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## Research Article

### A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF WRITING ACTIVITIES THAT MATCH THE WRITING SPECIFIC OUTCOMES IN THE GUIDELINES IN THE FIRST SIX UNITS IN THE STUDENT'S BOOK OF ACTION PACK 7

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#### ABSTRACT

The present paper aims at analyzing the writing activities that match the writing specific outcomes in the guidelines in the first six units in the student's book of Action Pack Seven. To answer the questions of the study, the researcher used frequencies and percentages. The findings of the analysis revealed that the writing activities in the student's book of Action Pack 7 are few despite the importance of writing in learning English as a foreign language. Moreover, the study showed that the writing activities in the student's book of Action Pack 7 are not integrated with other language skills in an acceptable way. In addition, the study pointed out that the first specific writing outcome is represented in a considerable way; whereas the second specific writing outcome is represented in a poor way. In addition, the study revealed the importance of increasing the writing activities in the student's book of Action Pack 7 as it helps in developing the learner's writing abilities.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language becomes necessary as it is the language that billions of people all over the world depend on as a medium of communication. It is used widely in industry, trade, science and technology. Because of its importance, it is said that people who know English well are able to get better education, high paid jobs, and to expand their knowledge due to this fact that many countries try to expand the use of English as a foreign language in their teaching policy.

In Jordan, the concentration recently has become on the learner, as he is the center and the focus in teaching English as a foreign language. The goal of the Jordanian Educational policy is to prepare the Jordanians EFL learners to become communicative and proficient in English. Consequently, the concentration in developing the curricula is one of the major projects in Jordan to find out the appropriate textbooks that can achieve the teaching goals in Jordan for all educational stages because the textbooks, the process of learning, and the material have become important components in the teaching process (Ababneh, 2007).

The importance of these modification and improvements for the textbooks comes from the fact that both students as well as teachers benefit from the curricula as they provide them with the necessary strategies that should be adopted to facilitate the process of learning (Hutchinson, 1997). It is expected that doing such content analyses for the Jordanian curricula may help in improving the curricula as they help in presenting the negative as well as the positive aspects in our curricula. In this case, one can avoid the negatives, and support and increase the positive points.

One of the basic requirements for the successful curricula is the integration of the four skills as teaching the four units as one unit facilitate the EFL learners' learning at class. It is known that writing as well as speaking are considered productive skills. Because they are productive, they require a good knowledge in the vocabulary of the foreign language. Ellis and Taylor (2005) believed that speaking and writing can be learned by the learners if they are given the suitable set of tools that help them in facilitating this process.

English language in Jordan is considered a compulsory subject in the basic, elementary, and secondary stages. Action Pack

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series in Jordan were introduced to be taught from grade one until the twelfth grade. The main goal of teaching these curricula is to integrate the four English language skills to develop the Jordanian students' linguistic abilities to become proficient communicative learners.

Like any skill, writing is considered very crucial in teaching English as a foreign language. To master it, students need to pay attentions to all other skills as they are completely integrated. Writing production depends on grasp of grammar rules, rich vocabulary reservoirs, and presentation of ideas in a logical ways. On other hand, we could not ignore the fact that writing is a complex activity that needs a lot of practice and learning. It is difficult to master writing without following or adopting the correct procedures that are put by experienced educational and linguistic experts. According to Bach (2002), writing consists of many abilities that should be taught to the learners, such as the best way in choosing the suitable sentence structure, sentence structure, cohesion, coherence, mechanics of writing, and ideas and thought. The researchers believe that mastering such these components help the EFL learners in expressing themselves through writing to express their own thoughts and ideas easily and freely. Thus, any English textbook should be planned and designed in a way that facilitates and enhances the process of teaching writing skill in an adequate way. Textbook has to satisfy students' curiosity in providing them with the necessary and useful worksheets as well as home works. Moreover, any writing task within the textbook should provide and deal with subjects that are relevant to the student's life and real contexts. These kinds of authentic writing tasks should be useful for our students in a way that help them cope with the needs of the knowledge explosion and educational process.

