

The Representation of Speech Acts and Language Functions in Libya Public Preparatory English Textbooks

Khadija Salem Almahdi Alhodairy¹, Pavani Malaa Meganathan^{*2}

^{1,2}Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

¹English Department, Sebha University, 18758, Sebha, Libya.

***Corresponding Author**

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ABSTRACT

Pragmatic competence involves understanding and applying sociocultural norms in communication, which is essential for effective language use. Despite grammatical and lexical proficiency, Libyan EFL learners often face challenges in real-life communication due to limited exposure to pragmatic language use, as English functions as a foreign language in Libya. Textbooks serve as key sources of pragmatic input, yet prior research has largely focused on secondary-level materials, overlooking preparatory textbooks. This study investigates the representation of speech acts and language functions in Libyan public preparatory English textbooks for Grades 7, 8, and 9, comprising three coursebooks and three workbooks. All dialogues from these textbooks were transcribed and compiled to reflect a range of communicative contexts and linguistic structures. Drawing on Searle's (1976) speech act theory and Halliday's (1978) language function theory, a mixed-methods approach was used. Quantitative data were obtained through systematic content analysis and analysed using SPSS, followed by qualitative interpretation. Findings showed a disproportionate emphasis on representative and directive speech acts, with minimal use of expressive and commissive acts and a complete absence of declarative acts. Similarly, language functions were largely limited to representational and personal uses, while instrumental, imaginative, and regulatory functions were scarcely represented. These imbalances may hinder the development of learners' pragmatic competence. The study highlights the need for curricular reform and professional development to support the integration of a broader range of pragmatic elements. It emphasizes aligning textbook content with real-world communicative demands to better equip Libyan students for effective language use.

Keywords: Pragmatics competence, Speech acts, Language functions, Libyan English textbooks

INTRODUCTION

To communicate effectively in a second or foreign language, learners must acquire multiple competencies, with pragmatic competence being particularly critical. Pragmatic competence has garnered significant attention in both research and language teaching, as it is increasingly recognised as a crucial element in the development of overall language proficiency. Pragmatics, which focuses on the use of language in specific contexts, is concerned with how language functions beyond mere grammatical accuracy. Specifically, pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language effectively in various communicative situations, demonstrating an understanding of the meaning in context (Tulgar, 2016). This competence enables learners to interpret context, navigate social situations, and express themselves appropriately. In other words, it involves knowing how to express oneself in a socially and culturally appropriate manner.

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, there has been a notable shift from a focus on linguistic theory to an emphasis on authentic, real-world communication. Consequently, learners require both linguistic accuracy and pragmatic competence to engage effectively in English conversations. For ESL/EFL learners, this skill is essential for interpreting and producing language in socially appropriate ways. Pragmatic competence extends beyond knowledge of grammatical structures and vocabulary; it comprises an understanding how language operates in diverse social contexts to convey meaning effectively and appropriately (Tran & Yeh, 2020). Without adequate pragmatic skills, learners may struggle to communicate effectively, even if they have a strong command of linguistic forms. This challenge becomes especially pronounced during intercultural interactions. In many Asian and Middle Eastern regions, English language learners face significant challenges in acquiring pragmatics skills. Limited exposure to the contextual and nuanced use of English often hinders their ability to apply language pragmatically in diverse settings (Ahmed et al., 2023).

Despite the importance of pragmatic competence, many Libyan EFL textbooks fail to address this area, placing a disproportionate emphasis on grammar and vocabulary. This imbalance limits learners' development of pragmatic skills and leaves them ill-equipped for practical communication. Consequently, learners may achieve linguistic proficiency but still struggle with real-world language use, especially in cross-cultural contexts (Ahmed et al., 2023). In the Libyan EFL context, textbooks remain the cornerstone of language education. They play dual role: on the one hand, they are instrumental in delivering both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge to learners (Ahmed et al., 2023); on the other, their written format presents limitations, as it lacks non-verbal cues such as tone, gestures, and facial expressions that are present in spoken communication (Ahmed et al., 2023). Therefore, developing pragmatic competence is vital for learners to grasp intended meanings and avoid misunderstandings in real-life conversations (Schneider, 2022).

