

A Content Analysis of the Vocabulary Items in "Action Pack 12" For Twelfth Grade in Jordanian Schools

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Abstract

This study aimed at analyzing the vocabulary items of "Action Pack 12" for twelfth grade in order to investigate whether these vocabulary items agree with the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce-Murcia (1991). This study attempted to answer the following two questions: "To what extent do the vocabulary items agree with the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce-Murcia? And "What are the highly and least available criteria in all textbook modules? The results of the study showed that: first, the vocabulary items were used in appropriate contexts. Second, they were inclusive per syllabus. Third, their accessibility was good, suitable in number and reasonable to the students' level. However, their balanced distribution concerning parts of speech was low. The first criterion (Appropriateness of context), the second criterion (Inclusiveness per syllabus) and the fourth criterion (Load suitability) gained the highest rates (4). The fifth criterion (Balanced distribution) gained the lowest rate (3). The researchers recommended that the vocabulary items should have better distribution in term of parts of speech.

Key words: "Action Pack", content analysis, vocabulary.

Introduction

The textbook and instruction material are important components to EFL/ESL programs (Ababneh, 2007). The textbooks are essential elements of English language teaching. Teaching – learning situations are not complete if there are no textbooks. Both students and teachers benefit from the textbook as it provides them with the necessary skills that help them inside and outside classroom (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994). Moreover, the textbook is still exercising its influential role on people because it is very cheap to buy and it can be used any time. Furthermore, it is an important source of information. Hycraft (1988) states that there are many advantages for textbooks, the most important of which is the psychological one as they are important to measure student's progress and achievement. All right (1990) believes that textbooks control the teaching learning process. Jordan improves its educational programs. The Ministry of education implements this improvement in order to achieve this aim. Thus, it introduced the new English Program of "Action Pack" textbooks for twelfth grade. Therefore, it is important to conduct this study to analyze its vocabulary items to find out the strengths and weaknesses of this textbook. "Action pack" is a multi level course designed for Jordanian students learning English in grades: one to twelve. The basic premise of the course is that students learn best when they study interesting and meaningful content. "Action pack 12" for twelfth grade consists of four modules, each based on a topic. There are different sub-topics within each module. Moreover, "Action pack 12" for twelfth grade is considered as a development step of the curricula and as a response to what teachers of English complain about the students' low performance in English and maybe as a response to the findings of the research studies.

Many evaluation studies were conducted on the currently taught series "Action Pack" for grades one to eleven, the previous series PETRA for the basic stage and AMRA for the secondary stage and university textbooks, but none had been conducted on action pack 12. Content analysis (CA) can be one of the best evaluating instruments that can be followed to analyze textbooks and show their strengths and weaknesses. CA results provide textbook authors and authorities responsible for issuing such textbooks with meaningful insights that help make the necessary developments and amendments to textbooks analyzed.

The method of CA enables the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and identify systematically its properties. Researchers have provided various definitions for CA. Holsti (1969:14) defines CA as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages". Pool (in Ahmed and Al-Hammadi, 1987: 343) defines CA as "An accurate method that aims at describing textual information which takes accuracy, validity, and reliability of the description into consideration". Content Analysis has wide applications. Although it was first founded by Berelson (Cited in Ahmed and Al-Hammadi, 1987: 343) to analyze media and communication, it was later developed to include the social sciences and humanities.

It was also developed from being only quantitative into a combination of both quantitative and qualitative analysis (Ahmed and Al-Hammadi, *ibid*: 345). CA summarizes the contents of a book or a series of books in one table which enables readers to judge their appropriateness to the learner. Content analysis is an organized process as it follows specific and controlled criteria. Sinan (1984) and Al-Khalili (1987) describe the general characteristics of the textbook. Blazer and Simonis (1991a) talk about books' bias to students' sex. Eltinge and Roberts (1993) discuss the linguistic analysis of textbook lexicon. As vocabulary items form a very important component in learning second/foreign language, it is very necessary to provide foreign language teaching textbooks with enough and suitable vocabulary. Language acquisition starts with the learning of words not structures, therefore more focus and care should be paid to make textbook authors, teachers, and learners recognize this fact, and as a result build textbooks, and learning strategies that help begin correctly. Content analysis can play a very significant role in directing attention to places of success in vocabulary learning.