Among the four skills, the writing skill, which is an important productive skill, needs a lot of practice and training (Chastin,1988). To be proficient in writing, students have to learn the mechanisms of correct writing and to have a good store of vocabulary that depends on the learner's age and educational level. When students are good at writing, this will definitely reflect positively in their written exams.

Analyzing textbooks plays a crucial role in EFL teaching and learning. It is a very helpful procedure to find out points of strengths and weaknesses, and its suitability for both students and teachers. Palmquist (1990) stated that content analysis of curricula in general and textbook in particular offers several advantages to researchers and teachers. In particular, content analysis:

- “looks directly at communication via texts or transcripts, and hence gets at the central aspect of social interaction
- can allow for both quantitative and qualitative operations
- can provides valuable historical/cultural insights over time through analysis of texts
- allows a closeness to text which can alternate between specific categories and relationships and also statistically analyzes the coded form of the text
- can be used to interpret texts for purposes such as the development of expert systems (since knowledge and rules can both be coded in terms of explicit statements about the relationships among concepts)

- is an unobtrusive means of analyzing interactions
- provides insight into complex models of human thought and language use
- When done well, is considered as a relatively "exact" research method (based on hard facts, as opposed to Discourse Analysis.”(p.3).

Many researchers present many examples of studies in content analysis that has been used as a research tool. Khuwaila (2000) conducted a study on the Arab learners' writing ability in writing essays to show the most common mistakes that students committed while writing their essays. The sample of the study consisted of 300 university students at the University of Science and Technology (JUST) in Jordan. The results of the study pointed out that most of the writing common errors in the essays were lack of coherence, cohesion, tense and parts of speech errors.

Abi-Samra (2003) conducted a study to explore the errors committed by Arabic Speaker in writing English.10 students of grade 9 in Brevet School were chosen in the study as a sample of the study. To conduct the study, the researcher identified, described the errors committed by the students. He found that those errors were committed due to many reasons such as grammatical, stylistic, lexical, and semantic ones. This study goes in complete harmony with the results of Khuawila's above study that stated that one of the students' writing common errors due to coherence and lexical reasons.

Fallahian and Nya (2011) made a content analysis to analyze the reading and writing Iranian textbooks of the primary schools of language based on UNCEF'S Deuple values. The researcher analyzed the curricula of human sciences in primary levels (The fourth and the fifth levels in particular). The results of the analysis showed that the mean of agreement was found between the content and the UNCEF'S Deuple values was about4.60%.This Percentage showed the low attention and concern to such essential values in the Iranian textbooks. Consequently, there were some major values that were missed from the textbooks.

Al-Qadi and Al-Qadi (2015) investigated a study to analyze the writing activities in Action Pack 10.The researchers aimed to measure the extent of the degree of their congruence with the general outcomes for the 10<sup>th</sup> Grade in Jordan. The results of the analysis showed that all the General Grade 10 outcomes are covered in an acceptable distribution. Moreover, the study indicated that the writing activities that were analyzed are covered in appropriate writing tasks that help 10<sup>th</sup> Grade students to develop their writing skill in this stage.

Karim, Fathema, and Hakim (2015) conducted a study to draw the teachers' attention to some of the problems that university students face while writing English. In addition, they tried to help the learners to overcome these difficulties especially the verbal errors. The sample of the study consisted of all students who studied ENG-1212 (Writing I) in the International Islamic University in Bangladesh. The results of the study showed the importance of feedback that is based on students' assignments. Moreover, the researchers pointed out that the learner should be motivated to work in peer work to discuss the necessary rules with his/her colleagues. Besides, students' awareness to the

rules of verb form and their practice should be given a lot of concern while teaching writing.

