

An investigation of the Inclusion of Critical Reading Strategies in Jordanian EFL Textbooks: A Content Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the inclusion of critical reading strategies in the Action Pack textbook employed in Jordan by using content analysis. The study sample was action pack textbook for ninth grade. The study used a list of analysis included the critical reading strategies as an instrument research. Its Intra- rater reliability has been verified and it was (0.84); it is appropriate for the purpose of the study whereas its validity has been verified by a jury of specialists .The findings of the study reveal that some critical reading strategies were moderately included in the textbook, like annotating, previewing, scanning and skimming, and facts versus conclusion, whereas some other strategies were limitedly included, such as classifying or categorizing, and comparing and contrasting, Meanwhile, generating questions was not included at all. These findings revealed that the inclusion of critical reading skills was somewhat imbalanced in the Action Pack9 textbook. Based on these results, it is recommended that the results of this study be taken into consideration when reforming EFL textbooks and that the content of other textbooks be analyzed.

Keywords: Critical Reading Strategies, Action Pack9.

Introduction

Teaching reading is considered one of the most significant issues in education due to its role in developing other language skills, especially in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). That is, reading texts is the only means to use and develop language. In this vein, Al-Khrisheh (2008) stated that reading is of paramount importance for EFL students because it opens the gate to further information, knowledge, and development. Similarly, AlRegeb (2009) and Alkhaldeh (2011) highlighted the importance of reading in developing learners' vocabulary and improving their communication skills.

It is important to draw the attention to the fact that merely reading words does not mean that the reader has achieved the goal of reading. That is, reading is an active process and requires that learners be instructed on several critical reading strategies to be able to comprehend and process the reading text. Combs (1992) viewed critical reading as an interactive process that uses several levels of thought simultaneously and stated that critical readers ask deep questions.

To help students be critical readers, textbooks should include the necessary reading strategies that encourage learners not to be afraid of challenging any text they read; this allows them to read between the lines and try to integrate what they have read with other ideas not stated in the text. In other words, they accomplish the aim of reading by understanding the text and not just reading isolated words. Critical reading is also important as it indicates the use of higher order cognitive skills; according to Ozdemir (2007), critical reading needs learners to be intellectual and have competencies at the level of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Additionally, it requires a process of active communication where comments and evaluation on the text are conducted.

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It is worth mentioning that the body of research highlighted the most common critical reading strategies like annotating which means highlighting key words and writing comments or questions in the margins (Linkon, 2008). Tovani (2000), on the other hand, revealed that critical readers need to analyze, to understand the text and then to interrogate it. Consequently, Tovani (2000) proposed some critical reading strategies to assist the reading comprehension process on the part of students; they are the following:

- Annotating means making explanations and asking questions about the text.
- Previewing is to get an overview of the structure of the text, cues, pictures, and personal experience prior to reading a text.
- Scanning and skimming means finding out the key features of the reading and getting the gist of the passage.
- Facts versus opinions strategy refers to how facts can be proved and have concrete evidence whereas opinions refer to beliefs and values and can be argued.
- Drawing conclusions means searching for clues in the text, thinking about what those clues elicit from prior knowledge, and making predictions.
- Analyzing the features of the text is examining and analyzing a textbook and determining how the features help them to find and use the information for learning.
- Summarizing means presenting the main ideas of the text using learners' own words.
- Comparing and contrasting means helping students draw conclusions and extend their thinking about the significance of key similarities and differences.
- Classifying or categorizing information means grouping items into one or more categories based on certain distinguishing characteristics.
- Generating questions is writing questions while reading the text for the first time, understanding will be enhanced if learners form a question for every paragraph.

It is obvious that teaching critical thinking skills is important as it liberates students from the constraints of the traditional teaching, which focuses on transferring knowledge to students without thinking critically about it or presenting it in new or innovative forms.

Critical reading strategies motivate learners to implement their higher order cognitive processes like analysis and evaluation. Therefore, it is important to include these strategies in learners' textbooks and transcend reading the text from the literal level to a deep level of reading; readers must learn to recognize what the text says about the topic and think about or analyze its ideas. That is, critical reading is not a merely simple reading. It is, according to Jinhong (2015), how to recognize and analyze information in the text, for example, to understand why the author writes the text, to highlight and consider important information in the text, and to analyze and summarize the text. In other words, it is reading between and beyond lines.