In the Libyan EFL context, where learners have limited access to authentic language use or native speakers, textbooks serve as the primary source of linguistic and pragmatic input. Effective textbooks should go beyond grammatical accuracy to include pragmatic elements such as speech acts and language functions—that help learners use language appropriately in social and cultural contexts. Ideally, textbooks should integrate pragmatic content, including examples of how language functions in social and cultural contexts. Such integration enables learners to develop not only linguistic accuracy but also contextual appropriateness in communication. However, Libyan EFL textbooks often lack sufficient coverage of these features, which can hinder students' communicative competence and lead to misunderstandings. Addressing these gaps is essential, as textbooks must provide structured guidance on pragmatic use to prepare learners for real-world communication and intercultural interaction (Owen et al., 2019; Ahmed et al., 2023).

In line to this, numerous studies have examined the representation of pragmatic elements in EFL textbooks, highlighting both their strengths and shortcomings in preparing learners for real-life communication. For instance, the studies by Bouknify and Anasse (2024) and Siswantara and Ariffin (2021) both explored the representation of pragmatic elements in EFL textbooks, highlighting significant gaps in how well these materials support the development of communicative competence. While focusing on different geographic and cultural contexts (Morocco and Indonesia) both studies shared a common concern: EFL textbooks often fail to provide sufficient pragmatic content, which limits learners' ability to use language effectively in real-world communication.

Moreover, studies by Thi and Yeh (2020) and Marni et al. (2024) examined the representation of pragmatic content in ESL textbooks, focusing on their effectiveness in supporting authentic communication. Although conducted in different cultural contexts (Vietnam and Indonesia) both studies identified significant shortcomings in how textbooks present pragmatic knowledge and the implications for learners' communicative competence. Thi and Yeh (2020) found that a Vietnamese ESL textbook offered insufficient meta-pragmatic information, limiting learners' ability to use speech acts appropriately in diverse social contexts. They argued for more realistic and culturally appropriate representations of language use to better prepare students for genuine social interactions. Similarly, Marni et al. (2024), in their analysis of Indonesian

junior high school textbooks, reported a lack of emphasis on key pragmatic elements such as speech acts, communicative context, and pragmatic implicatures. This absence led to a disconnect between textbook language and real-life communicative situations.

Furthermore, Jiang and Dengi's (2022) study and Zhao's (2022) research both focused on the representation of speech acts in Chinese EFL textbooks, yet they examined different contexts-China and Thailand-while sharing several important findings regarding the underrepresentation and simplification of pragmatic content. Through a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis, Jiang and Dengi found that speech acts were underrepresented, with many conventional acts excluded and the range and distribution of those included being uneven. Similarly, Zhao's (2022) research, focusing on Chinese intermediate textbooks used by high school students in Thailand, examined six specific speech acts which are refusal, request, complaint, apology, gratitude, and suggestion. Although pragmatic content was present, the emphasis placed on each speech act varied significantly. However, the study found that, like in Jiang and Dengi's analysis, speech act instruction in the textbooks was often oversimplified, with the focus on grammatical structures rather than the nuanced contextual factors that affect real-world communication.

Apart from that, Nourdad's (2022) study compared the pragmatic elements in two EFL textbook series, American English Files and the Prospect series, focusing on the frequency and types of implicatures, speech acts, and pragmatic markers. Employing Searle's speech act typology, Leech's implicature theory, and Biber's pragmatic markers framework, the authors used both qualitative and quantitative methods, including a Chi-square test, to assess differences between the series. Despite American English Files emphasizing socio-cultural aspects of English and Prospect being central to Iranian high school education, findings indicated no significant differences in pragmatic content across the two series. The study suggested that pragmatic elements in textbooks may follow similar patterns, with implications for materials development and teacher training.

Numerous studies have examined the representation of speech acts and language functions in ELT textbooks, highlighting their crucial role in developing learners' pragmatic competence. Research by Murniasih (2022) and Maknun (2019) on Indonesian high school textbooks revealed an overemphasis on directives and a lack of explicit instruction on speech acts, which forces teachers to improvise. Similarly, studies by Tahr et al. (2023) in Northern Iraq and Nevisi and Moghadasi (2020) in Iran found significant deficiencies and imbalances in pragmatic elements, particularly in the inclusion and distribution of speech acts and language functions. Both studies emphasized the need for improved textbook design to support authentic communication. Thi and Yeh (2020) and Marni et al. (2024) further confirmed these issues in the Vietnamese and Indonesian contexts, respectively, noting the limited meta-pragmatic information and lack of contextually appropriate examples. In contrast, Aida et al. (2022) identified a broader range of speech acts in the Indonesian textbook *Think Globally Act Locally*, suggesting that well-integrated pragmatic content can enhance learners' communicative skills.