Wilkins (in Johnson 1977: 1) states that in any second language class, vocabulary should be given at least equal consideration because if the learner knows only structure but not content words, then what he or she says is meaningless. Celce-Murcia and Rosensweig (1979) say that, The recognition of written words (vocabulary) and the awareness of each part of speech were primary objectives of language teaching. On the other hand, the reading approach elevated vocabulary and suppressed grammar. They, furthermore state that: Vocabulary should be recognized as a central element in language instruction from the beginning stages (*ibid*). They also say that, "Vocabulary is a large area that needs continued growth and development for both native and non-native speakers long after grammar and pronunciation are under reasonable control. To sum up, vocabulary ought to have more attention from all people concerned with the teaching-learning process, such as textbook authors, teachers, researchers, and learners.

Statement of the Problem

Being teachers and supervisors at Jordanian schools for a long time, the researchers noticed that most students find it difficult to answer the vocabulary questions whether in the school monthly exams or in the Secondary Stage Certificate Exams. All exams in secondary stage ought to have at least two vocabulary questions. The first question normally requires students to fill gaps from a set of words in a box while the other question asks students to complete the sentence with the correct form of the given word. The researchers noticed that most students fail to answer the vocabulary questions correctly. Therefore, this study aims to analyze all vocabulary items in "Action pack 12" for twelfth grade to find out the extent to which vocabulary items agree with the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce-Murica to provide recommendations, that might be helpful, to textbook authors, teachers, and students.

Questions of the Study

This study aims at answering the following questions:

- 1- To what extent do the vocabulary items of "Action pack 12" textbook modules agree with the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by CelceMurcia?
- 2- What are the highly and least available criteria in all textbook modules?

Significance of the Study

The series of "Action pack 12" was introduced for the secondary stage for the academic year 2009/2010. This study will be the first to be conducted on its vocabulary items. It is an important attempt to evaluate and analyze its vocabulary items. The findings of this study will be useful to educators who are interested in curriculum planning and development, teachers, supervisors and textbook writers. The findings will show the strengths and weaknesses of "Action pack 12" concerning the vocabulary.

Criteria of Analysis

The researchers adopted the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce-Murcia (1991). The criteria followed are:

1. Appropriateness of context
2. Accessibility
3. Inclusiveness per syllabus
4. Load suitability
5. Balanced distribution

Unit of Analysis

The word is used as the unit of analysis of this study.

Definition of Terms

- **"Action pack"**: It is a series of twelve books prescribed by the Jordanian Ministry of Education from first to twelve grade students. It includes student's book, activity book, teacher's book and cassettes.
- **Celce - Murcia scale**: It is a five-item scale adopted by the researchers to evaluate the vocabulary of "Action pack 12". Each item should be graded from 0 to 4 (Excellent = 4, good = 3, adequate = 2, weak = 1, totally lacking = 0).
- **Appropriateness of context**: The vocabulary items are introduced in appropriate contexts and situations.
- **Accessibility**: The vocabulary items included in the text are easily accessible to the learner by providing a word list or summaries of new words.
- **Inclusiveness per syllabus**: The vocabulary items included in the text are necessary for using the language up to the complexity / mastery the book achieves and thus these items can match the objectives of the book.
- **Load suitability**: The number of the new words introduced in every lesson seems to be reasonable for the students.
- **Balanced distribution**: The even distribution of vocabulary material among modules.
- **Limitation of the Study**: This study is limited to "Action Pack 12" for twelfth grade.

Review of Related Literature

Although vocabulary items play an important role in language learning, the researchers could not find any specialized CA studies that have entirely been devoted to vocabulary analysis. There were some studies that treated vocabulary as an aspect among other language aspects that have been analyzed. Therefore, the researchers provide the local studies which analyzed various aspects of Jordanian textbooks. Lababidi (1983) conducted a study in which she analyzed ten randomly selected lessons from the series "New Living English for Jordan" (NLEJ). The purpose of the analysis was to find out whether these lessons convey communication or not. She used a questionnaire including Yes/No and open-ended questions. The results of the analysis showed that: first, the content of NLEJ books did not reflect student's needs. Second, the objectives of NLEJ books were not realized. Third, grammar exercises were mechanical. Fourth, vocabulary items needed for reading texts were taught to students by the teacher using gestures or sound to show the meaning. Al-Jarrah (1987) evaluated the new TEFL textbook (PETRA) which was used by the fifth and sixth grades at Jordanian schools. He used an evaluative scale which he himself developed.