These thoughts reveal the necessity of including these strategies in the textbooks that EFL teachers implement. According to Rynanta (2013), a textbook is the complete package of English skills and components that help teachers and learners as their source of materials and exercises in EFL learning. Consequently, the textbook should encourage learners to process the text beyond knowing facts and gaining knowledge by memorizing the statements within a text; instead, it should help learners recognize not only what a text says, but also how that text portrays the subject matter. According to Kadir et al. (2014), critical reading strategies that focus on analysis, synthesis, and evaluation have not received the attention they deserve, and most teachers focus on comprehension skills, like using context to gain meaning, using schemata as aides, and predicting what comes next in the text, and are not concerned with critical reading skills.

In this vein, many researchers and scholars like Walz (2001), and Freire (1983), attempted to encourage the inclusion of critical reading strategies in textbooks to help teachers implement them while teaching reading, yet the degree of the success of these attempts is questionable.

The situation in Jordan is no longer different from that of the international one. That is, several Jordanian researchers, like Alkhaldeh (2015), Al-Jamal et al (2013), Al-Qatawneh (2007), conducted studies in reading comprehension and they found that the reading performance of upper basic and secondary school students is described as being low and they have a moderate reading proficiency level according to their results in national and international exams. They attributed these results to the negligible instruction of reading strategies, especially the critical strategies and the fact that EFL teachers ask students to memorize the reading texts and ask factual questions. Therefore, many researchers and decision makers recommended that training EFL teachers may be the solution to improving the reading proficiency of learners. However, the solution to this problem should be discussed from a different point of view, like the quality of textbooks and the degree to which these textbooks encompass reading strategies, especially critical reading strategies that have been derived from the principles of the cognitive strategies (Zabihi and Pordel, 2011).

It is of paramount importance to analyze the content of the reading passages in EFL textbooks in Jordan to investigate the inclusion of critical reading strategies in them. It is due to the effectiveness of this research approach in indicating how the textbooks support teachers in implementing these strategies. According to Berelson (1962), content analysis is considered a research technique for the objective, systematic description of manifest content of communication, and it emphasizes the actual content and internal features of it. This analytical strategy is usually employed to determine the presence of certain strategies, themes, characters, and sentences within texts and to quantify this presence in an objective manner. This shows the significance of analyzing textbooks in this study to have a comprehensive idea about the presence of critical reading strategies in textbooks used in Jordan.

In this vein, English language is a compulsory school subject in Jordan. It uses Action Pack textbook which is taught in Jordanian schools from grades one through twelve. It aims to develop the Jordanian students in the four language skills. Reading skills have received much attention due to their role in developing the other language skills and providing an open window to further knowledge, learning, and development. Due to the importance of reading skills, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Jordan (2006) affirmed that students should read to understand and respond to written English in an authentic way. This reflects the necessity of employing strategies that help students transcend the factual level of reading texts to process the texts deeply.

It is worth mentioning that analyzing textbooks plays an important role in the EFL teaching and learning process. Generally speaking, this process aims to identify the presence of the themes or characters that the researchers try to identify (Al- Ghazo and Smadi, 2013). Accordingly, a content analysis of English textbooks is a necessity especially when investigating the presence of critical reading strategies in them. The researcher chose the Action Pack for ninth grade as a sample of the English textbooks used in Jordanian public schools.

Reading has different purposes according to the age of the reader and his /her level, according to Brown (2001), reading for beginners focuses on decoding words, and then in later stages, it focuses on meaning and understanding the texts' messages. Even this aim has different views due to the differences between the writers' schemata and the readers' (Nuttall, 1996).