In conclusion, across studies, a common theme emerges, EFL textbooks frequently underrepresent pragmatic content and lack metapragmatic guidance necessary for students to develop nuanced communicative competence. While pragmatic elements were included to varying extents, their limited range and depth often fail to equip learners for authentic language use in social contexts. In light of these challenges, this study aims to examine the English textbooks used in Libyan public schools, focusing on the "21st Century English for Libya" Preparatory series. Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate how well these textbooks align with curriculum standards and support the development of learners' pragmatic competence. By analysing the representation of speech acts and language functions, the research will identify gaps and provide insights into how these textbooks can better prepare Libyan learners for real-world communication.

While many earlier studies have examined pragmatic content in EFL textbooks across various regional contexts, such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Algeria, these investigations have largely focused on secondary-level materials and often highlighted the insufficient inclusion of speech acts and metapragmatic guidance. In Libya itself, the only recent study is by Ahmed et al. (2023), who analysed speech acts and language functions

in the 21st Century English for Libya series but exclusively at the secondary level (secondary grades 1-3). Crucially, there is a lack of research addressing pragmatic competence development in Libya's preparatory-stage materials (Grades 7–9). Specifically, the 21st Century English for Libya Preparatory 1- 3 coursebooks and workbooks have not been empirically analysed for their inclusion of speech acts or language functions. This absence represents a significant gap in the literature and underscores the originality and relevance of the present study.

Therefore, this paper highlights this gap in past studies by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the types and frequencies of speech acts in the conversation sections and language functions used in the Libyan English Preparatory 7, 8, and 9 coursebooks and workbooks?
2. To what extent are the conversations in these textbooks pragmatically competent, based on the presence and distribution of speech acts and language functions across grade levels?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed method approach to evaluate the pragmatic content specifically speech acts and language functions in Libyan preparatory English textbooks. As Creswell (2014) explains, research design refers to the systematic planning of procedures for data collection and analysis to address specific research objectives. The core objective of this research was to identify and analyse the types and frequencies of speech acts and language functions embedded in the conversation sections of the 21st Century English for Libya Preparatory English coursebooks and workbooks for Grades 7, 8, and 9. The study also examined the extent to which these textbooks promote pragmatic competence across grade levels by evaluating the distribution and nature of pragmatic features. To fulfill the objectives, the study employed content analysis, a widely recognised quantitative and qualitative research methods commonly used for systematically examining textual and visual data (Prasad, 2019). This method was particularly appropriate given the study's focus on identifying patterns, categories, and frequencies within the text. By systematically categorising and analysing these elements, the research provided a detailed understanding of how well the textbooks align with the goals of pragmatic language teaching.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed in this study to select data that directly align with the research objectives. Purposive sampling is particularly advantageous when the researcher seeks to gain in-depth insights from a specific subset of data. This non-random approach enables the researcher to intentionally select specific instances or cases that are deemed relevant for the investigation, ensuring that the data collected are meaningful and directly applicable to the research questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The rationale for using purposive sampling lies in its ability to focus on data sources with characteristics aligned with the study's goals in this case, the examination of speech acts and language functions in English textbooks. By focusing on conversation sections from the selected textbooks, the researcher ensures that the analysis is both targeted and relevant to the study's aims. This method not only enhances the depth of the analysis but also ensures that the findings are both pertinent and meaningful, providing a detailed exploration of the pragmatic dimensions of the language used in the textbooks.

Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study were drawn from a diverse range of linguistic units, including words, sentences, clauses, and expressions. A total of 2,025 examples were analysed, comprising 416 examples from grade 7, 909 from grade 8, and 623 from grade 9, providing a comprehensive representation of the language featured in the selected textbooks. Specifically, the data were collected from the conversation sections of the preparatory 7,

8, and 9 course and workbooks of “21st Century English for Libya”. These textbooks were selected due to their central role in the Libyan educational context, as they serve as the primary resource for teaching English to preparatory-level students.

The dialogues in these textbooks, which exemplify language in use, were deliberately chosen to represent a wide range of communicative contexts and linguistic structures. This method of data collection ensures that the linguistic units extracted reflect authentic, context-rich examples that are directly relevant to the pragmatic analysis of language use in the Libyan EFL context. By focusing on these sections, the study captures both the frequency and distribution of speech acts and language functions, providing valuable insights into the textbooks' potential to develop students' pragmatic competence.

