

Research Article

The Inclusion of the Four Language Skills in English Textbooks for the Basic Stage in Jordanian Schools: A Content Analysis of Action Pack Textbooks

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Abstract

The study aimed to examine the extent to which learning activities for the four skills (Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing) are included in the Action Pack textbooks for the basic stage, in comparison with the focus on these four skills according to the Bases of Success, Incompletion, and Failure (BSIF). Content analysis was utilized as a tool for data collection by analyzing the quantity of learning activities in a sample of three textbooks: those for the 2nd, 5th, and 8th grades. The researcher calculated the number, percentages, and ranks for each skill in the three textbooks. The Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test was used to explore any statistical significance between the expected and observed proportions. The results of the study indicate that there is a statistical difference between the actual percentages of the inclusion of each language skill and the BSIF distributions of percentages. It is recommended that the Department of Education and Training (DET), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook designers, and curriculum planners in the Directorate of Curriculum and Textbooks (DCST) cooperate in their efforts while issuing the BSIF, to ensure that the actual teaching of the four skills aligns with the priorities suggested by the DET.

Keywords: Assessment, Content Analysis, EFL, Language Skills, Testing.

1. Introduction

The ever-growing need for effective communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world. And opportunities to gain experience English are provided in many ways such as formal instruction, travel, study abroad, as well as through the media and the Internet (Richards, 2006). EFL Learners want to be able to master English to an elevated level of accuracy and fluency. Employers, too, insist that their employees have good English language skills, and fluency in English is a prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world. The demand for an appropriate teaching methodology is therefore as strong as ever. So, Communicative language teaching (CLT) can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a

language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom.

Ahmad and Rao (2013) assured that with CLT began a movement away from traditional lesson formats where the focus was on mastery of different items of grammar and practice through controlled activities such as memorization of dialogs and drills, and toward the use of pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and project work.

In planning a language course, decisions must be made about the content of the course, including decisions about what vocabulary and grammar to teach at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels, and which skills and micro-skills to teach and in what sequence. Decisions about these issues belong to the field of syllabus design or course design. Decisions about how best to teach the contents of a syllabus belong to the field of methodology (Ahmad and Rao, 2013).

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the skills of any language which should be learned to use this language acceptably, comprehensively, and properly. To become a well-rounded communicator, one needs to be proficient in each of the four language skills. These four skills give learners opportunities to create contexts in which to use the language for exchange of information, evidence of their own ability (proof of learning) and, most important, confidence (Sadiku, 2015).

Listening and reading are the receptive skills because learners do not need to produce language, they receive and understand it. These skills are sometimes known as passive skills (Hamer, 2007). The productive skills are speaking and writing because learners are applying these skills in a need to produce language. They are also known as active skills. Consequently, to succeed in using a language, someone needs to integrate and use these skills efficiently, interactively, and appropriately to develop an acceptable level of proficiency which includes not only the grammatical rules, but also the pragmatic ones (Hedge, 2000).

Brown (2006) assured that teachers should set lofty standards for an ESL classroom. They should work to create the necessary conditions for students to learn effectively and reach the desired outcome. For the teaching of English to be successful, the four skills, reading, listening, speaking, and writing, should be integrated in an effective way. These skills should be addressed in a way that helps students meet the standards you set for them and develop their communicative competence gradually. In fact, the integration of listening and speaking with reading and writing will make learners good listeners, speakers, readers, and writers to be able to communicate effectively. The mastery of these skills is a gradual process. Teachers, for instance, should expose learners to gradually challenging tasks and material.

Rost (2006) claims that through daily activities, teachers provide learners with opportunities to develop each skill: students listen (to the teacher use the target language, to a song, to one another in a pair activity), speak (pronunciation practice, greetings, dialogue creation or recitation, songs, substitution drills, oral speed reading, role play), read (instructions, written grammar drills, cards for playing games, flashcards) and write (fill-in-the-blank sheets, sentences that describe a feeling, sight or experience, a dialogue script, a journal entry).