Gray (1960) highlighted the differences between reading lines literally and reading between and beyond lines. The first refers to the literal meaning of the text; the second refers to the critical evaluation of the text. That means teaching reading should move from the literal level to the critical one. According to Nation (2009), teaching reading should include learners

acquiring strategies to help them process the text critically, like previewing, predicting, posing questions, and activating prior knowledge. It is obvious that these strategies are important for arriving at the level of comprehension, but comprehension is a required step to start critical discussions. Therefore, many researchers and authors highlighted the importance of critical reading strategies and embedding them in textbooks to be practiced authentically. One of these researchers was Jewett (2007), who stated the importance of the strategy of role playing. In a similar vein, Gelman (2007) revealed the significance of learning critical reading strategies, as these free learners from the constraints of rote memorization of information and facts.

Related Studies

researcher was only able to locate a few content analysis studies on the inclusion of critical reading strategies in textbooks. This is because textbook analysis in the light of critical reading strategies has not received the deserved attention and may be a recent endeavor. Zabihi and Pordel (2011) investigated the presence of critical reading strategies within reading textbooks according to a checklist that included indicators of whether a particular text promoted critical reading or not. Three reading textbooks were selected to be analyzed according to three levels: critical thinking items, the use of appropriate tasks, and strategic instruction. The results unveiled that the textbooks met the first criterion to some extent, but they lacked the last two. The researchers emphasized the importance of examining the appropriateness of other reading textbooks in terms of employing critical reading strategies.

Takami (2009) analyzed textbooks to identify, categorize, and synthesize the reading strategies embedded in the textbooks used in some schools in the state of Washington. Content analysis methodology was used to examine six teachers' editions of textbooks to find and explore embedded reading strategies. Results revealed that very few reading strategies were integrated in the target textbooks. The researcher recommended revising the textbooks and embedding recent effective reading strategies to improve the teaching of reading and any other topic as reading is a necessary skill in any subject.

Additionally, Assaly and Igbaria (2014) performed a content analysis of the textbook Master Class for tenth grade students studying English language. They sought to determine to what extent the reading activities focused on high-level and low-level thinking and to what extent they led students towards levels that demanded higher thinking, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The activities identified as units for analysis were wh-questions, yes/no questions, multiple choice questions, complete the sentences, and statement and request questions. They were collected, listed, and analyzed according to Blooms' Taxonomy. Percentages and frequencies were calculated. Results revealed that 114 activities emphasized levels of cognition representing lower order thinking skills, and they also focused on comprehension, which is one of the lower order thinking skills. The researchers recommended conducting additional studies in the area of content analysis of English instruction textbooks and shedding light on the role of textbooks in improving the cognitive skills of students.

In the Jordanian context, content analysis studies have focused on issues like grammar, vocabulary, or teachers' perspectives concerning content, like Ababneh (2007), and Zawahreh (2012). Al-Ghazo and Smadi (2013) analyzed the reading texts of the students' book in Action Pack 11 to identify the authenticity of the reading texts. Frequencies and percentages were used to present the results of the study questions. Results revealed that the reading textbooks of Action Pack 11 have a high degree of authenticity, and this indicated the significance of reading skills in developing the communicative competence of students.

All in all, results of related studies unveiled that critical reading strategies have not received the attention they deserve,

and few studies have tried to analyze the content of textbooks due to the general thought that children will develop critical reading strategies automatically as they grow older (This Iethwaite, 1990). The result of this thought is the devastated level of student performance in reading comprehension; students are no longer able to analyze and evaluate the reading texts and instead they only read at the literal level and memorize the meanings of some new words.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the results of the few studies that showed the absence of critical reading strategies that focus on higher levels of thinking in textbooks. Therefore, the current study tries to identify the embedded reading strategies in the Action Pack ninth grade textbooks used in Jordan and whether they try to develop the critical reading strategies. Additionally, few studies were conducted to analyze textbooks used in Jordan. These textbooks are approved by the Ministry of Education and EFL teachers do not play any role in evaluating the efficiency of the textbooks used at schools in terms of developing learners' competence or skills. The Action Pack textbook is the series of textbooks used in public and private schools in Jordan. Accordingly, the results of this study help teachers and decision makers to have a comprehensive idea about the types of reading strategies that are embedded in the textbooks. It may also enhance the body of research in the field of content analysis in which strategies are encompassed in this series of textbooks. Finally, it could encourage researchers to conduct further studies to enhance this series or suggest ways of improving or reviewing them.