Cerci (2016) conducted a study to analyze the writing activities in the student' workbooks of a secondary-level Turkish language course. The researcher analyzed the workbooks from grade 5 to 8 to make sure whether those books were published according to the guidelines of Turkish Ministry of Education. The results of the analysis showed that the activities are poor in development as no principle of expression exists in the examined activities.

The curriculum of English in Jordan emphasizes the importance of communication in both the competence and the performance abilities. Moreover, it concentrates on the importance of the learners' productive as well as receptive skills. Therefore, Action Pack, the Jordanian English curriculum was built on developing the communicative competence of the Jordanian learners. Action Pack series is a twelve-level course for Jordanian students, leading them from the basic to the secondary stage based on the General Guidelines and General and Specific Outcomes which claim that "English language teaching should be interactively attempted and evaluated in light of the basic principles of communicative language teaching." (Ministry of Education 2006, p.9). This series provides many international topic-based contents that are designed to meet the educational needs and interests of students in Jordan

Action pack 7 is a series of EFL textbooks which is published and organized by the Jordanian Ministry and Education. It is described as a communicative and modern English language course. The goal behind publishing it is to be presented and taught in the governmental Jordanian schools. It is designed to be taught for both lower and higher stages. This series is expected to learn English as a foreign language in an easy and interesting way. Moreover, it aims to encourage learners to use the language outside and inside the class to become proficient users of English, as successful communication is the goal that the Ministry of Education seeks to achieve among these Jordanian learners. It aims at providing the Jordanian students with the opportunities to become successful users and communicators of English by encouraging students to speak and use the language in different authentic contexts.

Each level of Action Pack consists of a Student's book, an audiocassette, a Workbook, and a comprehensive Teacher's book. These essential components help the teacher as well as the learner to create an active environment that is full of communication and interaction among the teacher with his learners and among the learners themselves.

Action Pack 7 is divided into six modules. Each Module has a title. Each Module contains two units that contain a group of activities for the four language skills. The unit in each module is divided into eight lessons. Each lesson is designed to be presented by the teacher within a time of 40-45 minutes.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The present study is based on the specific writing outcomes under the Writing Section in General Guidelines and General and Specific Outcomes for English Language in Jordan of 2006. The present study aims at investigation the extent to which the writing specific outcomes are represented in the

activities of the first six units in the student's book of Action Pack 7. Moreover, it aims at studying to what extent the writing activities in the first six units in the students' book of Action Pack 7 respond to the writing specific outcomes that develop students' participation in producing two to three paragraphs about their personal experience, and their ability to write answers to questions based on reading materials.

### ***Questions of the Study***

The current study aims at answering the following two questions:

1. To what extent do the activities of the first six units in the students' book of Action pack 7 include writing activities?
2. To what extent do the writing activities in the first six units in the students' book of Action pack 7 respond to the writing specific outcomes that develop students' participation in producing two to three paragraphs about their personal experience, and their ability to write answers to questions based on reading materials?

### ***Statement of the Problem***

Jordanian students as well as Arab students who are learning English as a foreign language face a lot of difficulties in practicing different writing activities when they start writing about different topics in their life school (Smadi,1980,and Rababah,2003). The researchers through their work, as teachers of English language in Jordan and UAE for different educational stages and in their work as members of the teaching staff at Saudi universities and Jordanian universities, have experienced that students encounter many problems when they are enrolled in writing exams and assignments.

Students in all educational stages are asked to do written exams. The majority of students do not achieve the acceptable mark due to many reasons such as linguistic errors, lack of practice, shortage in vocabulary store and lack of training (Corder, 1981; Zughol & Taminian,1984; Abdeljawad,1986; and Assaf,2001). The problem of writing is not a local one as it is also a serious problem on the international level. A good example of that is the low marks that Jordanian students as well as other learners get when they are set to do some of international writing exams such as TOEFL. The difficulty in writing stands against developing students' abilities in learning English as it affects negatively on their educational progress. When students are poor in writing this will stand in front of taking the risk and to go more than that to talk about what is learned to express their ideas about, as writing gives the students the opportunities to be adventurous with the language they are learning (Shouman, 2002).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Criteria of the Study***

The criteria of this study are the inclusion of the writing activities and the responding of the activities to the writing specific outcomes in the first six units in the student's book of Action pack 7.

