

A Content Analysis of Pronunciation and Spelling Activities in Action Pack Ten

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Abstract

Pronunciation and spelling are crucial skills for any intelligible form of spoken or written communication. Both serve as important indicators—among others—that determine the quality of speech or writing. However, EFL learners often face challenges with these fundamental skills during real-life communication. This content analysis aims to examine whether pronunciation and spelling are adequately covered in the Student Book and Activity Book, the extent to which these activities are emphasized, and their focus within Action Pack 10. To achieve these objectives, a mixed-methods approach was employed, including the development of four content analysis sheets. Frequencies and percentages were used for analysis, and a detailed description of the pronunciation and spelling activities was provided. The results showed that Action Pack 10 includes both pronunciation and spelling activities. Specifically, a dedicated section with one activity per unit for teaching pronunciation is present, with each activity targeting a specific pronunciation outcome as outlined in the Teacher's Book of Action Pack 10. However, no dedicated spelling section was found, although spelling is explicitly integrated into some writing activities. Only 17.5% of the writing activities in the Student Book and Activity Book explicitly focus on spelling, as indicated in the Teacher's Book. The study recommends increasing the number of spelling activities utilizing various strategies to improve students' spelling, as well as developing more contextualized pronunciation activities to better help students achieve pronunciation-related outcomes.

Keywords: Textbook, Content Analysis, EFL Learners, Jordan, Pronunciation, Spelling.

1. Introduction

Effective learning of any language entails the ability to use that language meaningfully and appropriately. Hence, second/foreign language curricula should aim at helping students become able to convey and deliver their thoughts and meanings to others in the target language. Despite the efforts authors and designers of English as foreign language (EFL) curricula make towards developing a variety of activities to catalyze the language teaching/learning process, many EFL learners still face problems in both basic and more complicated skills. Spelling in English is a relatively difficult task even for native speakers, which is also true for pronunciation since

transforming written words into spoken sounds and vice versa are indeed challenging tasks (Kreidler, 1972).

The challenge the learners face in pronunciation and spelling can be attributed to the irregularity or mismatch between English sounds and letters, which makes it harder for learners to learn pronunciation and spelling and often results in confusion and errors (Rao, 2018; Reed, 2012). Different letters can be pronounced as one sound (e.g., of the variations of the letter a: tall: /ɔ:/, able: /eɪ/, ant: /æ/, far: /ɑ:/). Similarly, the same sound can be presented in different letters (e.g., of the variation of the sound /f/: fork, elephant, enough).

Regardless of the difficulty of learning pronunciation and spelling, teaching these important skills still receive the least attention relative to other basic skills (e.g., grammar, vocabulary), which results in serious problems for EFL learners (Gilbert, 2008; Kralova, 2019; Kreidler, 1972; Macdonald, 2002; Morley, 1991; Nunan, 1991). For example, Morley (1991) reported that English pronunciation is ignored at many EFL/ESL classrooms and at universities around the world while (Nunan, 1991) dubbed pronunciation "a neglected skill in many language classrooms despite the obvious importance attached to it by learners". Many teachers ascribe this neglect to time constraints and lack of confidence in their ability to teach pronunciation (Gilbert, 2008; Reid, 2016), not to mention that some scholars and teachers alike tend to regard pronunciation as less important (Breitkreutz *et al*, 2001) and complementary to other language skills (Alghazo, 2015). This problem is compounded by students' reluctance to risk using unfamiliar words for fear of making errors, which may, in turn, not only affect their understanding of English but also make learning more frustrating.

As important pronunciation is for speaking, spelling is for writing, as, without correct spelling, a writer may fail to convey his/her message and, thus, cause misunderstanding on the part of the reader. In fact, teaching spelling is necessary for improving students' word reading skills (Graham, 1999; Williams, 1914; Zare-Behatsh & Rezaee, 2018), as young learners usually depend on matching sounds with letters in spelling words (Beech, Beers, Cramer, Hammond, Lim, Muncy, Prejza, & Triplett, 1986). Yet, spelling instruction is not given the attention it deserves (Al-Jarf, 2011; Foorman & Petscher, 2010; Simonsen & Gunter, 2001), as teachers tend to focus more on teaching reading and writing skills, probably out of their belief that it is futile to teach the inconsistency and unpredictable spelling system of the English language.