The primary instrument used in this research is a content analysis form, specifically developed for analysing the pragmatic content of speech acts and language functions in the present study. Content analysis tables from previous studies (Meihami & Khanlarzadeh, 2015; Si, 2019; Tran & Yeh, 2020) were referred and adapting them to suit the specific objectives of this study. The content analysis form incorporates several key elements: data number, page number, unit number, number of lessons, sentences, categories of speech acts, and categories of language functions. This structured approach allows for a detailed and systematic analysis of the speech acts and language functions presented in the textbooks. By categorising and organizing the linguistic features, the content analysis form enables a comprehensive examination of the pragmatic dimensions of the textbooks, facilitating an in-depth understanding of how these features contribute to the development of English language proficiency.

For data collection, the procedure outlined by Zhao (2022) was followed, involving a systematic and structured approach. Data was independently gathered from the six textbooks, ensuring a thorough examination of all dialogues. These dialogues were sorted lesson by lesson for detailed analysis. To aid in identifying and categorizing various elements, the Sealer (1976) and Halliday (1978) frameworks, designed for analyzing speech acts and language functions, was used. Appropriate categories were constructed, and relevant data points systematically identified. Expressions and specific location information was recorded in a content analysis form, with detailed speech acts and language function types marked for an accurate and comprehensive analysis. This procedure ensures a clear and organised framework for evaluating the pragmatic content of the textbook.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, Excel, SPSS software and chi-square test were employed to analyse the data, with the chi-square test to determine the statistical significance of differences between the three levels and the expected frequencies in categorical data. The results were used to examine the patterns of existence and distribution of speech acts and language functions across the textbooks as the levels advanced. By assessing the variety and representation of these pragmatic elements, the study evaluated whether the textbooks offered a balanced and practical approach to language use, promoting the development of students' pragmatic competence as they advanced through the levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research question 1 of this research comprises the types and overall frequency of the speech acts in the Libyan coursebooks and workbooks. Table 1 demonstrates the types and frequencies of speech acts in year 7, 8, 9 course and workbooks. Across all three grades, representative speech acts were the most frequently occurring category in both coursebooks and workbooks. For example, in grade 7, representatives comprised 58.07% of coursebook content and 43.04% of the workbook. A similar pattern is evident in grade 8 (55% and 55%, respectively) and grade 9 (58.74% in the coursebook and 50.98% in the workbook). Directives, which include commands, requests, and suggestions, represented the second most common category.

In grade 7, directives accounted for 28.19% in the coursebook and 35.44% in the workbook. Meanwhile, grade 8 showed a noticeable increase in coursebook usage (32%), although workbook use dropped significantly to 15%. In grade 9, directives formed 30.24% of the coursebook and 33.33% of the workbook content, indicating a relatively consistent representation across the curriculum. The presence of commissive and expressive speech acts was comparatively limited. Commissive ranged from 3% to 7.84%, while expressive remained below 10% in all cases, reflecting a relatively low instructional focus on expressing feelings, emotions, or commitments. Next, declarations were entirely absent from all coursebooks and workbooks across all three grades.

Table 1: Frequencies of Speech Acts in Year 7, 8, 9 Course & Workbook

Categories	Year 7						Year 8						Year 9					
	Coursebook		Workbook		Total		Coursebook		Workbook		Total		Coursebook		Workbook		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Representative	241	58.07	34	43.04	275	55.72	488	55	11	55	499	55.12	336	58.74	26	50.98	362	58.34
Directive	117	28.19	28	35.44	145	29.39	286	32	3	15	289	31.92	173	30.24	17	33.33	190	30.17
Commissive	20	4.82	6	7.59	26	5.27	31	3	1	5	32	3.54	20	3.50	4	7.84	24	3.87
Expressive	37	8.92	11	13.92	48	9.73	82	9	5	25	87	9.61	43	7.52	4	7.84	47	7.58
Declaration	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Total	415	100	79	100	494	100	887	100	20	100	907	100	572	100	51	100	623	100.