The results of his study showed that the rationale and objectives of PETRA textbooks were started specifically, graded level by level and skill by skill. The sequence of PETRA textbooks flowed smoothly and the material was accurate. Saleh (1990) evaluated the second preparatory PETRA textbook. He used two evaluative scales, one for teachers and the other for students. The results of the study revealed that the rationale and objectives of the textbook were suitable and clear for both the teachers and students. El-Mustafa (1988) evaluated the first preparatory PETRA textbook. He used two evaluative scales, one for teachers and the other for students. Both scales were directed to cover the rationale, objectives, language skills, grammar, vocabulary, content, methods of teaching, teaching aids, workbook, the teacher's book, and some general aspects of the textbook. The results of the study concerning vocabulary revealed that the PETRA textbook selected vocabulary that suited its objectives; distinguished between receptive and productive vocabulary; presented vocabulary in appropriate context and situations; and recycled and revised new words.

Al-Marzouq (1992) evaluated the New English for Nurses textbook used for the second secondary class in the nursing stream. He also used two evaluative scales; one for the teachers and the other for students. The scales were to evaluate the rationale, objectives, teaching aids, vocabulary, structures, drills, and content. The results of the study revealed that the rationale of the textbook was based on teaching English for special purposes that match the learner's needs on the one hand. On the other hand, the objectives were clearly stated and the technical aspects of the textbook were attractive. It also revealed that the vocabulary items were properly selected to suit communication at hospitals. Al- Barakat (1996) carried out a study aimed at identifying and evaluating English Language textbooks for the basic stage in Jordan, PETRA series. The researcher made a quantitative analysis which consisted of all the main passages which were presented for reading. He also made a qualitative analysis which included all the material. The findings of the study showed that the six books of PETRA series reflected cultural bias. Al Momani (1998) conducted a study in which he evaluated AMRA textbooks used for first and second secondary classes of all academic streams in Jordan. He employed three evaluative questionnaires; one for teachers; another for supervisors; and the third one for students. The scales were directed to cover the rationale, objectives, listening and speaking skills, reading and writing skills, grammar and structural functions, vocabulary, methods of teaching, teaching aids, workbooks, the teacher's book, and some general aspects of the textbook.

The results of the study concerning vocabulary revealed that the new vocabulary items were suitably classified; the new vocabulary items were selected to facilitate communication; the meaning and the phonetic transcription for the new vocabularies were provided in AMRA II but not in AMRA I. Magableh (2000) evaluated the "Functional English" Language Textbook for Commercial First Secondary Class. The sample consisted of (6) teachers and (5) supervisors, and (81) students in Jerash Directorate of Education. The researcher used two questionnaires. The findings of the study showed that the textbook lacked the teaching aids and did not reflect the culture and the values of the Jordanian society. Al-Omari (2002) conducted a study in which he evaluated the "Action Pack" textbook. He also used two evaluative scales; one for the teachers and the other for supervisors. The scales were to evaluate the rationale, objectives, teaching aids, vocabulary, structures, drills, and content. The results of the study concerning vocabulary revealed that the textbooks were suitably provided word lists; the new words were adequately recycled in different texts; the selection of vocabulary items was suitable for the objectives. Besides, the vocabulary items were suitably relevant to the learners' needs and interests; above all number of words was suitable. Shatnawi (2005) conducted a study on the "Cutting Edge" series taught at Yarmouk University. The aim of the study was to investigate the role of culture in foreign language textbook through content analysis. Also, this study aimed at exploring the attitudes of students and instructors of English at Yarmouk University towards the importance of English and the inclusion of culture in TEFL.

The sample consisted of (300) male and female students and (20) instructors at Yarmouk University. Two questionnaires were used; one was for students and the other was for instructors. The researcher also analyzed the content of the "Cutting Edge" series. The findings showed that the textbook included the following cultural aspects; historical, economical, geographical, literary, political, religious, social man–women relationship, habits, customs and traditions and aspects related to the ways of living. Ababneh (2007) conducted a study on "Jordan opportunities" for the tenth grade. The study aimed at analyzing the content of "Jordan opportunities" for the tenth grade and investigating the teachers' and the supervisors' opinions concerning it. The population of the study consisted of (80) teachers and (8) supervisors in Irbid First, Second and Third Directorates of Education.