There are many English language teachers working in EFL contexts. Their work often requires the quick assessment of a student's oral ability, usually during a brief initial interview or

even in the very first class. This can help determine the choice of class material and the overall aims of a course of instruction. Informal assessment also continues throughout any teaching.

program, as a way of ensuring that desired outcomes are being achieved and students' needs are being met. Such informal assessment is clearly a central part of language teaching. It is no less important than the formal testing of achievement, or the testing of employment and academic-related proficiency. It follows that all teachers in EFL contexts, whatever their positions and duties, ought to have a basic understanding of the principles underlying assessment of oral language skills. The point here is that, although listening and reading tests can provide an indirect indication of speaking and writing ability, they provide no comprehensive assessment of communicative ability.

Ur (2012) claims that the language skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking are distinct from one another. Although testing one language skill individually may provide indirect information about a test taker's ability to perform the others, it cannot provide a comprehensive assessment of one's overall communicative ability, which frequently involves the use of multiple language skills in combination with each other. Consequently, to focus exclusively on some aspects to the exclusion of others might under-represent the construct and thus provide an assessment that was less than sufficiently valid for its intended purpose. While a specific language test may focus in depth on a single skill area and provide especially useful information about a test taker's proficiency in that skill, using measures of other skills usually will allow for a more complete assessment of a test taker's ability to engage in effective communication (Richards, 2006). Therefore Ur (2012) assured that estimating skill in a specific domain (speaking, for example) can be facilitated by testing skills in other, related areas as well. However, although this strategy can provide useful supplemental information, this is not to suggest that testing a skill in a related domain can substitute for testing a skill directly.

There are potentially serious societal consequences of choosing to test some aspects of language proficiency and not others. Washback is a very real phenomenon (Bailey, 1999). It has been alternatively defined as "the connections between testing and learning" (Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Ferman, 1996, p. 298) and "the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning" (Messick, 1996, p. 241). That is, what is tested is highly likely to affect not only what is taught, but how it is taught — if not immediately, then at least in the longer term. Alderson and Wall (1993) have hypothesized more specifically that a test may influence what teachers teach (and what students learn) and how it is taught and learned, the rate and sequence, and the degree and depth, for example.

Empirically, accumulative studies have been conducted on the way of testing and assessing the four skills, the significance of evaluating each skill interactively and the main aspects of each language skill under assessment process.

The purposes of assessment of learning might be, according to Alderson and Banerjee (2001), these can be categorized as having two different purposes:

- Assessment FOR learning (formative assessment)
- Assessment OF learning (summative assessment)

Assessment FOR learning refers to what we find out to be in a better position to support the learning in the classroom. Assessment OF learning refers to the collection of evidence to show

what a learner has learnt. A third purpose, Assessment AS learning, is sometimes identified; this refers to elements of assessment which contribute directly to the learning process, frequently involving self or peer assessment. In this discussion, however, such elements are included in the concept assessment for learning, as a good task used in assessment for learning will normally directly promote learning.

In Jordan, Action Pack Textbooks series were used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the public and private schools. They contain varied learning activities on the four skills (Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing). However, the Bases of Success, Incompletion, and Failure (BSIF) issued in 2018 by the Ministry of Education in Jordan (MOE) assured that all language skills in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) from the first grade to tenth grade should be assessed as follows: Reading (20%), Writing (20%), Speaking (30%) and Listening (30%). The Department of Examinations and Tests (DET) in the MOE assigns these percentages annually claiming that these proportion respond to the General guidelines for English subjects and general and specific outcomes for the English language curriculum (2006 and above). Therefore, this study aims at investigating the appropriateness of the Action Pack series adapted by The MOE in meeting these percentages that were suggested by the DET. This has been conducted by exploring the inclusion of the learning activities on each language skill.

2. Problem of the Study and Its Questions

Throughout the researcher's years of experience in teaching and supervising English in Jordanian schools, he noticed that the students' total achievements in the four skills were described as low; the same is reported by some researchers (Aljabali, 1996; Irianti, 2011 & Naqeeb, 1999) who reported that many Jordanian students suffer from a low level of speaking, listening, reading and writing proficiency. Some reasons behind such situation could be the lack of using appropriate assessment strategies, not teaching the activities altogether or there might be mismatch between the given percentages of assessment for each skill and the inclusion of the learning activities that are exposed on each skill throughout the textbooks.

