriculum designers to share their understanding of the curriculum with the researcher, but not the reason and understanding behind this understanding. Moreover, individual interviews were the only source of data used to investigate the design process of the

curriculum. Focus group interview was not conducted based on the interviewees' recommendation. This did not allow the researcher to see the interaction between curriculum designers, and how could they validate their responses to the individual interviews. Other sources of data that explain the design process of the curriculum, and that could have helped the researcher in better understanding the design process, were not available at CERD.

Content analysis was used to answer the second and third research questions. Curriculum documents were collected from CERD, and reviewed to determine to what extent language arts areas and twenty first century skills are covered in this curriculum. The researcher read those documents thoroughly, and compared the information presented in them to the qualitative criteria that were derived from literature in order to determine if there is full evidence, partial evidence, or no evidence that a specific skill is covered in the curriculum. This methodology allowed the researcher to identify if each specific area of language art is: fully covered partially covered, or not covered in the curriculum. The same applies to twenty first century skills. However, this methodology did not allow the researcher to investigate curriculum designers' understanding of language arts areas and twenty first century skills, and why certain skills are covered while others are not. Moreover, the criteria used in this study were only derived from Western literature. Lebanese curriculum designers might not share the same understanding of the Western curriculum. Although the curriculum reviewed is in Arabic and characteristics of Arabic Language might differ from characteristics of other languages, all criteria used in this study were related to English Language. Therefore, some characteristics of Arabic language might be missed from the criteria. This is because searching literature does not allow us to identify criteria for each language arts area in Arabic for early grades. This is applicable only for higher

grade levels. We can identify some standards that some Arab Countries developed for learning Arabic in elementary; however, comparing those standards to Western standards allow us to conclude that these Arabic Standards are translated.

Conclusion

This study explored the design process and content of Grade One Arabic Curriculum. The main aim was to compare the design process to theoretical models recognized in literature, and to compare the content of the curriculum to criteria related to language arts areas and twenty first century skills derived from literature. The study used a qualitative research methodology where the grounded theory was employed to analyze data received from interviews conducted with curriculum designers, and content analysis was employed to analyze data received from the curriculum documents. It was concluded that designers used the forward design model, which is a design model recognized in literature, to design the curriculum.

Reflection on the Design Process

Steps that curriculum designers followed to design the curriculum were shared with the researcher. They stated that that they diagnosed needs, developed learning objectives first, then they designed the content and methodology that needs to deliver the content, and they finally developed assessment tools which is evidence for learning. When compared with theoretical models, it was concluded that the forward design model was followed to design the curriculum. Many questions can be raised here. The first thing to question is why did curriculum designers followed those steps to design the curriculum. Curriculum designers did not mention that the forward design was adopted to design the curriculum. Thus; do they have a real understanding of the language curriculum design models and avoided to mention that they used the forward

design model? The forward design is preferred when teachers have a little choice on what to teach, rely on textbooks, most assessments are summative and centrally designed, and curriculum is designed by authorities (Richards, 2013). So was this curriculum design model chosen because the curriculum was design by the authority which is CERD? When the forward design is followed, there is a big focus on textbooks and different members can be performing different tasks where people preparing objectives might be different from those preparing the content (Richard, 2013). It might be that curriculum designers chose the forward design model to design the curriculum and avoided to state it when answering interview question due to the above mentioned reasons.

Another conclusion that can be drawn is that whether curriculum designers recognize the three language curriculum design models identified in literature and the impact of every design model on the process of language learning, and what type of learning they want to occur in the classroom, knowing that recognizing these models would have helped them identify if they are preparing a: teacher-centered classroom where the learner is able to apply language concepts in different contexts (forward design); a student-centered classroom where students build their knowledge and are actively engaged in the learning process (central design); or a classroom where real life situations are applied to learning and learners learn through practice (Richards, 2013).