These results aligned with past findings on the representation of speech acts in EFL textbooks. For instance, Tahr et al. (2023) also found a limited range of speech acts in high school textbooks, particularly in terms of the textbooks' ability to support pragmatic competence. He highlighted the need for textbooks to incorporate a broader spectrum of speech acts to better prepare students for diverse communicative situations. Furthermore, Nevisi and Moghadasi (2020) reported a disproportionate representation of speech acts in Iranian high school English textbooks, with representatives and directives being most common, while other speech acts were underrepresented, echoing the imbalanced distribution found in the Libyan textbooks. Besides, Ahmed et al. (2023), in their study of the "21st Century English for Libya" secondary textbooks, also found an uneven distribution of speech acts across various levels, with some categories being much more prevalent than others. These studies suggested that the scarcity of expressive and declarative speech acts may limit students' ability to engage in more nuanced and contextually appropriate communication.

Table 2 shows the Chi-square results for overall speech acts in Libya's preparatory grades 7, 8, and 9 course and workbook. Analysis of the textbook data (see Table 1) reveals a strongly skewed distribution of speech act types. The results of the speech-act distributions show highly significant deviations from a uniform distribution in each grade (all $p = 0.000$; $X^2=537$ for Grade 7, 852 for Grade 8, 609 for Grade 9; $df=3$). These values suggested that the observed frequencies of speech acts differ substantially from the expected frequencies, confirming a statistically significant variation. The degrees of freedom (df) for all grades are 3, reflecting the number of speech act categories minus one. This highlighted a distinct pattern in the use of speech acts across the grades, with significant imbalances in their representation.

Table 2: Chi-square Results for Overall Speech Acts in Libya's Preparatory Year 7, 8, and 9 Course & Workbooks

Textbook	Chi-square	Significance	Df
Grade 7	537.04	0.000	3
Grade 8	851.88	0.000	3
Grade 9	608.75	0.000	3

Table 3: Frequencies of Language functions in Year 7, 8, 9 Course & Workbook

Categories	Grade 7						Grade 8						Grade 9					
	Coursebook		Workbook		Total		Coursebook		Workbook		Total		Coursebook		Workbook		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Instrumental Function	7	1.69	0	0.00	7	1.28	16	1.80	0	0	16	1.68	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Regulatory Function	32	7.71	14	17.72	46	8.83	125	14.09	2	10	127	14.33	0	0.00	4	7.84	4	0.56
Interactional Function	45	10.84	2	2.53	47	9.11	93	10.48	0	0	93	10.47	34	5.94	4	7.84	38	5.29
Personal Function	66	15.90	22	27.85	88	16.89	258	29.09	7	35	265	29.89	175	30.59	8	15.69	183	25.49
Heuristic Function	78	18.80	15	18.99	93	18.77	135	15.22	2	10	137	15.42	139	24.30	14	27.45	153	21.35
Imaginative Function	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Representational Function	179	43.13	25	31.65	204	39.48	256	28.86	9	45	265	29.88	212	37.06	21	41.18	233	32.77
Attention-Getting Function	8	1.93	1	1.27	9	1.74	4	0.45	0	0	4	0.45	12	2.10	0	0.00	12	1.67
Total	415	100	79	100	494	100	887	100	20	100	907	100	572	100	51	100	623	100

Table 3 shows the types and frequencies of language functions in year 7, 8, 9 course and workbooks. A similar unevenness appears in the distribution of language-function categories as shown in Table 3. For instance, representational functions (informational content) are very prominent, especially in Grade 7 (about 39.5% of all functions). This remains substantial in later grades (roughly 29.9% in Grade 8 and 32.8% in Grade 9). Meanwhile, personal functions (expressing personal feelings/opinions) also feature strongly: they rise from about 16.9% of functions in Grade 7 (coursebook emphasis: 15.9% vs. 27.9% in the workbook) to 29.9% in Grade 8, then slightly recede to about 25.5% in Grade 9. Besides, heuristic functions (learning/eliciting information) remain consistently used (around 18 -21% of functions in each grade), even increasing to 21.35% in Grade 9. By contrast, several categories are almost absent. For instance, Instrumental functions (phrases fulfilling basic needs) appear at only 1-2% in Grade 7 and vanish entirely in Grades 8–9; the imaginative function is 0% at all grades; and attention-getting functions occur at only 1-2% at most. However, regulatory functions (commands/permissions) drop from 8.8% (Grade 7 total) to a mere 0.6% in Grade 9. Finally, interactional functions (social/phatic talk) are about 9 -10% in Grades 7-8 but fall to 5.3% by Grade 9.