Similarly, no one can deny that the ability to pronounce correctly is fundamental for successful oral communication, as without proper articulation of speech, a misunderstanding is bound to ensue, causing frustration for speaker and listener alike (Eric, 1995). Mispronunciation may also result in problems in spelling, because learners spell words as they pronounce them and, thus, establish often misleading connections between the pronunciation and spelling of these words (Beech *et al*, 1986).

The development of students' pronunciation and spelling skills should be emphasized in both EFL instruction and instructional materials, probably through contextualized activities which potentially create students who are capable of correct articulation of both letters and sounds. This, in turn, would also culminate in students' ability to understand what they hear and read and to engage successfully in oral or written exchanges of information.

Research (e.g., Al-Najjar, 2012; Datko, 2014; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Velázquez León, Escalona Sánchez, & Reyes, 2015) suggests that pronunciation instruction plays a significant role

in EFL language teaching, as the classroom may be the only venue for students to get proper language input. Moreover, research (e.g., Benyo, 2014; Henderson & Beer, 1980; Williams, 1914) emphasizes the importance of pronunciation instruction for developing spelling. In other words, pronunciation instruction is a catalyst for correcting spelling problems, as the former is considered one of the three stages of spelling instruction (viz., *the phonetic, word structure recognition, and meaning recognition*).

In EFL contexts, textbooks are one of the major, if not the major, resources for knowledge and activities for teachers and learners alike (Pusporini, 2009; Rahmawati, 2018). They are important components in English language programs (Ababneh, 2007), a source of information (Manasrah, Al-Sobh & Al-Jabali, 2013), and an indispensable source for providing teachers and students with opportunities to practice various skills both in- and outside the classroom (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994),

In the Jordanian educational system, textbooks are one of the most important components of the curriculum. The Jordanian Ministry of Education develops and prescribes the general guidelines, the content, the methods, and the procedures for different curricula. English is taught as a foreign language and, as in other similar EFL contexts, many students face problems in speaking and writing and other equally important skills (e.g., pronunciation, spelling). Students tend to be reluctant to engage in communicative exchanges and are reported to face numerous problems, foremost amongst are pronunciation and spelling.

The *Action Pack* series is prescribed by the Ministry of Education as the official and compulsory English language curriculum in all Jordanian public and most private schools. The series is taught from the first through the twelfth grade. It is based on the premise that students learn best when they study meaningful and interesting topics and provided with functional language practice. Hence, the *Action Pack* series focuses on the integration of the four language skills and the four basic skills (viz., pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and punctuation) to enable students to use language communicatively. The series, also, encourages students to use their prior knowledge to learn grammar and vocabulary. Each level of *Action Pack* includes a Student's Book, an Activity Book, a cassette for listening materials, and a Teacher's Book. Action Pack 10 is based on a carefully graded syllabus presented in six thematic modules. Each module culminates in a project that further promotes skill integration.

2. Objectives of the study and its Importance

2.1 Objectives of the study

Due to the significance of pronunciation and spelling for successful communication and the significance of the textbook in teaching and learning English, the current research aims at content analyzing Action Pack 10 to determine the potential inclusion of pronunciation and spelling activities, the extent of this inclusion, and the types and focus of these activities. More specifically, the research seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What is the frequency, focus, and types of pronunciation activities in the Student's Book and Activity Book of *Action Pack 10*?
2. What is the frequency, focus, and types of spelling activities in the Student's Book and Activity Book of Action Pack 10?

2.2 Studying Importance

Based on a thorough review of related literature, this study may be one of the few in Jordan that content analyzed the pronunciation and spelling activities in the Action Pack series, Action Pack 10. Thus, the study is meant to provide EFL teachers and textbook writers with insights into the frequencies, focus, and types of pronunciation and spelling activities in Action Pack 10.