### Unit of Analysis

The unit of this analysis is the writing activity in the first six unit of Action Pack 7.

### Categories of the Analysis

The categories of this analysis are the writing activities in the first six units of Action Pack 7. They are classified according to the following two Writing Specific Outcomes:

1. Producing two to three paragraphs about personal experience.
2. Writing answers to questions based on reading materials.

### Limitations of the Study

The content analysis in this paper is limited to the first six units of the student's book of Action Pack 7.

Moreover, the researcher chose the third Writing Specific Outcome\* (W7.2.3) and the fourth Writing Specific Outcome\*\* (W7.2.4) in Group Two of the General Grade Outcomes which says that:

**"It is expected that students will write 2-3 of paragraphs for specific simple authentic purposes and audiences such as short reports, narrative accounts, and presentations." (p.42).**

As for the Specific Grade Outcomes, they are the following:

In adopting them, it is expected that students will:

*W 7.1.1 write multiple-paragraph compositions*

*W 7.1.2 write short reports (e.g., tress in my area/village/city)*

**\*W 7.1.3 produce 2-3 paragraphs about personal experience**

**\*\*W 7.1.4 write answers to questions based on reading materials**

*W 7.1.5 write emails to peers on topics related to study needs and personal interests*

*W 7.1.6 translate words from Arabic into English and vice versa*

*W 7.1.7 create a poster (e.g., travel poster for a Jordanian historical site using ICT*

Source: Ministry of Education (2006, p.42).

### Definitions of Terms

**Inclusion Criterion:** It aims to judge whether the content under analysis includes certain phenomena, characteristics, or values. It can also determine whether this inclusion has significant influence, what type it is (explicit or implicit) and the extent of its inclusion. In this paper it is the extent of inclusion of these writing outcomes in the activities of Action pack 7.

**Writing Activities:** They are the activities that enable students to turn their spoken language, their personal experiences, feelings, ideas and thoughts into written symbols.

**Writing Specific Outcomes:** They are the students' participation in producing two to three paragraphs about their personal experience, and their ability to write answers to questions based on reading materials.

**Action Pack 7 Writing Specific Outcomes:** They are the writing specific outcomes in the General Guidelines and General and Specific Outcomes for English Language in Jordan

(2006). Pupils are expected to achieve the specific outcomes which include the following:

*W 7.1.1 write multiple-paragraph compositions*

*W 7.1.2 write short reports (e.g., tress in my area/village/city)*

**\*W 7.1.3 produce 2-3 paragraphs about personal experience**

**\*\*W 7.1.4 write answers to questions based on reading materials**

*W 7.1.5 write emails to peers on topics related to study needs and personal interests*

*W 7.1.6 translate words from Arabic into English and vice versa*

*W 7.1.7 create a poster (e.g., travel poster for a Jordanian historical site using ICT*

Source: Ministry of Education (2006, p.42).

### Data Collection

The researcher used frequencies and percentages to present the results of the questions in this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the frequencies and percentages of writing activities that are included in the first six units in the student's book of Action Pack 7 compared to the total number of writing activities.

**Table 1** Frequencies and Percentages of Writing Activities in the First Six Units of Action Pack 7

Unit/Number/Title	Frequencies and Percentages	Total and Percentage of Writing Activities per Unit
1/ World Friends	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6
2/ Sport and Activities	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6
3/ My Routine	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6
4/ School Life	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6
5/ Camping	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6
6/ Celebrations and Food	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6
Total	Frequency Percentage	6 100

The table shows that there are six writing activities. These writing activities have been distributed in the six units. The table shows that the six units have the same number of writing activities. There is one writing activity in each Unit. In Unit one, one writing activity is introduced.

