Evaluation of the Communicative Activities Used in English for Palestine 7th Grade for Developing the Oral Skills

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Evaluation of the Communicative Activities Used in English for Palestine 7th Grade for Developing the Oral Skills

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Abstract

This study analyzes the activities in English for Palestine 7th Grade textbook used in Palestinian schools to determine their ability to communicate. In other words, it aims to check whether or not the primary focus is on meaningful communication as opposed to linguistic forms. A rating scale (Marcella C. Martinez, 2010) was adapted to evaluate the activities based on the following criteria—understanding, purpose, information gap, spontaneity, and the use of authentic materials. The researchers used the method of content analysis to collect the data of the study. Results of the study showed that 75 out of the 331 were classified as activities that require students to communicate for the completion of the task. The ratings for the “understanding” variable were the highest of all. On the other hand, the ratings for the “authentic materials” and “spontaneity” variables were the lowest. Based on the results, the activities did not become more communicative as the book progressed. Findings of the study also showed that a great number of the activities do not conform to the theories of communicative language teaching which aim to develop students’ oral skills. Hence, the main focus of the activities in English for Palestine 7th Grade textbook is on teaching structures, vocabulary, and forms as opposed to having such functions carried out within a social context. The study suggested some recommendations for those involved in the process of teaching and learning in Palestine.

Keywords: communicative competence, spontaneity variable, authentic variable, information gap.
Background of the Study

English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. The English language has some official status even in nations where it is not the primary or the second spoken language. For Example, the English Language is officially taught from first grade in Palestinian schools. It has also become the language of instruction in some private schools and universities especially for the scientific courses. As a result of its status and international dominance, the Ministry of Education in Palestine requires Palestinian students to learn English as a foreign language throughout their elementary, secondary, and tertiary education. One of the main reasons of teaching English in Palestine is to help the students become well acquainted with the language and to be able to use it for communication. Therefore, the ministry highlights the learner-centered approach in the process of teaching and learning. It becomes of paramount importance to create as many communicative activities as possible for the sake of activating students and enhancing students' abilities to appropriately communicate with others. Consequently, authors of English for Palestine curriculum do their best to incorporate many communicative activities into textbooks mainly that of the primary stage. To meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education, the definitive versions of

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة الأنشطة الواردة في كتاب "الإنجليزية لفلسطين" المعتمد في المدارس الفلسطينية الصف السابع من أجل تحديد توافقها مع شروط الطبيعة التواصلية والوظيفية - أي التأكد من أن التركيز الأساسي قائم على التواصل الهادف لتحسين القدرات الشفوية وليس فقط التراكم إجراء بعض التعديلات على مقياس التصنيف (Marcella C. Martinez, 2010) لتقييم الأنشطة وفق المعايير الآتية: الفهم، والغرض، وفجوة المعلومات، والعفوية، واستخدام مواد أصلية. استخدم الباحثان أسلوب تحليل المحتوى لجمع بيانات الدراسة وقد أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن 75 نشاطاً فقط من اصل 332 نشاطاً، صنفت على أنها تتطلب التواصل بين الطلبة لإتمام النشاط أو المهمة بنجاح. حصل معيار الفهم على أعلى نسبة في حين ان معياري العفوية وتوظيف المواد الأصلية على أدنى النسبة. كما اظهرت النتائج أن الفعاليات والمهام الموجودة في الكتاب لم تفتح بغير الوحدات حتى نهاية المناهج. ومن خلال تحليل المحتوى البنى اثرت نتائج الدراسة على الحاجة لتحسين اللغة الإنجليزية للصف السابع على التركيب اللغوي والمفردات على حساب وظائف اللغة وتوظيفها في سياق اجتماعي. وخلصت الدراسة إلى اقتراح العديد من التوصيات للأطراف المعنية بالعملية التعليمية في فلسطين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة التواصلية، متغير العفوية، متغير الاصالة، فجوة المعلومات.
English for Palestine of all grades includes many interesting and valuable communicative activities that aim at improving students' level in the speaking skill. However, the question that is raised here is to what extent these activities are truly communicative ones. This question was the main motive that drives researchers to investigate the communicativeness of the activities targeting the speaking skill.

