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ANALYZING THE READING QUESTIONS OF AP12 TEXTBOOK ACCORDING TO BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

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Abstract: *This study aimed to analyse the lower and higher order thinking skills of reading comprehension questions in the Action Pack 12 English Language textbook for grade twelve students in Jordan. Also, it used the content analysis in collecting, analysing, and classifying reading questions according to Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain. The researcher calculated the percentage and frequencies in each unit of the textbook. The findings showed that the reading comprehension questions covered all of Bloom's Taxonomy cognitive levels (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). The results showed that 79 questions focused on lower thinking processes (knowledge, comprehension, and application) while 35 questions looked at the higher level of thinking processes (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). Findings from this research recommended that the textbook authors should further develop the content of the textbook and maintain a balance between the lower-order questions and the higher-order ones where multilevel questions should be used and included at the end of each reading passages.*

***Keywords**: English Textbook, Analysis, Bloom's Taxonomy, Reading Comprehension Questions*

Introduction

English language learning has become a major necessity because it has reached most parts of the current globalized world by choice or by force. Chang (2006) expressed a common observation of English as the most well-known foreign language used in learning and educational programme. Any educational programme mainly consists of three elements: the student, the teacher, and the curriculum where the third is made up of textbook use. The use of textbooks is an important element in most education systems because they are the bridge connecting between teachers and students. With regards to TEFL and the use of TESL textbooks, Genesee (2001) affirmed that evaluation is a process of gathering, evaluating, and understanding data. Therefore, present available textbooks should fulfil current needs in line

with the modern world progress. So, using checklists of criteria in the analytical research is one way of evaluating textbooks.

Students' success can be identified by classifying and improving their level of cognitive development. One method of achieving this is by asking good-prepared questions using Bloom Taxonomy of Cognitive Domain (BTCD), which is the theoretical framework for this research. This framework is commonly used as learning objectives and can evaluate the cognitive domain of the reading questions covered in the Action Pack 12 textbook. BTCD has been used as a framework for textbook comparison in a variety of studies (e.g. Hoeppel, 1980; Amin, 2004; Mosallanezad, 2008; Gordani, 2008).

BTCD lists down six levels of domain, which make up two major spheres: knowledge and comprehension comprise the lower-order thinking skills (LOTS), whereas application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation make up the higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Moreover, depending on the relationship between the cognitive level of a student's thinking (lower-order and higher-order thinking skills) and the level of questions according to BTCD, students should be asked higher-order thinking skills questions to develop his or her thinking skills (Jo & Bednarz, 2011).

Reading comprehension texts is an essential tool for practicing cognitive skills. Raymond (2006) assures that "effective reading requires not only accurate reading skills, but also being able to comprehend easily and automatically". When using the low-order level questions in these texts, students should recall schemata of information where they should comprehend and apply this information to generate conclusions. When using higher-order level questions, students are bound to exercise their ability to analyse, synthesise and evaluate while processing the information. They can use reading comprehension exercises to practise these skills where such exercises often include questions that accompany the reading passage. Answering these questions will allow students to improve their comprehension skills. Consequently, it is essential to examine the questions in the textbooks to see if they improve students' thinking abilities.

This study analysed comprehension questions included in the Action Pack12 (AP12) textbook. Since textbooks are important in the process of teaching and learning, its content must be evaluated regularly to ensure the improvement of its content. Like several studies which looked into the evaluation of English language textbooks, for example, Assaly and Igbaria (2014) conducted a study on the Master Class English textbook in Palestine where they analyzed the reading and Listening questions in the textbook; this study could also benefit those teaching English as Foreign language in Jordan. However, this study stands out in its focus on how the development of creative-thinking skills is supported by the reading activities included in Action Pack 12. The reading questions in Action Pack 12, which is analysed, are intended for students from the 12^{th} grade reading level. This stage of learning is considered to be most important in the students' academic life, including their comprehending English.