3. Study Terms

In the current study, the major terms are operationally defined as follows: Inclusion refers to the frequency of pronunciation and spelling activities in Action Pack 10. Pronunciation activities are those which promote pronunciation practice in Action Pack 10 whereas spelling activities are the writing activities which explicitly promote self-correction of spelling errors in students' writing (as prescribed in the Teacher's Book of Action Pack 10). Type pertains to the practice involved in each activity for students to achieve its pertinent learning outcome.

4. Methods

4.1 Criteria, Categories, and Units of the Content Analysis

This content analysis uses a mixed-approach research design, as it combines an account of the frequencies of both pronunciation and spelling activities and a detailed description of these activities in the book under study. Two criteria were used in this analysis: the inclusion and types of pronunciation and spelling activities across the ten units of the six modules of Action Pack 10. The categories of analysis encompass the unit and module in Action Pack 10. Every pronunciation and spelling activity in Action Pack 10 is used as the unit of analysis of the inclusion of pronunciation and spelling activities in the book understudy.

5. Study Results and Discussion

5.1 Study Result

The results are presented according to the two questions of the study. The first question asks about the frequency, focus, and types of pronunciation activities in the Student's Book and Activity Book of Action Pack 10. To answer the question, the researchers' content analyzed all the

pronunciation activities in the Student's Book and the Activity Book of Action Pack 10 to determine the frequency, focus, and types of these activities, as shown in Table 1 and 2 below. Table (1) presents the frequencies, percentages, and focus of the pronunciation activities in Action Pack 10.

Table (1): Frequencies, Percentages, and Focus of the Pronunciation Activities in Action Pack 10

Module	Frequency	Percentage	Focus
One: Starting out	-	-	-
Two: The Natural World	2	18	Pronouncing the final -r
			Pronouncing words in a proverb
Three: Science	2	18	Pronouncing a in different ways
			Pronouncing words in a proverb
Four: Journeys	3	28	Pronouncing the letters p and b
			Using rising intonation

			Using rising and falling intonation
Five: Climate and Earth	2	18	Pronouncing words of places
			Pronouncing initial cr
Six: Tourism	2	18	Pronouncing th
			Pronouncing initial wh
Total	11	100	

Table 1 shows that the total number of these activities in the six modules in both the Student's Book and Activity Book of *Action Pack 10* is only 11, which are all in the Student's Book. Table 1 also shows that each module contains two activities, each of which presents one learning outcome. To gain more information about these activities, the researchers developed another analysis sheet to determine the types of activities in terms of what the students are expected to do, as shown in Table (2).

Table (2): Types of the Pronunciation Activities in Action Pack 10.

Module	Unit	Activity Number	Type of Activity
One: Starting out	-	-	-
Two: The Natural World	One	5	Listen and repeat to notice a sound
	Two	5	Use the pronunciation Table to say the proverb
Three: Science	Three	5	Listen and repeat, then group the words according to similar sounds
	Four	5	Use the pronunciation Table to say the proverb
Four: Journeys	Five	7	Listen and repeat, then group the words according to similar sounds
		5	Listen and repeat to notice the rising intonation
	Six	4	Listen and repeat to notice the rising and falling intonation
Five: Climate and Earth	Seven	9	Listen and repeat to notice the correct the pronunciation of words
	Eight	6	Listen and repeat to notice the sound of the cluster cr-
Six: Tourism	Nine	4	Listen and repeat group words according to similar sounds
	Ten	7	Listen and repeat to notice the cluster wh

Table (2) shows that nine (out of the 11) pronunciation activities are of the Listen and Repeat type during which students listen to and repeat five or six words either in isolation or within sentences. Table 2 also shows that most of these activities use repetition (following a model on the cassette) as a teaching/learning strategy. Using a pronunciation Table is evident in Units 2 and 4 whereby the two activities provide students with a proverb in phonetic symbols and a pronunciation chart (at the end of the Activity Book) to identify the sound of the letter and match it to the words of the proverb.

To answer the second research question, which addresses the frequency, focus, and types of spelling activities in the Student's Book and Activity Book of Action Pack 10, the researchers developed two analysis sheets to analyze the writing activities and the activities with explicit focus on teaching spelling and other elements of writing, as presented in Tables (3 and 4).