Reflection on the Content

When comparing the content of the curriculum with the criteria derived from literature, some skills under each language arts areas and twenty first century skill proved to be evident while others proved not to be. This raises questions towards curriculum designers understanding of a grade one language curriculum and its content, especially the criteria that those curriculum designers followed to design the

curriculum. Their purpose toward including some language arts areas and twenty first skills and excluding others makes us think of their understanding of language arts curriculum especially that those missed skills are described earlier as essential for different types of learning and that their absence affects the learning process. Therefore, it could be asked what types of language learning do they want to occur, what is the profile of learner they want to graduate, what type of twenty first century learning they want to take place, what criteria were they following to develop the content of the curriculum if not that addressed in literature?

Moreover, many of the skills that were proved to be not included in the studied curriculum, proved to be evident in other textbooks published by private publishing houses but approved by CERD. For example, skills such as distinguishing facts from opinions, make predictions, and using punctuation rules proved not to be evident in the studied curriculum. However, they are covered in a grade one practice book called لغتي فرحي published by دار الفكر اللبناني and approved by CERD as it respects the Lebanese Curriculum. Therefore, it is questioned if the criteria used to approve textbooks are different from those used for developing the curriculum. The results leave the researcher wondering what criteria does CERD use to approve textbooks, and on what basis do they monitor the work of other publishing houses that publish curricula.

Many skills in this curriculum focused on the product rather than the process. For example, writing skills proved to focus on writing techniques and not on the process, group work skills as students to work in groups but do not identify group work strategies, and the same applies to asking students to talk about their work. It is focusing on the process rather than the product that allows learners to make a purpose of learning and make it a lifelong process (Jacobs & Farell, 2001).

A final note to conclude with is that the studied curriculum was developed in

1997, and since then its content was not changed, knowing that according to Lebanese law, the curriculum needs to be reformed every four years (retrieved from one of the interviews). This fact might be affecting the quality of the content of the curriculum when measured against currently adopted international standards. The knowledge base on learning and on best techniques to enhance language art acquisition is advancing to allow improvement and generation of new ideas; educational research and reform is always needed to improve our professional practices (McKee, 2003).

Recommendations for Practice and Research.

The following sections presents recommendation for both practice and research that curriculum designers might use when designing and evaluating a language curriculum.

Recommendations for Practice

Curriculum designers at CERD are currently in the process of designing a new Arabic Curriculum. Thus, they can use the results of this study to avoid gaps presented in this studied curriculum when designing the new curriculum. That is, they might work on including all language arts skills and twenty first skills that were absent from the studied curriculum. They might use the developed criteria in this study to include all necessary skills in a grade one Arabic Curriculum. It is recommended that those designers get a further understanding on curriculum design processes, and do to view curriculum design as a process that involves different complicated steps rather than a task. It is recommended that curriculum designers need to look for curriculum design processes that are described as best practices in literature, have deep understanding for them, and design the curriculum based on them. Moreover, curriculum designers are asked to revisit their understanding to needs analysis as an essential step that precedes curriculum design; and it is more a process rather than

distributing questionnaires to teachers and asking them what to include in the new curriculum. They are invited to design the curriculum based on certain criteria and profile of learners they want to graduate, and make these criteria visible for the ones who are implementing the curriculum.

Recommendations for Research

Curriculum designers and evaluators might use the criteria developed in this study to analyze the design process of curriculum and compare it with theoretical models. They might refer to this study to analyze if a language curriculum is suitable for twenty first century learning and if it covers all language arts areas. Further studies are also needed to check for understanding, especially when it comes to the conceptions held on each of the criteria used as the basis of the language art curriculum.

APPENDIX A

CRITERIA FOR EXPLORING CURRICULUM DESIGN PROCESS

These criteria were derived from literature to identify the design process that was used to develop the curriculum, and curriculum designers understanding of a curriculum. The responses of curriculum designers on interview questions were compared to these criteria. It was decided if there is full evidence, partial evidence, or no evidence if the criterion is presented in interviewees' responses. The first section looks for curriculum designers understanding of curriculum, the second is concerned with needs analysis, and the third with the process and steps designers followed to design the curriculum.

Curriculum Designers' Understanding of Curriculum

The following criteria were adopted to explore curriculum designers' understanding of Curriculum.

Criteria	Full Evidence in Designers' Responses	Partial Evidence in Designers' Responses	No Evidence in Designers' Responses
The curriculum is a set of learning competencies.			
The curriculum covers content that needs to be taught.			