The unit is entitled "World Friends". In this unit, students are asked to write a paragraph about their homes. There is a model under the activity. Students have to follow this model to write a similar paragraph about their homes. In Unit Two, there is also a writing activity. Here, students are asked to write about their favorite sports star. To do the activity, students are provided with a model that they have to follow. The model talks about Mahmoud Shelbaieh. He is one of the most famous football players in our Jordanian National Team. Unit Three has one writing activity. The Unit is entitled "My Routine". In this unit, students are going to write six sentences about their school rules. Unit Four has also one writing activity. In this unit, students are going to write five sentences to the chartroom

about the best things in their school .Unit Five is entitled "Camping". It has also one writing activity. In this unit, there is a reading passage that talks about Harrods. One of famous shopping malls in London. In this activity, students are asked to write a paragraph about their favorite shop. As for Unit Six, the table shows that it has also one writing activity. This unit is entitled "Celebrations and Food". In this unit, students are asked to read an article about three festivals in three different places. Then, they are asked to write about what takes place in each festival.

Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentages of the writing activities that are classified according to the two writing specific outcomes that are found in the first six units in the student's book of Action Pack 7.

**Table 2** Frequencies and Percentages of Writing Activities per each Unit in the Student's Book of Action Pack 7 according to the Two Writing Specific Outcomes

Unit/ Number/Title	Frequencies and Percentages	Writing Outcome 1 (W7.2.3)	Writing Outcome 2 (W7.2.4)	Total and Percentage of Writing Activities Per Unit
		Producing two to three paragraphs about a personal experience	Writing answers to questions based on reading materials	
1/ World Friends	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6	- -	1 16.6
2/ Sport and Activities	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6	- -	1 16.6
3/ My Routine	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6	- -	1 16.6
4/ School Life	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6	- -	1 16.6
5/ Camping	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	1 16.6	- -	1 16.6
6/ Celebrations and Food	Frequency Per Unit Percentage Per Unit	- -	1 16.6	1 16.6
Total	Frequency Percentage	5 83.4	1 16.6	6 100

Quantitatively speaking, Table 2 shows that 5 activities out of 6 in the first six units in the student's book of Action Pack 7 require producing two to three paragraphs about a personal experience with a total percentage of 83.4%. Such focus on this outcome highlights the significance of giving the chance for all students to write about their personal experiences. There are many studies that look at writing as a valuable and necessary skill that help students to put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form and to mentally interact with the message.

Gelbi (1974), Raymond (1980), and Whiteman (1981) looked at the writing skill as an act of creation, a means of self-expression through conventional and understandable visible marks. They believed that writing is an effective way for developing the student or the person to discover himself.

Teachers should give their students the chance to write about themselves because this way will help a lot in improving the student's writing skills. To achieve this goal, teachers may ask their students to write simple writing tasks. They may ask their students to write about their families, their favorite sports, and their school or about their favorite friends or teachers. According to the findings of the study carried out by Suhong (2001), he found that the students' writing skills develop best when they interact with others and learn from their environment. These activities can be found in exercise 9 on page 11. In this lesson, students are going to write about their

homes, their favorite room, and the size of their homes. They have to follow the following model to write about their homes: "I live in a (house). My house is( big and comfortable). It has (three bedrooms). It has got (a kitchen.....). My favorite room is (my bedroom)." Another example is exercise 8 on page 17. In this activity, students are going to write about their favorite sports star. They are asked to read the model that talks about Mahmoud Shelbaieh, then they have to write about their favorite players. Unit Two is entitled "Sports and Activities" so it is something normal to have a writing activity that requires talking or writing about one of the famous sports star. Students enjoy writing about different kinds of sports in general and about their

favorite sport stars in particular. Another example can be found in Unit Three on page 25. The title of the unit is "My Routine". In this activity, students are asked to write about some of the school rules which are a necessary part in every students' life .They have to write some rules such as:

- Walk on the left of the corridor**
- Don't chew.**
- Never come late to school**