Statement of the Problem

In Jordan, research has found that EFL students cannot deal with and interact with reading texts appropriately because EFL teachers use only one way to teach reading comprehension. This way of teaching could be explained as reading the text silently, answering questions, and explaining the meanings of new words by stating the dictionary definitions or the definition stated in the teachers' book without clarifying or consolidating meaning, working cooperatively, or presenting meaning visually. This study attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice by identifying what reading strategies are encompassed in textbooks and if they develop critical reading strategies or the low level of thinking revealed by EFL teachers' practices. Besides, it could be helpful for EFL textbook adaptors, teachers and students. Therefore, this study tries to answer the following question:

- To what extent do the Jordanian EFL textbooks encompass critical reading strategies?

Limitations of the Study

This content analysis study is limited to the student' book of Action Pack 9 under the study. It is also considered an initial investigation of the critical reading strategies in the Jordanian textbooks of English language. Moreover, it is limited to the critical reading strategies presented as an analysis list and to its psychiatric characteristics such as reliability and validity.

Operational Definitions of the Terms

- Action Pack is a twelve-level series covering the basic to secondary stages in phases starting with the academic year 2000 and culminating in 2010 with Action Pack 11 and Action Pack 12 for the eleventh and twelfth grades. Action Pack combines a topic-based approach with functional language practice, careful attention to grammar and vocabulary, and a comprehensive skills syllabus. Each level of Action Pack consists of a pupil's/student's book, a workbook, a

comprehensive teacher's book, audio cassettes and a website. In this study, it refers to the document used to identify the number of critical reading strategies included in the textbook (The English Language National Team, 2006).

- Critical reading strategies: A group of reading strategies that help learners understand, analyze, interrogate and summarize a text (Linkon, 2008). In this study, they refer to the extent of the presence of these strategies in Action Pack 9, in other words, the frequency of each strategy in the target textbook.

The Method of The Study

This study employs content analysis to determine the degree to which the reading texts in the ninth grade Action Pack encompass critical reading strategies.

The population of the study and its sample

The population of the study is the target textbook "Action Pack" series implemented by the Ministry of Education in Jordan from the first grade to the twelfth grade. The sample of the study was Action Pack for ninth grade. It is selected as a representative sample of the action pack series due to being a critical year after nine years of studying this series and it is the best year in which students could acquire cognitive skills and develop their higher order thinking. Therefore, it is of paramount significance to investigate of the textbook in 9th grade.

The instrument of the study

The researcher studies the literature to identify the most evidence based critical reading strategies which are the following: annotating, previewing, scanning and skimming, facts versus opinions, drawing conclusions, analyzing features of the text, summarizing, comparing and contrasting, classifying and categorizing information, and generating questions. Then, all the reading texts in Action Pack 9 were examined to identify the incorporation of the ten critical reading strategies. The analysis was conducted based on the incorporation and presence of these strategies in the reading texts introduced in the textbook. The unit of analysis was each exercise in the reading text in the six modules in the textbook and the category of analysis was the type of critical reading strategy in each reading text in the six modules.

The Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To establish the validity of the list of the exercises related to the reading texts used in the analysis, it was given to a jury of four experts in Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) and measurement and evaluation to make sure it was appropriate for the purpose of the research. The jury's suggestions focused on rewording, adding, or deleting items. Intra- rater reliability of the content analysis was also established through test-retest. The reading texts and their related exercises were analyzed and two weeks later reanalyzed according to the categories of the analysis by an EFL teacher. The reliability coefficient between the two analyses was measured to identify inter-rater reliability. It was found to be (.84); it is appropriate for the purpose of the study.

Findings and Discussion

- The research question was: to what extent does the Jordanian EFL textbooks encompass critical reading strategies? to answer it, the researcher analyzed the content of the student books of Action Pack for ninth grade according to its inclusion of critical reading strategies in the reading text. The frequency and the percentages of the critical reading strategies in all the exercises in the reading passages in the target textbook were calculated in table (1).