The curriculum

covers teaching

methodologies.

The curriculum

covers assessment

tools.

The curriculum

covers professional

development aspects.

The curriculum

extends outside the

school.

Conducting Needs Analysis

The following criteria were adopted to explore if curriculum designers conducted needs analysis before designing the curriculum, what tools they used, and whether these tools are recognized in literature.

Criteria	Full Evidence in Designers' Responses	Partial Evidence in Designers' Responses	No Evidence in Designers' Responses
Curriculum designers conducted needs analysis before designing the curriculum.			
Curriculum designers used tools recognized in literature (interviews, questionnaires, tests) to conduct the needs analysis.			

Curriculum Design Process

The following criteria were adopted to explore what curriculum design process the curriculum designers used to develop the curriculum, and whether it matches theoretical models.

Criteria	Full Evidence in Designers' Responses	Partial Evidence in Designers' Responses	No Evidence in Designers' Responses
Curriculum designers included learning competencies in the curriculum			
Curriculum designers included content and teaching material in the curriculum			
Curriculum designers included assessment tools in the curriculum.			

APPENDIX B

CRITERIA FOR EXPLORING THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM- LANGUAGE ARTS AREAS

This appendix presents the criteria that were developed to determine to what extent the curriculum covers language arts areas proposed by Cox (2008). These are: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visual representation, spelling, and grammar.

Reading Area

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers reading skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Criteria:	Full Evidence in Curriculum Documents	Partial Evidence in Curriculum Documents	No Evidence in Curriculum Documents
Decode words.			
Recall all letters.			
Understand letter-sound relationships.			
Recognize beginning and end-sound.			
Understand that print has meaning.			
Recognize text events.			

Read books that have themes and episodes.

Answer comprehension questions.

Describe cause-effect relationships.

Make connections the book and personal experiences.

Writing Area

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers writing skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover

Writing Criteria:	Full Evidence in Curriculum Documents	Partial Evidence in Curriculum Documents	No Evidence in Curriculum Documents
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Hold writing tools properly.

Form letters correctly.

Separate words by spaces.

Produce a piece of writing that has at least three sentences that are related to the same topic.

Use descriptive and emotion words in the writing pieces.

Plan for writing by producing several drafts.

Proof read and edits writing by following learned proofreading skills.

Listening Area

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers listening skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Listening Criteria:	Evident in Curriculum Documents	Not Evident in Curriculum Documents	Evidence from Curriculum
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Remember and recall heard information.

Ask for clarifications if the heard information is not comprehended.

Understand and follow simple oral instructions.

Represent heard information by drawings.

Answer questions about details and events of oral presented and read aloud texts.

Speaking Area

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers speaking skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover

Speaking Criteria:	Evident in Curriculum Documents	Not Evident in Curriculum Documents	Evidence from Curriculum
Talk about own writings.			
Tell logical stories that include five or six well-sequenced events about themselves and others.			
Explaining own work to classmates.			
Express oneself using correct content-related words.			
Produce rhyming words.			
Act out stories			

Answer oral questions about
read and heard stories

Engage in book talks

Viewing and Visual Representation Area

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers viewing and visual representation skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Viewing and Visual Representation Criteria:	Evident in Curriculum Documents	Not Evident in Curriculum Documents	Evidence from Curriculum
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Define meanings of words
through referring to visual aids.

Write and illustrate own stories.

Act out verbally and none
verbally the stories through
dramatic representations, and
through writing and illustrating
own books.

Interpret concept maps that age
level appropriate.

Construct concept maps that age
level appropriate.

Spelling Area

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers speaking skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Spelling Criteria:	Evident in Curriculum Documents	Not Evident in Curriculum Documents	Evidence from Curriculum
Spell high frequency words correctly.			
Write commonly misspelled words correctly by referring to the words list.			
Use sound-letter relationship to correctly spell words.			

Grammar Area

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers grammar skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Grammar Criteria:	Evident in Curriculum Documents	Not Evident in Curriculum Documents	Evidence from Curriculum
Use punctuation rules correctly.			
Distinguish singular from plural.			
Use verbs to convey sense of time.			
Use prepositions correctly.			