“Evaluation is a process of inquiry in which data are gathered through different instruments and from different sources. This information is interpreted to make important decisions based on the research results. All these efforts are made to the betterment of a course of study and bringing about satisfactory results” (Zohrabi, 2011, p. 141). Aqel (2009) states that evaluation has numerous purposes; however, the main ones include the following – examining the effectiveness of the instructional material, giving important information about the students’ progress, and curriculum development (p. 2). Graves (2000) considers formative evaluation as one of the main types of evaluation. It is performed for the purpose of evaluating what is effective and changing what is ineffective so that the course meets the needs of the students, gives them a voice in learning, and provides information for the course’s design (Aqel, 2009, p. 4). Aqel (2009) highlights the use of summative evaluation that aims at making decisions about the worth or value of different aspects of the curriculum; it is concerned with determining its effectiveness, efficiency, and acceptability (p. 4).

**Statement of the Problem**

Gilmore (2011) suggests that “despite the fact that the quality of English textbooks have improved over the recent years, research shows that these textbooks fail to meet many of the students’ communicative needs” (p. 791). Students have spent more than ten years learning the English language; yet they are still unable to use the language effectively and meet the objectives of learning English. “It can be observed that some students have no experience in exercising initiatives and participating imaginatively in activities and purposeful learning because of past rigid formal training” (Jeyasala, 2014, p.164). Martinez (2010) states that research on the activities in foreign language textbooks reveal that many of these activities emphasize the practice of grammatical structures rather than real communication. Students manage to grasp the gist of the materials presented in their textbook such as vocabulary, sentence structures, and forms; however, when it comes to communication, they face many obstacles. There are various studies that have dealt with the evaluation of English textbooks; however, to the best of researchers
knowledge, this is the first study to evaluate the communicative activities presented in English for Palestine 7th grade textbook.

**Purpose of the Study**
The purpose of this study is to evaluate the activities presented in English for Palestine 7th grade textbook used in Palestinian schools to check if they correspond to the theories of communicative language teaching which implies that textbooks should offer activities in which the primary focus is on meaningful communication as opposed to linguistic forms.

**Questions of the Study**
The main research question for this study was as follows: (1). To what extent are the activities used in English for Palestine 7th Grade textbook for developing the oral skills considered communicative ones in relation to the criteria of (a) understanding, (b) purpose, (c) information gap, (d) spontaneity, and (e) the use of authentic materials?

A secondary focus of the study was to answer two relevant sub-questions: (a) Do the activities become more communicative in nature as the textbook progresses from the earlier units to the later ones? (b) What is the percentage of communicative activities compared to all other activities presented in English for Palestine 7th Grade textbook?

**Significance of the Study**
This study proposes criteria for the purpose of assessing the degree of the communicative ability of textbook activities in English for Palestine 7th Grade. The activities are worth evaluating to check the degree to which they assist learners in using the target language for communicative purposes. It is hoped that the research can bring about change in the format of the activities in future editions of the textbook and that curriculum developers and textbook publishers would take into consideration the importance of communicative activities in developing students’ communicative competence. It is also hoped that the activities in the book will be taken to a higher level so as to expose the learners to the appropriate usage of the target language in a variety of social contexts and that language teachers may benefit from this study in terms of developing their teaching strategies and becoming more effective with their students.

**Limitations of the Study**
This study is limited to English for Palestine 7A textbook used for middle school English classes with the most current edition available for the scholastic year 2015/2016. The study is also limited to the activities within
the textbook and not how the teacher applies or modifies these activities in the classroom.

**Literature Review of Related Studies**

**Introduction:**
“Dell Hymes coined the term ‘communicative competence’ in 1966 as a response to Naom Chomsky’s ‘linguistic competence’ which contrasted between a learner’s competence (knowledge of the language) and performance (the actual use of the language)” (Howatt and Widdowson, 2004, p. 330). “Hymes' theory of communicative competence is a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community. Hymes argues that a learner needs to use the target language not only correctly based on linguistic competence, but also appropriately based on communicative competence (SpyroSpero, para. 4). “Communicative activities are tasks that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners, as well as with people in the program or community. These activities have real purposes: to find information, break down barriers, talk about self, and learn about the culture [of native speakers]” (Activities to Promote Interaction and Communication, p. 41). Some of the most important characteristics of communicative activities include information gap, choice, and the use of authentic materials. Textbook activities are not considered communicative unless they allow students to share information with one another in order to complete the task successfully. Learners must be able to negotiate meaning and develop their problem-solving skills while interacting with other learners. Daughty and Pica (1986) (as cited in Martinez, 2010) suggest that classroom tasks require an exchange of information which is crucial in generating conversation in order to acquire a second language. In order for activities to be regarded as communicative, they must allow the students to use the language creatively so as to produce spontaneous expressions, initiate questions, and express their opinions. Tasks which require students to replicate the formatted scripts and fixed expressions presented in the book are not communicative ones. In other words, language learners should have the choice of what to say and how to do so without being constrained to specific forms (Larson-Freeman, 2004, p.132). The use of authentic or genuine materials is also considered a prominent characteristic of communicative activities, playing a major role in bridging the gap between the classroom and the outside world (Ianiro, 2007, p.1). Using materials originally intended for native speakers exposes the learners to the target language and the culture of those who speak it.
“A study of ABE, GED, and ESL students (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, and Soler, 2001) showed that when [learners] used authentic materials inside the classroom, they were more likely to engage in literacy activities outside the classroom” (Ianiro, 2007, p. 1).