CRITICALRS READING STRATEGIES MODULE NO	ANNOTATING	PREVIEWING	SCANNING AND SKIMMING	FACTS VERSUS OPINIONS	DRAWING CONCLUSIONS	ANALYZING INFORMATION	SUMMARIZING	COMPARING AND CONTRASTING IIIIIIIIIIINFORMATION	CLASSIFYING OR CATEGORIZING INFORMATION	GENERATING QUESTIONS
Module 1	2	3	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	0
Module 2	3	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Module 3	2	3	2	3	0	1	1	1	0	0
Module 4	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	0	0	0
Module 5	1	2	2	3	2	3	3	1	1	0
Module 6	3	3	3	2	3	2	2	0	1	0
Reading 1	1	1	3	3	1	1	2	1	1	0
Reading 2	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	0
Total (118)	15	18	19	20	12	13	12	4	5	0
Percentage of inclusion each strategy in the textbook	13%	15%	16%	17%	10%	11%	10%	3%	4%	0%

As table (1) illustrates, there are seven critical reading strategies included in the Action Pack 9 in the first and second semesters. Unlike the comparing and contrasting strategy and classifying and categorizing strategies which were limitedly included in the textbook, the generating questions strategy had a zero frequency. The facts versus opinions strategy, scan and skimming strategy, and previewing strategy were heavily included, with 17%, 16%, and 15%, respectively. On the other hand, the annotating, analyzing information, and summarizing and drawing conclusions strategies were moderately included in the textbook with 13%, 11%, and 10%, respectively.

It is clear that the Ministry of Education especially curricula and textbook department has been aware of the importance of critical reading strategies and how they should be encompassed in textbooks to draw the attention of both students and teachers in how to implement them while teaching reading skills. That is, it is one of the priorities of the MoE to introduce critical reading strategies. Its main aim is not just to convert orthographic symbols to language, use context and knowledge to comprehend what is read, or process the text deeply but also to predict what the text will be about, take notes, guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, understand the text critically, and to be able to think outside of the box. Therefore, inclusion of these strategies is of paramount importance as researchers, teachers, and scholars could not expect learners to develop these strategies on their own without being exposed to and taught these strategies. According to Wallace (2003), including word recognition skills, comprehension skills, and fluency skills in textbooks is no longer necessary because most teachers could teach them, but critical reading skills seem to be neglected by teachers as they need a high level of perception and cognition. Teachers need to be familiar with them by explicitly being exposed to them in the

textbook to help learners use their cognitive abilities to interact with the text and analyze it.

It is important to draw attention to the general grade outcome identified in the general guidelines and the general and specific outcomes for the English Language Curriculum for the basic and secondary stages. These outcomes focused on using reading strategies to understand a variety of simple authentic informational and literary reading materials, demonstrate understanding of a variety of simple authentic informational and literary reading materials, and make connections between prior knowledge and experiences and a variety of simple authentic informational and literary reading materials. It is clear that the general grade outcomes implicitly focus on critical reading skills especially those that have been heavily included in the textbook, for instance, the previewing, activating prior knowledge, annotating, and facts versus opinions strategies. This leads to a general conclusion that Action Pack 9 implicitly encompasses critical reading strategies that the body of research recommends to be explicitly taught to learners with a minor focus on providing learners with opportunities to process the reading texts by comparing and contrasting and classifying or categorizing information. No chances are given to learners to generate their own questions about the text to reflect on it and evaluate it from their own standards. In other words, general outcomes may not make a direct reference to critical reading strategies, but nine out of ten strategies (annotating, previewing, scanning and skimming, facts versus opinions, drawing conclusions, analyzing information, summarizing, comparing and contrasting, classifying and categorizing information) were evident to different degrees in the target textbook.