Table (3) presents the frequencies, percentages of the general writing activities and the writing activities with explicit focus on spelling (as prescribed in the Teacher's Book of Action Pack 10).

Table (3): Frequencies and Percentages of the General Writing Activities and of the Writing Activities with Explicit Focus on Spelling.

Module	Unit	Frequency (General)	Percentage (General)	Frequency (Explicit Focus on spelling)	Percentage (Explicit Focus on spelling)
One		6	9.5	0	0
Two	one	5	7.9	1	9
	two	6	9.5	2	18
Three	three	7	11.1	1	9
	four	2	3.2	0	0
Revision 1		2	3.2	0	0
Four	five	6	9.5	1	9
	six	5	7.9	1	9
Five	seven	4	6.4	0	0
	eight	6	9.5	3	28
Six	nine	6	9.5	1	9
	ten	4	6.4	31	9
Revision 2		4	6.4	0	0
Total		63	100	11	100

Table (3) shows that the total number of writing activities in the Student's Book and Activity Book of *Action Pack 10* is 63. However, the activities which specifically focus on spelling are only 11 (17.5% of the total number of writing activities). Even though spelling activities are included in *Action Pack 10*, they constitute a little percentage and, thus, receive relatively little focus, especially if one notes that these activities all focus on the students' self-correction of misspelled words.

To identify the types of the activities that focus on spelling (as prescribed in the Teacher's Book), the researchers analyzed the writing activities in every unit to glean those with a focus on spelling, as shown in Table (4).

Table (4): Types of the Writing Activities with Explicit Focus on Spelling in Action Pack10

Module	Unit	Activity and Page Number	Type of Activity
One	-	-	-
Two	One	8, p.15	Write a short paragraph with a solution to a problem
	Two	8, p.21	Write a short description
		9, p.23	Write a short description
Three	Three	7, p.31	Write a letter
	Four	-	-
Revision 1		-	-
Four	Five	6, p.45	Write an e-mail
	Six	9, p.53	Write about a memorable journey
	Seven	-	-
	Eight	7, p.63	Write sentences about a place

<i>Six</i>	Nine	7, p.65	Write three paragraphs about cause and effect
		7, p.67	Write an account of what happened and what you saw
	Ten	8, p.75	Write a postcard to a friend
		6, p.81	Write a plan and describe a process
Revision 2		-	-

Table (4) reveals that every unit, except seven and the two revision units, has one writing activity with an explicit focus on spelling. These activities can all be classified into one main type which is *writing (at least) one paragraph* (viz., descriptive, letter, email, plan, and postcard).

5.2 Discussion of the Results

The current study examined the frequency, focus, and types of pronunciation and spelling activities in *Action Pack 10*. Table 1 above shows that the pronunciation activities are equally distributed among the six modules (viz., two activities per module except for the two revision units). Each of these activities is meant to realize one learning outcome pertinent to pronunciation, amounting to 11 pronunciation-related learning outcomes in the book under study. The analysis shows that there is one pronunciation-oriented activity per unit, except for Module 4 which has three activities, of which two meet one learning outcome (viz., *using rising and falling intonation*).

Table (1) also shows that most of these activities focus on segmental issues of pronunciation (e.g., the sound of the final r, the sound of a in different positions in different words, the pronunciation of clusters as cr-, wh- and th-) whereas only two activities focus on suprasegmental features of pronunciation (i.e. the rising and falling intonation. For example, Activity 5 (Unit 1, p. 14) focuses on segmental features, as the students are asked to listen to the cassette and notice the sound /r/ at the end of a given word. The teacher plays the cassette and asks some students to repeat the words aloud for the whole class to hear the words, as shown in Figure (1) below.