Table 4: Chi-square Results for Overall Language functions in Libya's Preparatory Year 7, 8, and 9 Course & Workbooks

Textbook	Chi-square	Significance	Df
Grade 7	312.07	0.000	7
Grade 8	339.89	0.000	7
Grade 9	349.46	0.000	6

These imbalances are statistically significant. Table 4 presented the Chi-square results for overall language functions in the 21st Century English course books and workbooks for Libya's preparatory years 7, 8, and 9. The results highlighted significant differences in the distribution of language functions across all three grades, as indicated by the p-value of 0.000 for each grade. The Chi-square values were 312.07 for grade 7, 339.89 for grade 8, and 349.46 for grade 9, with degrees of freedom (df) of 7 for Grades 7 and 8, and 6 for Grade 9. These high Chi-square values demonstrated that the observed frequencies of language functions vary

significantly from the expected frequencies, indicating a lack of uniform distribution in the representation of language functions across the textbooks. In summary, the analysis of RQ1 shows that across Grades 7 - 9, the textbooks' conversations concentrate heavily on informational (representative/representational) content and related personal/heuristic use, while other pragmatic functions receive little attention.

These findings aligned with the results of previous studies examining the representation of language functions in EFL textbooks. For instance, Nevisi and Moghadasi (2020) analysed Iranian high school English textbooks and found that informative (representational) functions dominated the textbooks, with other functions, such as regulatory and imaginative, being less frequent. Similarly, Tahr et al. (2023) found that EFL textbooks in Northern Iraq showed significant deficiencies in the representation of language functions, particularly those related to social interaction and creativity. Their study emphasised the need for a more balanced inclusion of language functions to foster students' pragmatic competence. In a similar vein, Afa et al. (2022) examined the language functions in the "When English Rings a Bell" textbook and reported a lack of diversity in the language functions presented. Their findings highlighted the underrepresentation of key functions, such as the regulatory and imaginative functions, which play important roles in real-world communication.

Moreover, a study by Ahmed et al. (2023) on the "21st Century English for Libya" secondary textbooks revealed a similar trend. The study found that while representational and personal functions were well-represented, other functions, particularly the heuristic, regulatory, and imaginative functions, were either underrepresented or entirely absent. This imbalance limited students' exposure to various communicative scenarios, which are essential for developing pragmatic competence in real-life interactions. These findings echo the calls from previous studies, such as those by Wilson (2023) and Asghar et al. (2023), for a more balanced and diverse inclusion of language functions in EFL textbooks. They argue that textbooks should encompass a wide range of language functions to adequately prepare learners for different social, academic, and professional contexts. Therefore, the findings from this study underscored the importance of diversifying the range of language functions in Libyan EFL textbooks.

In addressing Research Question 2, the distributional patterns observed in Tables 1 - 4 carry important implications for the development of pragmatic competence across the Libyan preparatory English curriculum. Ideally, as learners progress from Grade 7 to Grade 9, one would expect the materials to present a broader and more balanced range of speech acts and language functions, thereby fostering pragmatic growth and communicative readiness. However, the data reveal little indication of such developmental progression. Representative acts and representational functions remain dominant at every level, suggesting that conversations continue to focus chiefly on conveying information. The proportion of directives also stays roughly the same (around 30% of speech acts) in each grade. In contrast, important categories that facilitate pragmatic fluency are consistently underused. For example, expressive speech acts (sharing emotions) never exceed 9% of utterances and decline by Grade 9 (to 7.6%). Declarations, which include performative utterances like announcements or greetings are missing entirely at all levels, indicating a complete lack of exposure to this category. Similarly, functions such as instrumental, imaginative, and attention-getting remain almost absent even in Grade 9. Some functions do change with level, but not uniformly toward greater competence. The personal function surges in Grade 8 (to 29.9% total) and then tapers off in Grade 9 (25.5%), possibly reflecting a temporary curriculum emphasis on personal opinions. Meanwhile, Heuristic function rises to its highest point in Grade 9 (to 21.4%), which could indicate more information-seeking or dialogic activity in advanced dialogues. Yet these gains are offset by declines in other areas: for instance, regulatory function that nearly disappears by Grade 9 (from 14.3% in Grade 8 to 0.6% in Grade 9), and interactional function roughly halves (from 10% to 5%). Thus, by the senior level the conversations provide fewer examples of commands, requests, or social exchanges than before.