APPENDIX C

CRITERIA FOR EXPLORING THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM- TWENTY FIRST CENTURY SKILLS

This appendix presents the criteria that were developed to determine to what extent the curriculum covers twenty first century skills addressed in Voogt and Roblin (2012) meta- analysis. These are: digital literacy, communication skills, problem solving and collaboration skills, critical thinking and creativity skills, and social and cultural skills.

Digital Literacy Skills

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers digital literacy skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Digital literacy Criteria	Evident in Curriculum Documents	Not Evident in Curriculum Documents	Evidence from Curriculum
Use word processing programs to write own names and simple words correctly.			
Copy sentences and short paragraphs using the keyboard correctly.			

Illustrate stories using age appropriate illustration programs.

Use computers and other tools to record readings and stories.

Work with teachers to create pictures, videos, texts, and concepts.

Find answers to questions using websites with the help of the teachers.

Communication Skills

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers communication skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Communication Skills	Evident in	Not Evident in	Evidence from
Criteria:	Curriculum Documents	Curriculum Documents	Curriculum

Work in groups.

Discuss opinions and share ideas with teachers and other students.

Problem Solving and Collaboration Skills

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers problem solving and collaboration skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Problem solving and Collaboration Skills Criteria:	Evident in Curriculum Documents	Not Evident in Curriculum Documents	Evidence from Curriculum
Look for a pattern.			
Act out a problem.			
Solve simple problems.			
Use proper dialogue strategies.			
Use proper group work strategies.			
Reach an agreement.			

Critical Thinking and Creativity Skills

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers critical thinking and creativity skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Critical Thinking and Creativity Skills Criteria:	Evident in Curriculum Documents	Not Evident in Curriculum Documents	Evidence from Curriculum
Make predictions and reason them.			
Use evidence and different criteria when reaching conclusions and answering questions.			
Distinguish fact from opinion.			
Relate cause and effect.			

Social and Cultural Skills

The following criteria were adopted to explore to what extent the curriculum covers social and cultural skills that a grade one curriculum is supposed to cover.

Social and Cultural Skills Criteria:	Evident in Curriculum Documents	Not Evident in Curriculum Documents	Evidence from Curriculum
Discuss similarities and differences between groups			
Talk about others cultures such as legends, believes, and costumes.			
Name feelings and express them properly.			
Name others feelings after listening to them.			
Respect the rules of group work.			
Use courtesy words when speaking with others.			
Ask for help when needed.			

APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interviewer will introduce herself to interviewees, and will provide the interviewees with the needed information about the study, and offer them the opportunity to ask for clarifications if needed.

The interviewer will start asking the questions and an estimated time will be provided for each question. During this stage, the interviewer will be recording the responses, taking notes, and intervening when necessary. The questions will be as follows:

1- How do you describe an effective process of curriculum design?

What are the steps that should be followed, and the actions that should be done to design a curriculum?

2- What is the process you followed to design the curriculum? Describe the actions you took and provide examples.

- a. Possible probes: Why did you decide to review the previous curriculum?
- b. What did you find after reviewing it?
- c. How is this curriculum compared to the other?
- d. Did you conduct needs analysis before designing the curriculum? Why? What tools did you use?
- e. What design map did you use to design this curriculum? Why did you choose this map?

After answering the questions, the interviewer will thank the interviewees and ask them if they have additional thoughts that they would like to share.

APPENDIX E

CURRICULUM CONTENT- ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

This check list analyses the content of the studied curriculum to determine if every language arts area and twenty first century skill is: fully covered, partially covered, or not covered in the curriculum.

Language Arts Areas

Language Arts Area:	Fully Covered	Partially Covered	Not Covered
Reading			
Writing			
Listening			
Speaking			
Viewing and Visual Representation			
Spelling			
Grammar			

Twenty First Century Skills

Twenty First Century Skills:	Fully Covered	Partially Covered	Not Covered
Digital Literacy			
Communication			
Problem Solving and Collaboration			
Critical Thinking and Creativity			
Social and Cultural Skills			

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