Communicative activities should be meaningful, that is to say, such activities are carried out to fulfill a specific purpose in a real life context (Rhalmi, 2010, para. 10). Communicative activities come in the forms of role-plays, language games, puzzles, problem-solving tasks, scrambled sentences, picture-strip stories, simulations, and etc. In these types of activities, language functions are emphasized over linguistic forms and meanings. However, this does not mean that formal instruction of grammar is not significant in terms of acquiring a second language. Learning forms and meaning is only a part of learning a language. Students need to understand the different social contexts in which certain functions can be used. Mastering the use of such functions appropriately within a specific social context can be achieved through frequent use of the target language. In other words, students should be given as many opportunities as possible to produce output in the target language (Martinez, 2010, p.12).

According to Bachman and Palmer, 1996 (cited in Vesna & Jelena, 2007) stated that language ability is of two main constituents: language knowledge and strategic competence. As two main components of language knowledge, the organizational knowledge and pragmatic competence play a complementary role in having truly communicative usage of the language. In Bachman and Palmer’s model, organizational knowledge is composed of competences indulged in a control language structure over the formal one, i.e. of grammatical and textual knowledge. Bachman also emphasized the ability to utilize the grammatical forms in real situations through using authentic materials.

**Pertinent Studies:**

Chaudhury (2015) did a study to assess the impact of introducing communicative activities in teaching methodology as an alternative to ‘chalk and talk’ method to as to enhance the communicative competence of learners of English as a second language. The results of the study showed that the students of the experimental group showed progress after being taught using communicative task-based materials. The students found the materials “very useful” and mentioned that their competence increased highly. Chaudhury recommended the use of communicative tasks for the purpose of integrating the four skills of language learning to
create situations which will foster the learners’ communicative competence.

Jeyasala’s (2014) study aimed at finding out the effects of using communicative activities in improving the oral skills of English learners in Tamil Nadu, India. Upon the distribution of different article texts, students were able to read, interpret, expand, discuss and comprehend the materials. To conclude, it was recommended that the use of communicative activities due to the fact that "real communication occurred in the second language classroom and students were able to organize their own ideas and contribute to the discussions. The activities also paved way for developing the students’ reading comprehension, questioning, retention, and conversational skills." (Jeyasala’s, 2014, p.169)

Ngan (2013) conducted a study for the purpose of finding out the reality of teaching and learning English in speaking classes and the benefits of applying communicative activities at Cao Lanh City High School 11th grade. The results of the study showed that the teachers were bound to the textbook activities; they did not attempt to re-design them. The tasks in the textbook were not considered communicative ones as the students were required to read the sample dialogues and speak out the given lines while role-playing. When students were given handouts and asked to speak, they were only reading the text (Ngan, 2013, p. 29). Finally, he suggests that teachers should re-design the activities to allow students to speak without being conformed to the language presented in the textbook (Ngan, 2013, p. 59).

Gilmore’s (2011) quasi-experimental study investigated a classroom for the purpose of exploring the potential of authentic materials in developing the communicative competence of Japanese learners. The results of the study strongly suggest that “learners who were exposed to authentic materials developed their communicative competence to a greater degree than those bound to the textbook materials” (Gilmore, 2011, p. 800). As a result, he highly recommends the use of authentic materials as they are essential in developing students’ oral skills and preparing them for spontaneous communication using the target language. In addition, they “provide richer input for learners to work with in the classroom, and allow them to notice and acquire a wider variety of linguistic, pragmatic, strategic, and discourse features” (Gilmore, 2011, p. 810).