The persistently uneven distributions (as seen in Table 2 and 4) suggest that higher grades do not achieve a substantially more balanced or comprehensive set of pragmatic functions. The overrepresentation of certain categories (e.g. representational statements) and underrepresentation of others (e.g. expressive acts, creative/imaginative uses, issuing commands) remain virtually constant. Consequently, from a pragmatic standpoint the Grade 9 materials do not appear markedly richer or more efficient than Grade 7 materials. In

practical terms, students progressing through these levels are repeatedly exposed to the same dominant patterns and are likely deprived of practice in the neglected areas. This limited variety could hinder their pragmatic competence: they may not develop skills in speech acts and functions that are seldom modeled or practiced. In summary, the conversation sections across Grades 7- 9 show no clear progression in pragmatic coverage. The curriculum remains heavily weighted toward factual information and personal opinion, with little expansion into other pragmatic domains. The over-reliance on a narrow set of speech functions and the omission of many others imply that the textbook dialogues are pragmatically inefficient as they do not evenly distribute necessary speech acts or functions, nor do they demonstrably improve students' pragmatic range as they advance. This raises concerns about the adequacy of these materials in promoting full pragmatic competence.

In conclusion, the analysis of RQ2 strongly suggests that the Libyan English preparatory textbooks do not effectively foster pragmatic competence across the three levels. The conversations remain pragmatically imbalanced and static, prioritising informative over interpersonal and expressive functions. As a result, learners are not progressively exposed to the diverse and contextually rich language required for real-world communication. As Paul Nation (2001) emphasises, learners need repeated and varied exposure to vocabulary in meaningful contexts to develop communicative competence. To enhance pragmatic efficiency and learner readiness, future textbook revisions should aim to integrate a broader array of speech acts and language functions, especially those facilitating emotional expression, social interaction, negotiation, and creativity.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the representation of speech acts and language functions in Libyan preparatory English textbooks for Grades 7-9, revealing a consistent and statistically significant imbalance in pragmatic content. Representative speech acts and representational functions dominate the curriculum, while other key pragmatic elements such as expressive, commissive, and declarative speech acts, along with instrumental, imaginative, regulatory, and interactional functions, are severely underrepresented or absent. The findings also indicate a lack of developmental progression across grade levels, with little variation or enrichment in pragmatic scope as students advance. This suggests that the textbooks fail to support the systematic development of students' pragmatic competence, which is essential for effective and contextually appropriate communication.

These results align with previous research (e.g., Asghar et al., 2023; Ahmed et al., 2023; Nevisi & Moghadasi, 2020) highlight similar deficiencies in EFL materials. The overemphasis on informational content, at the expense of interpersonal and expressive functions, limits students' exposure to the diverse communicative scenarios necessary for real-world language use. Consequently, the current textbook design may hinder learners from developing the pragmatic flexibility and fluency required in academic, professional, and social settings.

To address these concerns, decision-makers in education, including policymakers and curriculum developers, must recognise the need to revise and enhance the national curriculum to better reflect pragmatic diversity. Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) recommend that future textbook development should include a broader array of cultural topics and incorporate tasks or activities that expose learners to various cultures and communities. Such enhancements would not only aim to foster students' intercultural competence but also align language education with the demands of an increasingly interconnected world. The monocultural focus identified in the English Prospect Series (Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018) limits learners' exposure to diverse pragmatic norms, thereby hindering the development of pragmatic competence essential for intercultural communication.

Furthermore, these textbook limitations inevitably translate into classroom challenges, as teachers may struggle to compensate for the lack of balanced pragmatic input. Incorporating teacher interviews and classroom observations in future research would provide deeper insight into how these gaps affect instructional practices, learner engagement, and communicative outcomes.

Allocating resources for textbook revision and supporting professional development programs for teachers are critical steps toward this goal. Such programs should equip educators with the knowledge, tools, and techniques needed to integrate pragmatic instruction effectively into classroom practice. This should also involve raising teachers' awareness of the limitations of the theoretical models underpinning the current curriculum, including the potential Western-centric bias of frameworks such as Searle's speech act theory, which may not fully account for culturally specific pragmatic norms in the Libyan EFL context.

Finally, this study recommends that textbook authors, curriculum planners, and teacher training providers adopt a more inclusive, culturally responsive, and pragmatically diverse approach in designing learning materials. Providing concrete examples of communicative scenarios, integrating authentic dialogues, and embedding activities that simulate real-life intercultural interactions would enhance both the linguistic and pragmatic preparedness of Libyan EFL learners.

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