By analyzing the content of the textbooks and finding out the extent of inclusion for each learning skill, the researcher might find if this low performance in learning EFL could be due to the mismatch between the expected percentages mentioned in the BSIF and the actual inclusion of the learning activities that are properly supposed to highlight the four skills with similar focus as the BSIF's percentages.

2.1 Questions of the Study

The present study is an attempt to answer the following question:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference at ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the proportion of inclusion of the learning activities for each skill (Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing) in Action Pack textbooks and the BSIF percentages distribution for each skill?

3. Objective of Study and Its Importance

3.1 Objective of Study

The study aimed at examining the extent of inclusion of the learning activities for the four skills (Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing) in comparison with the focus of the four skills according the BSIF.

3.2 Importance of Study

The significance of study can be summed up in the following points:

1. Curricula designers in the Ministry of Education in Jordan (MOE) might take into consideration quantity and quality of the learning activities that should be covered during each grade and responded to the BSIF distributions for each skill.
2. EFL teachers might pay attention to the inclusion of each skill in the textbook activities and enrich them with additional activities that recover any gap between the BSIF and the textbooks.

4. Methods and procedures

4.1 Samples of Study

Three textbooks of Action Pack series were chosen to be analyzed. The basic stage, according to the MOE, is divided into stage 1 (grades 1,2 and 3), stage 2 (grades 4,5 and 6) and stage 3 (grades 7,8,9 and 10). Therefore, one textbook was chosen randomly from each stage; the second, the fifth and the eighth grades *Action Pack* textbooks. The researcher counted all the learning activities whether they were separate or integrated with each other. The activities of the foundational skills (vocabulary and grammar) were not counted.

4.2 Instruments, data collection and data analysis

The researcher used content analysis as a tool for exploring the three textbooks by finding out the number, the percentage, and the ranks of the learning activities for each skill in each grade and comparing them with the percentages given in the BSIF. Then statistical processes were calculated to find if there is a significant difference between the percentages of inclusion for each skill and the BSIF distributions.

4.3 Validity of the instruments

To ensure the validity of the instrument, they were submitted, in their initial forms, to the jury of the twelve judges who validated the instructional program. Therefore, the instruments were modified in their final versions according to the Jury members' comments and suggestions.

4.4 Reliability of the Instruments

To ensure the reliability of the content analysis, the researcher re-analyzed the learning activities in the three books after a week, and then the researcher used Pearson's Correlation test to obtain the reliability coefficient of the tests; the results are presented in Table (1).

Table (1): Pearson's Correlations-Coefficient of Overall Speaking Skill Tests

Speaking Test	N	Pre-test	
		Pearson's Correlation	Sig. (2 tailed)
posttest	15	0.824**	0.0

**Significance at 0.01 level

Pearson's Correlation reliability coefficient for the inter-reliability of the content analysis was reasonable and dependable for the purpose of this study. The Data were analyzed, and the

percentages were calculated for the three books which were taught in the scholastic year 2017/2018.

5. Results of the study and Discussion

To answer the question of the study, the researcher calculated the number of activities for each skill in the three books, the rank for each skill in each book and finally the percentage of inclusion for each skill in the three books. Chi-Square Goodness of fit test is used to judge if the differences in percentages are significant or not. Table (2) below presents the number and the percentage of the learning activities for each skill in the three textbooks.

Table (2): The Numbers and the Percentages of the Learning Activities of the Four Skills in the Action Pack 2, 5 and 8

Grade	Reading		Writing		Speaking		Listening		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
2	64	23.50%	66	24.26%	67	24.63%	75	27.61%	272
5	92	28.22%	70	21.47%	93	28.52%	71	21.79%	326
8	52	29.21%	56	31.46%	25	14.04%	45	25.29%	178
Total	208	28.40%	192	23.63%	185	22.69%	191	25.27%	776

The table presents the number and the percentage of the learning activities for each skill in the three textbooks. The table reveals that the highest number of activities was in speaking skill in the fifth grade (93 activities with percentage of 28.52 %) while the lowest number was in speaking skill in the eighth grade (25 activities with percentage 14.04%). Table (3) presents the ranks for each skill in the three textbooks.