Zohrabi’s (2011) study was conducted to evaluate the English for General Purposes (EGP) course at the University of Tabiz, Iran, as students were “insufficient in applying their linguistic knowledge to interactive use” (Zohrabi, 2011, p. 142). The results of the study showed that main focus of the lecturers was only on implementing the drills and exercises in the
textbook instead of language production. “There was barely any innovation on the part of the lecturers to create diversity in the classroom activities” (Zohrabi, 2011, p. 144-145). He recommends that teachers implement communicative activities in the classroom and allow students to practice and produce the target language due to the fact that “it is only during the production stage that the students can put their passive knowledge into active use and know where they have weaknesses” (Zohrabi, 2011, p. 148).

Martinez (2010) conducted an evaluative study of the communicative activities used in Spanish textbooks. The activities were rated based on the following criteria—understanding, purpose, opportunities for the student to share information, and spontaneity. The results showed that only 26% of the total number of activities in the book required communication. The activities were not applicable outside of the classroom and the students were required to conform to a formatted script with little opportunities to produce the language spontaneously (Martinez, 2010, p. 31-34). In conclusion, he recommends that teachers give the students more opportunities to communicate and interact. In addition, material developers need to decrease the emphasis on grammar so as to enhance communication, for grammar is only one way to foster students’ acquisition of the target language (Martinez, 2010, p. 42).

Summary:
In contrast to this study, most of the studies mentioned above were mainly focused on finding out whether the use of communicative activities in foreign/second language classrooms would develop students’ communicative competence. Prior to the use of communicative tasks, researchers found that students are not producing the target language spontaneously; instead, they are practicing communication only by reading the sample dialogues found in their textbooks. The teachers did not put any effort into re-designing the activities and creating diversity within the classroom. In addition, the use of authentic materials which enhance communication was neglected and students were given very few opportunities to practice and produce the target language. The results of the studies however, showed that incorporating innovative activities and communicative tasks in teaching English has significantly improved students’ oral skills and allowed them to put their knowledge of the rules of the language into actual use.

The results of the evaluative study by Marcella Martinez showed that the percentage of the activities which require communication in the evaluated Spanish textbooks was significantly low. The main focus of the remaining
tasks was on grammar and forms rather than communication. In addition, the majority of the activities were not applicable outside of the classroom and the students were bound to formatted scripts as opposed to producing the language spontaneously. Martinez’s study is similar to the present one as its main aim is to evaluate the communicative activities found in language textbooks. However, the main difference was the fact that the textbooks evaluated for her study were Spanish textbooks as opposed to the English textbook used for this study. Despite this difference, the study is considered relevant as it categorizes and evaluates the activities found in foreign language textbooks. This study is different from the rest as its main purpose is to evaluate the communicative activities relevant to English for Palestine 7th grade textbook and to the best of researchers’ knowledge it is the first study to be conducted in this area.

Research Methods
Data Collection Procedures
The data for the study were obtained through content analysis of the textbook. All the activities were analyzed and categorized based on whether or not they have a communicative focus. Then the activities were rated in relevance to the following criteria—understanding, purpose, information gap, spontaneity, and the use of authentic materials (Appendix B). Each criterion received a total of five rating scores; each score had its own description in relevance to the main criterion.

Instrumentation:
A rating rubric was adapted for this study. It was originally designed by Marcella C. Martinez (2010) for the study titled An Evaluation of Communicative Activities in First-Year High School Spanish Textbooks at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, U.S.A. The rubric consisted of the following criteria—understanding, purpose, opportunities to share information, and spontaneity (Appendix A). A new criterion—the use of authentic materials and information gap were added to the rubric, and the Opportunities for the student to share information was excluded from the original rubric (Appendix B). The rating rubric was sent to a jury of experts in the field for validation.

Data Analysis:
The analysis of the data was approached in three ways. First, for each unit in the textbook, the percentages of the activities which require communication were calculated by dividing the number of activities which require communication by the total number of activities. Second, the communicative nature of the activities in the textbook was evaluated by calculating descriptive statistics for the rating scores on each of the five
variables. The mean, mode, median, and standard deviation were calculated and displayed in charts using Microsoft Excel. Lastly, the mean difference of units 1 and 8 were calculated. The total number of units in the textbook was nine; however, unit 9 was a unit of revision that is why unit 8 was selected instead to check whether or not the activities became more communicative as the book progressed.