Only the generating questions strategy was not encompassed in the reading exercises of the target book. This may be attributed to the fact that all the included reading exercises aimed to accomplish certain specific grade outcomes as well as the possibility of including all the questions that learners may think of generating. Additionally, in many classrooms, teachers ask most of the questions. This contradicts the findings of the body of research that to help learners become strategic and critical readers, teachers should encourage them to ask questions instead of having them answer questions (Hervey, 2006). Hervey (2006) highlighted the significance of encouraging learners to pose their own questions, which helps them to focus on their reading skills, delve deeper into the text, clarify meaning, and reflect critically on what they have read. Furthermore, Hervey (2006) stated that research shows that learners who have been shown how to generate questions as they read outperform those who have not. Generating questions helps learners think profoundly about the topic of reading, how it is presented, whose opinions and values are expressed, the authors' purpose for writing, and their reactions to the text.

On the other hand, the strategies of comparing and contrasting and classifying or categorizing information are limitedly included in the target textbook despite their role in deepening understanding of the text by showing similarities and differences. The textbook includes various activities that help learners see patterns and make connections. For example, learners compare things that are similar and contrast things that are different; they also classify when they identify features or characteristics of a group of objects or ideas and then develop a scheme to organize those objects (West and Marzano, 2015). According to Marzano et al. (2001), the cognitive research shows that textbooks should challenge learners to link, connect, and integrate ideas; consequently, they will boost student achievement.

All in all, it can be concluded that the encompassment of critical reading strategies in Action Pack 9 is not somewhat systematic, this can be attributed to the fact that critical reading strategies have not been explicitly mentioned in the general and specific outcomes. This indicates that the Jordanian EFL curricula and textbooks have not been designed or adapted with an eye on critical reading strategies.

It is important to mention that the findings of the current study are consistent with the findings of some studies, for instance, the studies of Zabihi and Pordel (2011), Takami (2009), and Assaly and Igharia (2014). They all found that the

textbooks that they analyzed included some critical reading strategies but not in a systematic way, as these kinds of strategies require a high level of thinking and an innovative way of embedding these strategies in the textbooks. They recommended taking the content analysis into consideration when adapting or reforming these textbooks and including critical reading strategies when designing the reading exercises.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the current study suggest that critical reading strategies have not received the attention they deserve and have not been included in the studied textbook equitably and systematically. Further research is needed in this vein, especially in investigating textbook content and classroom practices to reform the content of EFL textbooks and general and specific outcomes. Additionally, teachers should be familiar with how to tackle these strategies by being exposed to the content of the textbooks by the experts in the curricula and textbooks departments.

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استقصاء مدى تضمين كتب اللغة الإنجليزية الأردنية لاستراتيجيات القراءة الناقدة: تحليل محتوى

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ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء مدى تضمين كتاب اللغة الإنجليزية ضمن سلسلة (Action Pack) الأردنية لاستراتيجيات القراءة الناقدة وذلك باتباع أسلوب تحليل المحتوى. تكونت عينة الدراسة من كتاب اللغة الإنجليزية للصف التاسع الأساسي، واستخدم في الدراسة قائمة تحليل وتشتمل على مجموعة من استراتيجيات القراءة الناقدة حيث تم التحقق من صدقها من قبل مجموعة من المحكمين وثباتها عن طريق الاختبار وإعادة الاختبار حيث بلغ معامل الثبات (0.84) وهي قيمة مناسبة لأغراض الدراسة. وكما كشفت النتائج بأن بعض استراتيجيات القراءة الناقدة تم تضمينها بدرجة متوسطة مثل أخذ الملاحظات والمعانيمة للنص والقراءة المسحية والتفصيلية واستراتيجية تحديد الحقائق مقابل الآراء، بينما استراتيجيات المقارنة والتصنيف فقد تم تضمينها بشكل محدود في الكتاب المدرسي، في حين أن استراتيجية توليد الأسئلة لم يتم تضمينها على الإطلاق. هذه النتائج تكشف بأن تضمين استراتيجيات القراءة الناقدة غير متوازن في كتاب اللغة الإنجليزية للصف التاسع. وبناءً على ذلك فإن الباحث يوصي بأخذ نتائج هذه التحليل بعين الاعتبار عند مراجعة المنهاج والكتاب المدرسي وإجراء دراسة تحليل محتوى على كتب اللغة الإنجليزية للصفوف الأخرى.

الكلمات الدالة: استراتيجيات القراءة النقدية، كتاب اللغة الإنجليزية للصف التاسع الأساسي.

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