Table (3): The Ranks for the Four Skills in the Action Pack 2, 5 and 8.

Grade	Reading Activities	Writing Activities	Speaking Activities	Listening Activities
2	4	3	2	1
5	2	4	1	3
8	2	1	4	3

Table (3) shows that listening was at first rank in the 2nd grade, speaking was at first rank in the 5th grade and writing was at first rank in the 8th grade. On the other hand, reading in the 2nd grade, writing in the 5th grade, and speaking in the 8th grade were at fourth rank among other skills.

Table (4) below reveals the results of Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test for the expected proportions and observed proportions:

Table (4): The Results of Expected Proportions and Observed Proportions of the Four Learning Skills in Chi-Square Test

Proportion	Reading Skill	Writing Skill	Speaking Skill	Listening Skill
BSIF	0.20	0.20	0.30	0.30
Observed	0.284	0.236	0.227	0.257
Chi-Square	10.15			
df	3			
Asymp sig	0			

5.1 Discussion of Results

The question of the study asks about the inclusion of the learning activities in Action Pack series and the extent to which this inclusion meets the percentages of the four skills in the BSIF. The results of the Chi-Square test (10.15), which is more than the tabulated Chi-square result (0.35), reveals that there is a significant difference between the expected percentages that should be covered during assessing the four language skills during teaching English and the observed results which showed varied and different percentages of the inclusion for the four skills in Action Pack series.

While reading skill should take 20% of the total assessing grades in the BSIF, it was noticed that 28.4% of the learning activities were dedicated to reading skill. On the other hand, the BSIF suggested 20% of grades should be on writing skills, unexpectedly about 24% of learning activities in the textbooks were on writing skill.

Consequently, while oral skills, speaking and listening, should take 60% of the total grade (30% speaking & 30% listening) as suggested in the BSIF, it was found that about 48.4% of the learning activities in the Action Pack were dedicated to assessing these oral skills; 22.7% for speaking and 25.7% for listening.

More to add, the result of the study reveals that the rank of each skill throughout the textbooks was not hierarchically designed; while listening skill in the 2nd grade was at the first rank, it became at the third rank in the 5th and 8 grades and speaking skill in the 5th grade was at first rank then it moved backward to the fourth rank in the 8th grade. The researcher might explain this shifting and unsteady integration of each skill throughout the *Action Pack* series due to the lack of cooperation of the DET and the Directorate of Curricula and School Textbooks (DCST) in the MOE; the researcher claims that the people who are in charge of suggesting the percentages for each language skills or those who are responsible to adapt textbooks should make hold regular meetings in this concern and conduct a content analysis for each textbook to decide any amendments or change either in the BSIF percentages for the learning skills or in changing, adding and modifying the included learning activities to be compatible with the expected percentages by the BSIF. The DET claims that each skill should be assessed with a specific proportion, while the actual instruction for the textbooks showed different extent of inclusion that might hinder students to achieve these percentages.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study warrant the following conclusions:

1. The result of the study reveals there is a gap in the inclusion of the learning activities for the four learning skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) that should respond to the BSIF percentages.
2. The results reveal a lack of cooperation between the DET and the DCST while adapting curricula or determining the percentages for each skill; no content analysis was conducted while issuing the BSIF percentages.
3. The result of the study demonstrates a low vertical or hierarchical integration for each skill throughout different grades; a skill might be at first rank in a grade while it becomes at the third or fourth rank in other grades.

7. Recommendations

Considering the results of this study and in compliance with the General Guidelines and Specific Outcomes, it is recommended to the DET, EFL textbook designers and curricula planners in the DCST to cooperate their work while issuing the BSIF to make the actual teaching of the four skills respond to the priority of skills as suggested by the DET. It is also recommended that teacher's role should be changed from a dominator into a provider, assistant, facilitator and consultant who is able to construct a variety of effective activities with some relax, and enjoyable real-life activities with more emphasize on English as a medium of instruction in the EFL classes to increase effectiveness in the EFL teaching-learning environment; the teacher should take into consideration the significance of each skill during assessing students. More focus should be dedicated to oral skills without neglecting reading and writing skills.

Conflicts of interest statements

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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