Results of the Study
Research Question 1: To what extent are the activities used in English for Palestine 7th Grade textbook for developing the oral skills considered to be communicative ones, and specifically, in relation to the criteria of (a) understanding, (b) purpose, (c) information gap, (d) spontaneity, and (e) the use of authentic materials?

The analysis of the research question was approached in two ways. First, for each unit in the textbook, researchers calculated the percentages of the activities which require communication. That was done by dividing the number of activities which require communication by the total number of activities. The results are shown in the table below.

Table (1):
Percentages of Activities which Require Communication in Each Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Number of activities which require communication/total number of activities</th>
<th>% of activities which require communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1</td>
<td>9/43</td>
<td>20.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2</td>
<td>9/43</td>
<td>20.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 3</td>
<td>10/42</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 4</td>
<td>11/43</td>
<td>25.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 5</td>
<td>6/15</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 6</td>
<td>8/42</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 7</td>
<td>9/45</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 8</td>
<td>8/43</td>
<td>18.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 9</td>
<td>5/15</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Activities</td>
<td>75/331</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, 75 out of all the 331 were classified as activities that require students to communicate for the completion of the task. This represents 22.7% of all the activities distributed among nine units and suggests that
the remaining 77.3% of the activities in the book did not have communication as their main focus. The other approach to evaluating the communicative nature of the activities in the textbook involved calculating descriptive statistics for the rating scores on each of the five variables. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table (2): Descriptive Statistics for Each Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Gap</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Materials</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures below – (1 through 5) represent charts for each variable and show the frequency of each rating. As shown in the charts, the ratings for the “understanding” variable were the highest of all the ratings with the most common rating being 4. On the other hand, the ratings for the “authentic materials” and “spontaneity” variables were the lowest, with the most common rating being 1. This suggests that material developers and publishing companies value the degree to which the language is comprehensible to the student. On the contrary, these activities are irrelevant in terms of developing students’ communication skills by presenting authentic materials and allowing the spontaneous production of the target language.
As shown in the figure above, the most common trend of the “understanding” variable was a score of 4. This means that the activities require most of the language to be understood in order for the student to complete the task.

**Figure (2):**
Score Frequencies for “Purpose” Variable

As can be seen from the figure above, the most common trend of the “purpose” variable was a score of 3. This means that the activity focuses mainly on linguistic forms, with some attention to meaning and that this activity may be applicable outside the classroom under certain circumstances.

**Figure (3):**
Score Frequencies for “Information Gap” Variable

The most common trend for the “information gap” variable, in the figure above, was a score of 2. This means that the students have access to the
same information but are able to substitute in order to make the activity more personal.

As can be seen from the figure above, the most common trend for the “spontaneity” variable was a score of 1 which means that the activity requires the student to follow a formatted script.

As shown in the figure above, the most common trend for the “authentic materials” variable was a score of 1. This means that the activity does not use any authentic material.
**Research Question 1 (a): Do the activities become more communicative in nature as the textbook progresses from the earlier units to the later ones?**

It was hypothesized that the activities in the textbook would gradually become more communicative as the book progresses. That is true mainly because the students’ communicative competence would presumably increase in company with the course progression. Table 3 shows the mean difference for each of the five variables for units 1 and 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Unit 1</th>
<th>Unit 8</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Gap</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Materials</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from the table that the mean ratings for the authentic materials and understanding variables were higher for unit 8 as opposed to unit 1, suggesting that more authentic materials were presented to the students and the students needed to understand the language more as the book progressed. However, the mean ratings for the purpose, information gap and spontaneity variables were higher for unit 1 than for unit 8. Based on the results, the activities did not become more communicative as the book progressed which entails that there is room for improvement with regard to re-designing the activities so that they may present more authentic materials, information gap tasks, and allow the students to use the language spontaneously.

**Research Question 1 (b): What is the percentage of communicative activities compared to all activities presented in English for Palestine 7th Grade textbook?**

The results show that only 22.7% of the activities in the textbook require the students to communicate using the target language. The remaining 77.3% of the activities do not have a communicative focus; instead, they focus on grammar, reading, and vocabulary.