Exercise 5 on page 31 requires also writing about one's personal experience. The unit is entitled "School Life". In this activity, students have to write about the best place in the school .First, students have to read the given model, then they have to write about their favorite places such as the library, the garden or the chess club. To do such an activity, the teacher has to read the example, then he asks students to suggest some ideas then he writes them on the board .The teacher has to give students enough time their sentences. The teacher has to go round and he has to check his students' works. Finally, the teacher asks every students to read out what they have writing about their favorite place in their school .When talking about writing, we should not expect from our students to write a long story or a play because these activities require creativity, practice, and of imagination. As we know, the majority of our students are weak in writing. However, we are looking to help our students to express themselves in an easy and acceptable

way. Smadi (1986) noticed that the majority of students cannot use or understand English in normal communication; either spoken or writing. He added that although Jordanian students learn English in public school for eight years, they could not use or understand it in normal communication, especially in writing.

Regarding the second writing specific outcomes, the table shows that only one activity out of six activities require writing answers to questions based on reading materials. This activity can be found in exercise 2 on page 45 (Unit Six). In this exercise, students are asked to read an article (p.44) about three different festivals (Eid Al- Fitr, Chinese New Year and Diwali), then they have to write about what happens in each festival. The researcher found that is the only activity among all other writing activities that represent the importance of language skills integration.

Because this activity comes under the title of Reading and Writing. Omaggio (2001, p.337) believed that "it is important to consider ways to integrate writing with practice in listening, speaking and reading so that language skills are not artificially separated. "Barras (1982) and Krashen (1984) saw that students' weakness is of roots due to method of teaching, the teacher, lack of motivation, practice and interest, and to the curriculum design. According to the present study, one may agree that the curriculum design may have a bad effect on students' progress. The Table shows that there are only six writing activities in these six units. This number is few if it is compared to the total number of activities that are related to the other three language skills (Reading, speaking, and listening). In a previous content analysis of some of these language skills, the researchers found a reasonable number of activities for these skills in each unit. Whiteman (1981) believed that students are weak in writing because they do not practice it regularly and there is a noticeable imbalance in instruction in favor of grammar, punctuation, and spelling drills, rather than actually having students to write. Smadi (1986) and Alawneh (1985) saw that most secondary graduates may know a great deal about English grammar but their practical ability is insufficient. To make a progress in teaching writing, our textbooks must contain a lot of writing activities. The majority of students and teachers look at writing as one of the most difficult skill compared with the other three skills.

Our students need more and practice, so it is the teachers responsibility to do that. Omaggio (2001, p.280) indicated that "learning to write - even in one's native language- is not simply a matter of writing things down." Teachers can prepare extra writing activities about topics that are related to the students life and interests. They may ask students to write about the things that they like and dislike. Teachers should use their experience and the young teachers may ask other experienced teachers to know from them about the best practical ways that they may adopt to teach writing. Teaching writing is not an easy task, teachers should use the most well-known methods in teaching writing in an appropriate and useful way.

### **Inferences**

The content analysis that was made by the researchers showed out many findings. First, the findings revealed that the writing activities in the student's book of Action Pack 7 are few despite

the importance of writing skill in learning English as a foreign language. Only one writing activity is introduced in each unit, which is poor, and it does not fulfil the goal behind teaching writing for the students in this level.

Second, the writing activities in Action Pack 7 are not integrated with other language skills in an acceptable way despite the importance of this integration as the four skills should work as one unit in learning English. Third, the analysis of the writing activities in the student's book in Action Pack 7 show the importance of giving students the chance to write about their personal experiences as this one of the basic and necessary requirements for starting writing in an acceptable way to encourage the students to write freely to increase their confidence in themselves.

Finally, the findings revealed that the first specific writing outcome is represented in a considerable way, whereas the second specific writing outcome is represented in a poor way although the second specific writing outcome is important in learning writing as it is based on writing answers to questions based on reading material. This shows once again the importance of the integration of the four language skills.

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