The researcher analyzed the students' book, the activity book and the teacher's book then presented how the outcomes, language skills, linguistic components, communication activities and the cultural aspects were stated. The researcher developed a five point Liker-questionnaire of (78) items and a structured interview to investigate the teachers' and supervisors' opinions of "Jordan opportunities". The findings of the study showed that the outcomes and vocabulary were not fairly distributed in modules. Grammar and reading gained the highest frequency and percentage. The cultural aspects were found suitable to Jordanian setting, except that aspect related to man/woman relationship. The findings also showed that the teacher's book was of great help to teachers. In conclusion all research studies conducted on EFL textbooks in Jordan have shown that they dealt with different domains, but did not analyze the vocabulary items. Therefore, this study will be the first to be conducted on vocabulary items. It comes to fill the gap and be useful to educators, teachers, curriculum designers, textbook writers and students.

Methodology

The researchers used a list of criteria concerning the analysis of vocabulary items suggested by Celce-Muricia (1991). All criteria follow Liker Scale (0-4): (0) means that the criterion is totally lacking, while (4) rate means that the criterion under investigation is excellent. Table (1) presents the Liker-Scale of the vocabulary analysis criteria used by the researchers in this study.

Table (1) Liker – Scale of the Vocabulary Analysis Criteria

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Weak	Totally lacking
appropriateness of context					
accessibility					
inclusiveness per syllabus					
load suitability					
balanced distribution					

Each item should be graded from (0-4) that is: 0 = totally lacking, 1 = weak, 2 = adequate, 3 = good, 4 = excellent

In order to estimate the rates of the criteria listed in Table (1), the researchers analyzed the words in "Action pack 12" for Twelfth Grade. Furthermore, they counted the number of the new vocabulary items of the four modules in order to be able to estimate the rates of the fourth and fifth criteria. All the vocabulary items in the four modules were analyzed by three raters, the researchers themselves. The raters analyzed each module separately. After that, the researchers made another check on some modules to ensure the reliability of the instrument of the analysis. There was a very high agreement between raters according to the agreement formula:

$$\frac{154 \text{ (Number of items agreed on by all raters)}}{160 + 6 \text{ (The number of all items + the number of disagreed ones)}} \times 100 = 0.93\%$$

Percentages were the only statistical treatments followed to determine the results of the questions of the study. Since this study aimed at analyzing the new vocabulary items in "Action Pack 12", the researchers took the word as the unit of analysis. The word in this analysis includes the words in the boxes at the beginning of each unit and other vocabulary exercises in the Student's Book. The word can be a single word or an expression as classified in each box; that is: a noun, a verb, an adjective, an adverb, a phrasal verb or an idiom (or expression as sometimes called).

Findings of the Study

This section presents the findings of the analysis in accordance with its question which asks about the extent to which vocabulary items in "Action pack 12" for Twelfth Grade agree with the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce – Murcia (1991).

Table 2. The Rates and Means of Vocabulary Analysis Criteria According to the Adopted Liker-Scale

Criteria	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Means
1. Appropriateness of context	4	4	4	4	4
2. Accessibility	4	4	4	4	4
3. Inclusiveness per syllabus	4	3	3	4	3.5
4. Load suitability	4	4	4	4	4
5. Balanced distribution	3	3	3	3	3

Table (2) shows that the rates of vocabulary analysis criteria range between 3 and 4 since the first criterion (Appropriateness of context), the second criterion (accessibility) and the fourth criterion (Load suitability) have gained the highest rates which means that these criteria are presented in an excellent manner.

The third criterion which is inclusiveness per syllabus obtained the rate (3.5) which means that the accessibility of the vocabulary items in the modules is very good. Whereas the fifth criterion (Balanced distribution) gained the rate (3) which means that the balance of vocabulary items among modules is good. The rates of the fourth and fifth criteria were achieved by counting the number of the vocabulary items and the results are shown in Table (3).