**Summary:**
The activities in the textbook did not rate high on any of the communicative variables; they did not approach the highest rating of the rubric which was a score of 5. The majority of the activities require students to understand the language in order to complete the task successfully. However, the activities do not present enough authentic materials to the students. In addition, students are required to conform to the formatted script in the textbook as opposed to producing the language spontaneously. The activities are not designed to allow students to exchange information as they have access to the same information for the most part.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Conclusion:
The goal of the study was to evaluate the activities in English for Palestine 7th grade text-book to determine whether or not they are regarded as communicative ones. Only 22.7% of the activities have a communicative focus; the remaining 77.3% of the activities serve the purpose of checking students’ reading skills and their knowledge of grammatical structures as well as vocabulary items. This suggests that there is room for improvement as far as making the activities in the textbook more communicative; as it is evident, that the majority of the activities are not in alignment with the most prominent characteristics of communicative activities. Also, the results of the study revealed that of the five variables rated, the category of understanding scored the highest with a rating score of 4, which suggests that textbook authors pay close attention to the information presented to the learners as they are required to understand the language for the purpose of completing the task successfully. The most common trend for the “purpose” variable was a score of 3 which shows that most of the activities focus on linguistic forms, with some attention to meaning and that they may be applicable outside the classroom under certain circumstances.

Nevertheless, the categories labeled as “spontaneity” and “the use of authentic materials”, scored the lowest with a rating score of 1 for each. This means that the majority of the activities require students to follow a formatted script when producing the target language; especially during role plays because students simply repeat the same lines given in the sample dialogues. The activities do not expose the learners to authentic materials which are known to bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world to enhance communication. In addition, the most common trend for the category labeled as “information gap” was a score of 2; which suggests
that the learners have access to the same information while completing the tasks in the textbook. This means that the activities should be re-designed to allow students to share unique information and communicate in order to complete the task successfully.

**Recommendations for Textbook Publishers and Teachers:**
First, researchers recommend that textbook publishers and curriculum developers take this study into consideration and improve the structure of the activities in English for Palestine 7th grade textbook for the purpose of giving students more opportunities to practice and produce the target language. Second, we suggest that the focus on grammar and vocabulary in the activities should be minimized to maximize the communicative ones instead. Researchers are not implying that learning grammar is not an essential part of language learning, we are saying that it would be more beneficial for the students to have 77.3% of the communicative activities as opposed to only having 22.7%. Third, we also suggest that the activities be redesigned to present more authentic materials to the learners and encourage them to use the target language spontaneously rather than be constrained to the fixed scripts and forms presented in the textbook. Perhaps by doing so, the activities would rank higher in the criteria of understanding, purpose, information gap, spontaneity, and the use of authentic materials. Lastly, we encourage the teachers to be innovative and to incorporate other forms of communicative activities such as games, puzzles, and simulations into the lesson to help the students develop their communicative competence and use the target language for effective communication.

**Recommendations for Further Research:**
For future studies in this area, Researchers recommend that the activities in other levels of English for Palestine textbooks are to be evaluated to determine their potential for communication and the extent to which they develop students’ oral skills. Ministry of Education should reconsider types of activities that appear in the 7th grade curriculum so that it can meet the requirements of the truly communicative activities. These activities should guarantee the presence of choice, information gap, authenticity, spontaneity, purpose and understanding. Teachers should also get benefit from the principles of the communicative approach while teaching their students.
References:


Vesna & Jelena (2007). Defining Communicative Competence. Faculty of Philosophy, University of Osijek Jelena Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of


Appendices:

Appendix (A)

1- Rating Scales Used With All Textbook Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding (extent to which students need to understand the language used in order to complete the activity)</th>
<th>Purpose (extent to which activity focused on communicating meaning, and extent to which activity can be transferred to a real life situation outside the classroom, as opposed to merely practicing linguistic forms)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The activity can be completed by the student without understanding the meaning of any of the words.</td>
<td>Activity is designed to focus exclusively on linguistic forms, with no attention to meaning, nor does it reflect applicability to situations outside of classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity can be completed by the student without understanding the meaning but may require a little effort to obtain meaning (looking at cognates).</td>
<td>The activity can be answered by making minimum substitutions to the activity given, it is an activity unlikely to be use outside of the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity requires understanding of some of the language in order for the activity to be completed.</td>
<td>Activity focuses mainly on linguistic forms, with some attention to meaning, this activity may be applicable outside the classroom under certain circumstance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The question requires most of the language to be understood in order for the student to complete the activity.</td>
<td>Activity requires attention to form in order to be able to answer correctly, activity may very well be used outside the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity can be completed only with full understanding of meaning.</td>
<td>The activity is designed to expand beyond grammar concepts allowing the students to create own concepts, this activity helps students apply information and it can be use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2- Rating Scales Used With Activities Labeled as “Communicative”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities for the student to share information</th>
<th>(Activities that are depicted as communicative or have a sharing icon will have this extra rating scale)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students have access to the same information, no negotiation of meaning is required</td>
<td>The students have access to the same information but are able to substitute in order to make the activity more personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity requires interaction but the information is not shared equally. One student may have access to the information while the other student may need to come up with the answers in order to complete the activity</td>
<td>Students have access to information equally and some negotiation of meaning is required to complete the activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each student has unique information, the student must negotiate meaning in order to complete the task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Spontaneity (lack of prompting and naturalness)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity requires the student to follow a formatted script</th>
<th>The activity has some formatted script but the student is able to make some substitutions</th>
<th>The activity may require one student to have a formatted script while another student has</th>
<th>This activity allows both students to share information equally, in this activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity allows students to create open-ended questions or dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the opportunity to answer although the answer is not known or expected