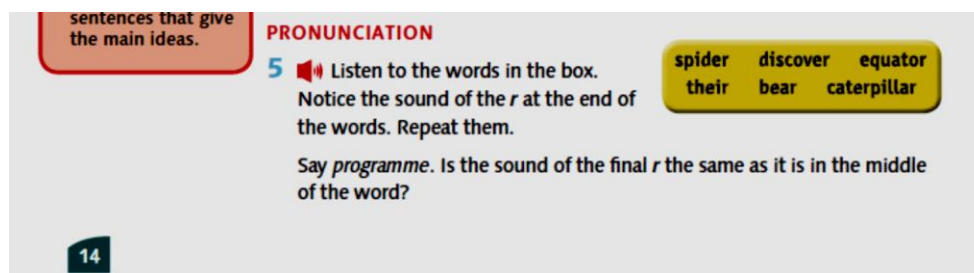


Figure (1): Example Pronunciation Activity

The teacher must make sure that the students produce the correct British pronunciation of the final r. The students then listen again to the cassette to learn the accurate pronunciation of the word programmed, as the teacher draws their attention to the difference in the sound of the letter r in the middle of the word. The teacher then asks them to look at the pronunciation Table (page 75 of the Activity Book) to notice the different pronunciations of the letter in different positions

in the word (e.g., four, red, peculiar). To wrap up, the teacher reiterates that the final r is not pronounced and that words which end with the letter r are pronounced with the vowel sound

instead in British English. As seen in Figure 1, the words in this activity are decontextualized as they are presented isolated in a box. Similar activities are activities 5 (Module 2/Unit 3, p.27), 9 (Module 5/Unit 7, p.59), 6 (Module 5/Unit 8, p.67), and 7 (Module 6/Unit 10, p.77).

It is fairly evident that most of the pronunciation activities are not contextualized (i.e., they present individual words in isolation). Only two contextualized activities are found. The first is activity 5 (Module 4/Unit 5, p.43) in which the words to be learned are contextualized within a reading text, as seen in Figure (2).

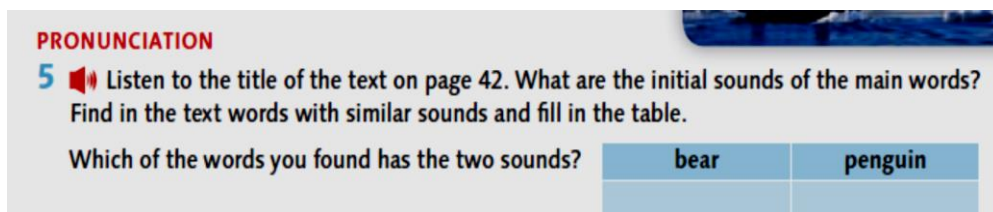


Figure (2): Example Contextualized Pronunciation Activity

As shown in Figure (2), even though the focus of the activity is on discrete initial sounds (viz., /p/, /b/), the words within which the two sounds are presented are contextualized within a reading text previously taught in the Unit. After the students read the instructions, the teacher asks some to read the title of the text and one student to write the title on the board and underline the letters p and b in *polar*, *bear* and *penguins*. Students listen to the cassette and pay attention to how the two letters are pronounced, and individual students are asked to read the title aloud. The students then refer to the phonetic chart for more examples. Under the teacher's guidance, the students work in pairs to find further examples in the text and write them down under the right column in the Table. The second and only other example of this type of activity is Activity 4 (Module 6/Unit 9, p.75) in which two sounds of the cluster th are contextualized within two sentences (e.g. it is pronounced /θ/ in *thief*, and /ð/ in the pronoun *there*).

Whereas the examples above present segmental features of pronunciation (viz., single sounds), only two activities target suprasegmental features of pronunciation (viz., falling and rising intonation), as shown in Figures (3 and 4) below.