Table (3) The Number and the Percentages of the Vocabulary Items in "Action pack 12" for Twelfth Grade,(Modules 1-4)

Module	Number of Vocabulary Items	Percentage
	63	21.8
	77	26.5
	74	25.5
	76	26.2
Total	290	100

Table (3) shows that the number of vocabulary items ranges between 63 and 77 (21.8 and 26.5). Module 2 has the highest number whereas module 1 has the lowest number. The number of new vocabulary items in the four modules and their distribution on word group or parts of speech with their percentages are presented in Table (4).

Table (4) Numbers and Percentages of New Vocabulary Items in Modules One to four of "Action pack" for Twelfth Grade

Module/ Item	Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Adverbs	Phrasal Verbs / Idioms/ Expressions	Total
	35	6	13	-	- 10	63
	49	13	9	-	6	77
	38	15	14	1	6	74
	32	13	17	1	13	76
Total	154	47	53	2	35	290
Percentage of Each Group	53.1	16.1	18.2	0.68	11.7	100

Table (4) shows that the number of new vocabulary items which appeared in the vocabulary boxes and exercises is 290. It also shows that the number of nouns occupied the highest percentage of the new vocabulary items (154 and 53.1), whereas the adverbs got the lowest number and percentage (2 and 0.68%).

Discussion of the Findings

As it is shown in Table 2, the first, second and fourth criteria have the highest rates which mean that such criteria were given a special interest by the planners of the curriculum. Concerning the first criterion which is the "Appropriateness of context", it is observed that the vocabulary items were used in appropriate contexts which help students to identify the meanings of such vocabulary items without checking the dictionary for meaning. For example, the vocabulary items: "get down", "competition" and "revolutionary" occurred in the following contexts:

- I was a member of the law society.
- When he accused me of being wasteful, I got very angry.

Regarding the second criterion which is "Inclusiveness per syllabus", Table (2) shows that the vocabulary items are inclusive for achieving the objectives of the modules. For example, one of the objectives in module three is to describe "crimes and criminals". Therefore, some of the vocabulary items listed in the module were: court, guilty, sensitive, innocent, jury, legal, prove, rule, property and principle. This agrees with El-Mustafa whose study concerning vocabulary revealed that the PETRA textbook selected vocabulary items that suited their objectives.

Concerning the third criterion which is "Accessibility", it is clear that in most cases the vocabulary items which have something in common are grouped together which makes it easy for students to study them. For example the vocabulary items: "cold", "crop", "season", "dry", "not", "rain", "sunny weather", can be used to describe the weather. Accordingly, it can be suggested that the accessibility criterion in the six modules is good. Concerning the last criterion "Balanced distribution", it seems that the vocabulary items have a convincing balanced distribution among the modules. For example, module 1 contains 63 new vocabulary items, whereas module 3 contains 77 new vocabulary items. Therefore, the "Balanced Distribution" criterion seems to be good.

Table 4 shows that the number of new vocabulary items in terms of the part of speech in all modules ranges between 2 and 154 with the percentage of 0.68% and 53.1%. It also shows that the number of nouns occupied more than half of all vocabulary items. It shows that there are 154 nouns out of 290 vocabulary items that is 53.1%, whereas there is very rare presence of adverbs. There are only two adverbs with the percentage of 0.68%. To be more precise, Table (4) shows that there was an adequate balanced distribution of vocabulary items among the modules which ranges between 63 and 77 and there was no balanced distribution in terms of parts of speech classification which ranged between 2 and 154.

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings of this study, it can be concluded that

- The vocabulary items in "Action pack 12" for Twelfth Grade were used in appropriate contexts.
- The vocabulary items in this textbook are inclusive per syllabus.
- The accessibility of the vocabulary items is excellent.
- The number of the new vocabulary items seems to be suitable and reasonable to the students' level.
- The balanced distribution of vocabulary items is convincing.
- The balanced distribution of vocabulary items concerning parts of speech is low.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, the researchers recommend the following:

- The authors of "Action pack" are recommended to take into consideration the fair distribution of vocabulary items of parts of speech among the modules.
- The authors of "Action pack" are also recommended to take into consideration the suitable distribution of vocabulary items in terms of parts of speech among modules.
- Book authors are recommended to provide the textbook with a glossary of meanings of the new vocabulary items with their phonetic transcription.
- Teachers ought to be more flexible with the textbook's new vocabulary items.
- Students should develop their own strategies which help them guess the meaning of the new vocabulary items.
- Other research studies should be conducted to analyze other skills and language components in this text book, such as reading and writing.

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