Appendix B
The Modified Communicative Activity Rubric Used by the Researchers

1. Understanding: the extent to which students need to understand the language used in order to complete the activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The activity can be completed by the student without understanding the meaning of any of the words</td>
<td>The activity can be completed by the student without understanding the meaning but may require a little effort to obtain meaning</td>
<td>The activity requires understanding of some of the language in order for the activity to be completed</td>
<td>The question requires most of the language to be understood in order for the student to complete the activity</td>
<td>The activity can be completed only with full understanding of meaning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Purpose: the extent to which activity focused on communicating meaning, and the extent to which activity can be transferred to real life situation outside the classroom, as opposed to merely practicing linguistic forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activity is designed to focus exclusively on linguistic forms, with no attention</td>
<td>The activity can be answered by making minimum substitutions to the</td>
<td>Activity focuses mainly on linguistic forms, with some attention to meaning,</td>
<td>The activity requires attention to form in order to be able to</td>
<td>The activity is designed to expand beyond grammar concepts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to meaning, nor does it reflect applicability to situations outside of classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students have access to the same information, no negotiation of meaning is required</td>
<td>The students have access to the same information but are able to substitute in order to make the activity more personal</td>
<td>Activity requires interaction but the information is not shared equally. One student may have access to the information while the other student may need to come up with the answers in order to complete the activity</td>
<td>Students have access to information equally and some negotiation of meaning is required to complete the activity</td>
<td>Each student has unique information, the student must negotiate meaning in order to complete the task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Information Gap:** the extent to which students exchange information with one another in order to complete the given task
4. **Spontaneity**: (lack of prompting and naturalness)

<table>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activity requires the student to follow a formatted script</td>
<td>The activity has some formatted script but the student is able to make some substitutions</td>
<td>The activity may require one student to have a formatted script while another student has the opportunity to answer although the answer is expected or known</td>
<td>This activity allows students to share information equally, in this activity the answer is not known or expected</td>
<td>Activity allows students to create open-ended questions or dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. **Authentic Materials**: the use of “genuine” materials which expose students to unregulated native-speaker language – the language itself as it is actually used by native speakers for the purpose of communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The activity does not use any authentic material</td>
<td>The activity uses some authentic materials, but does not expose students to the culture of the native speakers</td>
<td>The activity uses some authentic materials which help students experience “real” language as used by native speakers</td>
<td>The activity contains authentic materials (newspapers, magazines, etc…) which aim to build new vocabulary and constructions</td>
<td>The activity uses a variety of authentic materials which motivate the students to use the target language in real contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

1. Work in pairs and look at the pictures. What do you think the people are saying?

2. Now listen and choose the correct picture.

3. Complete the questions and sentences.
   1. What ________ you ________ here?
   2. ________, you ________ Chinese?
   3. More and more people ________, ________ Chinese these days.
   4. ________, only ________ English this year.
   5. The number of students ________, ________ up.


5. Look at the other picture and think about what the people are saying or doing. Write three questions to ask a friend.

6. Work in pairs. Ask and answer questions about what you’re saying or doing.

   Hello! What are you doing here? We’re having some cakes for my father’s birthday.
1 Read and think. What is the tense of the verbs? Then choose the correct words to complete the rules.

I think it's angry!
Do you understand dogs?
We don't always know what they're saying.
It wants food.
I don't like dogs very much ...
She loves cats.
What do you mean?
Do you hear that noise?

1 Many verbs of thinking and liking (see the examples above) are not used in the present continuous / simple tense.
2 We use the present continuous / simple even when the action is happening now.
3 Because many of these verbs are verbs of thinking, feeling and liking, we often use them to express actions / opinions.