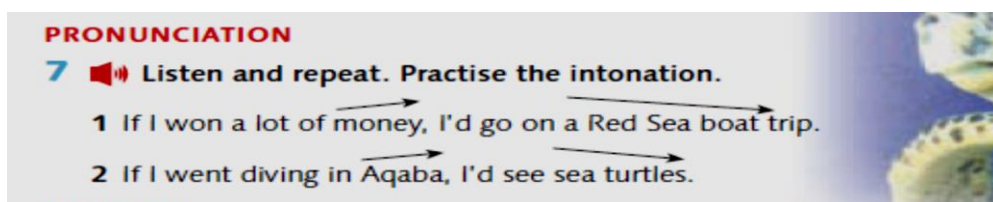


Figure (3): Example Pronunciation Activity which Focuses on Rising and Falling Intonation

In Activity 7 (Module 4/Unit 5, p. 47), the teacher reads the sentences aloud drawing students' attention to the second conditional. He/she then explains the meaning of the upward and downward arrows and that the *if* clause has an upward arrow while the *main clause* has a downward arrow. The students then listen to the cassette noting and then practice the rising and falling intonation patterns in the two parts of each sentence.

PRONUNCIATION

4  Listen to the questions from the text. To which questions can the answer be *yes* or *no*?

1 So, where shall we go on holiday this year?	2 How about going to Canada?
3 Do you think it's a good idea?	4 Shall I check the flights to Canada?

Listen again. Which questions go up in pitch at the end? Repeat.

Figure (4): Example Pronunciation Activity which Focuses on Pitch

In Activity (4) (Module 4/Unit 6, p. 49), the teacher explains how the pitch in the first and second questions is different from that in the third and fourth questions. He/she further explains that a rising pitch is used when the answer to a question is yes or no. Several students are then asked to listen to the cassette to notice the rising pitch in questions 3 and 4.

To identify the types of pronunciation activities, the researchers examined the title of each activity, as presented in Table 2 above. Most of these activities were found to be of the listen and repeat type. These activities ask students to listen to the cassette twice to notice the individual sounds of each word and to repeat these sounds after the model on the cassette. These activities require students to use the phonetic chart at the end of the Activity Book (p.75) to come up with more examples of the sounds under study, which potentially helps them learn the sound of each pronunciation symbol and think of different words with similar sounds (e.g., the sound /f/ in words like fish, enough, photo). Only two activities were found to teach pronunciation differently. They present a proverb written in phonetic symbols for the students to read using the phonetic chart, as shown in Figure (5).

PRONUNCIATION

5 Can you say this proverb? Use the pronunciation table at the end of your **Activity Book** glossary to help you.

/hi hu: faɪndz ə frend, faɪndz ə treɪzə/

What do you think this proverb means? Translate it into Arabic, then in pairs compare your answers.

Figure (5): Example Pronunciation Activity

Figure 5 shows Activity (5) (Module 2/Unit 2, p. 23) in which students are asked to refer to the phonetic chart (provided at the end of the Activity Book) to learn how to match the pronunciation symbols with their corresponding sounds. This is done for the students to guess the proverb and practice pronouncing the symbols together. The teacher explains that these symbols are guides to pronouncing English words, helps the students practice pronouncing the words of the proverb, and facilitates pair-work to read and write the words of the proverb.

In their attempt to work out the proverb, the students pronounce the symbols aloud and write what they think they are in their notebooks. After they complete the task, the students are asked to translate the proverb into Arabic and to make sure that they are translating for meaning word-for-word. They then share their translations to vote (as a class) for the best translation. Only one other similar activity was found in the book under study (viz. Activity 5 in Module 4/Unit 4, p. 37).

The second question addressed the frequency, focus, and types of spelling activities in Action Pack 10. Towards this end, the researchers analyzed the instructions of the writing activities in the Teacher's Book to determine which of these activities explicitly focus on spelling and types of these activities in the Student's Book and Activity Book of Action Pack 10.

Table (3) above shows that the writing activities which explicitly focus on spelling amount to only 17.5% of the writing activities in the book under study, which may be an indication of the relatively little significance ascribed to spelling. In these activities, the students are required to write paragraphs or essays and self-check their writing for spelling errors. Activity 8 (Module 2/Unit 1, p. 15), for instance, is illustrative of the writing activities which focus on spelling, as shown in Figure (6).

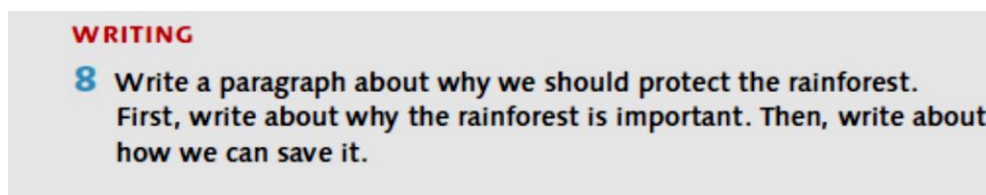


Figure (1): Example Writing Activity with a Focuses on Spelling

In this activity, the teacher asks the students to suggest reasons for the importance of rainforests and to write their ideas on the board. The teacher then encourages them to help him/her write a paragraph about rainforests using full sentences. The students each write a paragraph providing reasons for the importance of rainforests and suggesting ways to save them using the ideas on the board. As the students write, the teacher monitors errors and encourages them to correct their spelling, punctuation, and grammar. After they finish, individual students are chosen to read out their paragraphs, after which they assess their progress using the Self-Assessment Tool 1 at the end of the Activity Book.

Similarly, Figure (7) presents Activity 6 (Module 4/Unit 5, p. 45) which asks students to write an email describing a visit to a friend.

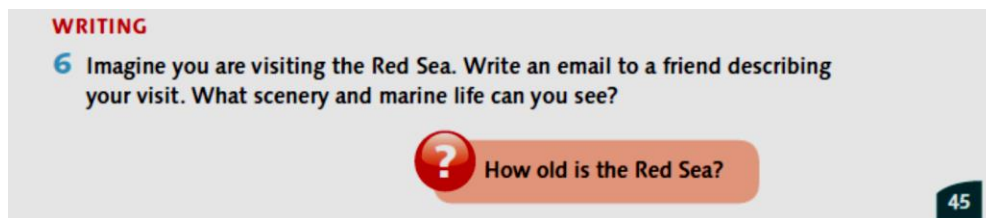


Figure (2): Example Writing Activity which Focuses on Spelling

This activity encompasses two writing skills (viz., writing an email and writing a description), as students are asked to describe a scenery and wildlife of a place they can see or imagine. First, the teacher demonstrates how to begin and end an email and calls for further suggestions (e.g., Hi, See you soon, best regards, Bye for now). As students write their emails, the teacher monitors, points out errors, and encourages them to self-correct instead of immediately asking for his/her help.

Table (4) above shows that the writing activities are all of one type which requires writing at least one well-organized paragraph. These activities focus on different aspects of writing of

which spelling is just one, as they require students to correct their errors. These activities all focus on the students' self-correction of their misspelled words even though no clear guidance on how to do that is missing altogether.

6. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

It can be readily concluded that the pronunciation and spelling activities included in *Action Pack 10* are not many, which may reflect the relative significance of these two basic skills in the book under study. The inclusion of more activities on the pronunciation- and spelling-related learning outcomes may help the students get a firmer grasp on pronunciation and spelling.

Furthermore, a heavier emphasis on suprasegmental features of pronunciation in this upper-intermediate level of the basic stage may catalyze the students' ability to use these features, especially as they add to the quality of articulation and help EFL learners better understand and be understood by native speakers of English. Other types of pronunciation activities (e.g., tongue twisters, homophones, shadow reading, silent sound games) may also be catalysts, as they allow students opportunities for further practice.

Other activities which are pertinent to the use of the phonetic chart may be capitalized on, especially with the availability of free online and offline interactive phonetic charts. These researchers suggest that one or more hyperlinks to interactive phonetic charts be included in this, and preferably other books of the *Action Pack* series, which may constitute an added value towards independent and self-paced pronunciation learning.

Self-correction is the only spelling strategy used to help students improve this fundamental sub-skill, which is relatively difficult for students in general and for poor spellers in particular. These researchers suggest that a specific how-to section be provided in each unit to help students with the activities which are meant to teach effective strategies for improving spelling. Furthermore, these researchers strongly recommend integrating spelling and pronunciation instruction, as the literature suggests that pronunciation instruction is a prerequisite and a catalyst for correcting spelling problems and for developing spelling in general (Benyo, 2014; Henderson & Beers, 1980; Williams, 1914).

Conflicts of interest statements

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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