2 Choose the correct words to complete the sentences.

1 We're watching a film and we enjoy / 're enjoying it. It's good.
2 We're watching a film and we love / 're loving it. It's good.
3 I hear / 'm hearing a noise in the kitchen. Is it a cat?
4 He reads / 's reading a book in English but he doesn't understand / isn't understanding much.

3 Put the words in the correct order to make the answers.

1 What do you think of this? it / I like / think / it's / I / interesting

2 How do you understand this song? some English / know / I / and / to practise / I / want

3 Do you want some tea? Sorry, / like / I / tea / don't / juice / I prefer

4 Do you know Paul? Yes! / hear / And / I / going to / he's / a new school

5 Do you think the dog likes the ball? / he / it / know / likes / Look / his / tail / at

4 Work in pairs. Ask and answer the questions in activity 3.

Grammar: verbs not usually used in the present continuous
Some verbs are not used in the present continuous form. Many are verbs of thinking and liking.
We use the present simple even when the action is happening now. Because many of these verbs are verbs of thinking, feeling and liking, we often use them to express opinions.
1. Work in pairs. Look at the pictures. What do you know about the animals?

2. Listen and match each passage with the pictures in activity 1.

3. Listen again and answer the questions.
   Passage A
   1. Why does the dog move its tail and bark?
   2. How does the dog make the speaker feel?
   Passage B
   3. Can gorillas speak?
   Passage C
   4. Does the speaker like giraffes?
   Passage D
   5. What does the speaker like about whales?

4. Complete the questions about animals.
   1. What do you think of ______________________?
   2. How does a dog ______________________?
   3. How do you know when a cat ______________________?
   4. Do you know anything about ______________________?
   5. What do you know about ______________________?

5. Work in pairs. Ask and answer questions about animals.
   Use the questions you wrote in activity 4.
   - How does a dog show it is happy?
   - It moves its tail.
   - What do you think of elephants?
   - I love elephants. I think they're...
UNIT 1

1. Listen and repeat the words.

   ages hug kiss often perhaps pleased smile surprised

2. Work in pairs, look at the pictures and answer the questions.
   1. Are the people friends or not?
   2. What do you think they are saying?

3. Listen and answer the questions.

4. Listen and read. Underline the words from activity 1.

   Every day we meet people. We meet friends in the street or at school and sometimes we meet new people. What do you usually do when you meet friends? Do you kiss and hug them? Perhaps you never do that. But in some countries people always kiss and hug their friends.

   Jane: Hi! How are you?! I haven't seen you for ages! How's your family?
   Anne: Hello! How are you? You look great! We're all fine. How are your parents?
   Jane: They're very well, thank you! Oh, I'm so surprised to see you here!

   What do you do when you meet new people? Are you friendly? Do you often smile?

   Paul: Jake, this is Evan. He's my cousin.
   Jake: Hi, Evan. I'm pleased to meet you.
   Evan: How do you do, Jake? Good to meet you too. I've heard a lot about you.
   Paul: And this is my cousin, Clara.
   Jake: Hi, Clara.
   Clara: Hello.

5. Work in groups. Act out the conversations in activity 4.

   Everyday English

   I haven't seen you for ages!
   We're all fine.
   Pleased/Good to meet you.
   I've heard a lot about you.
1 Work in pairs. Look at the pictures and answer the questions.
1 Where are they?
2 What are they doing?

2 Listen and put the pictures in order. Write the letter on the picture.

3 Listen again and answer the questions.

PART A
1 Does the man welcome the boys to his shop? __________________________
2 Why are the boys in the shop? __________________________

PART B
3 How did the boy break the bowl? __________________________

PART C
4 What does the man give to the boys? __________________________
5 Why does he give it to them? __________________________

4 Ask questions. Then listen and check.
1 Have / you / be / to / Jerusalem / yet / ?
2 Have / you / see / ceramics from Jerusalem / yet / ?
3 Have / you / buy / ceramics / from / Jerusalem / ?
4 Have / you / make / crafts / at school / ?
5 Have / you / give / something special to your parents / ?

5 Work in pairs. Ask and answer questions about things you’ve done recently.
Use the questions in activity 4 to help you.

Have you been to Jerusalem?
No, I haven’t, but my parents have been and I want to go.

Have you seen … yet?
Yes, I have. I think they’re fantastic.

6 Practise your conversation with another student.