Having understood the situation well around the use of AP12, we noticed that university professors feel that Jordanian college students do not demonstrate effective ability to answer questions of the higher thinking skills types. This triggered our research interest to investigate the nature of questions used in AP12 and its efficacy to develop the 12th-grade students mentally and intellectually. Hence, we aimed at evaluating the 12th-grade students'

comprehension questions in AP12 through a descriptive analysis to help them prepare for their admission to college and help the textbook designers improve on the quality of questions which are needed by future undergraduate students. As such, this research aimed to find out to what extent, the availability of the six levels of the cognitive domain are present in AP12 reading questions.

This study is significant because it is the first attempt made in Jordan to analyse the AP12 textbook according to BTCD as its educational objectives. The results of this study should help future teachers and researchers to make use of HOTS questions for the use in classroom and also curricula designers to provide new ideas for the improvement and modification of the textbook. Jordanian curricula planners and developers may also find the results of this study useful, and the study may result in the introduction of different levels of questions and activities in new Jordanian curricula and textbooks. However, this evaluative research is limited to evaluating the reading questions according to BTCD in AP12 textbook in the Student's Workbook during the scholastic year (2018 – 2019).

Literature Review

Evaluation

The expression evaluation differs according to its use as there are many meanings related to it. Therefore, there are textbook evaluation, curriculum evaluation, and program evaluation. Brown and Rogers (2002: 289) described evaluation as the method of trying to build the value of something for some goals. Another definition of evaluation is: Evaluation represents the past or present in order to develop the future. It gives awareness and knowledge by concentrating on issues covered in research questions (who, what, when, where, and why). It additionally supplies researchers with ways of criticism which are helpful for judging the authenticity and integrity and value of the things which researchers judge (Riffe, et al. 1998: 50). El Mustafa (1988 cited in Masri, 2003: 10) views evaluation as "method of presenting valuable data on the advantages of objects, forms, instruction, content and the effectiveness of educational activities, for students, teachers, textbook, authors and other decision makers".

Textbook Evaluation

A textbook is a book adopted for teaching and learning goals, mainly in schools and colleges, since a textbook is in the middle, as a link or a tool between the English program and the teaching position, Tomlinson (1998) defined textbook evaluation as, a well-organized examination material used in relation to their goals and to the objectives of learning. Evaluation can be pre-used and accordingly directed on predictions of possible value. It can be used and hence concentrated on awareness, and a description of what the learners are doing, and the materials are being used.

Reading comprehension

Many definitions have emerged concerning the reading skill due to its importance among the other skills. Thus, many specialists affirm the importance of reading; in this regard, Al-Qudah et al (2002: 109) state that of all language skills, reading is the most necessary for independent learning. Through reading, students can gain access to further knowledge both about the language and about other subjects. Al-Drees (2008: 18) agrees with him (Al-Qudah) and states "by reading a lot, the readers can advance their English background knowledge and broaden vision, inspire their thought, build the values, train the creative

performance and develop their intelligence". Accordingly, specialists and educationalists define reading comprehension as follows:

The first significant challenge is that reading comprehension requires dynamic and multi-component methods (Snow, 2003). Readers use a difference of reading strategies to interpret the meaning of a written text. For example, readers may use semantic, syntax and context clues to make sense of the meaning of unknown words. They may also use several cognitive skills such as inferring, reasoning, predicting, comparing and contrasting to conclude their interpretation of the text. Readers also need to combine the words they have read with their previous knowledge, experience, attitude, and language.

A range of variety comprehension questions is a crucial part of improving motivation and for developing various skills to be used. Using the same questions in comprehension exercise will decrease students' motivation and enthusiasm. Surely, a textbook should cover exercises that provide students with opportunities to practice and develop their reading skills. This can be done with different types of comprehension questions such as Wh-questions, open-ended questions, yes/no questions, true or false, and multiple-choice. Other questions link the different parts of the textbook by asking the students to make comparisons, estimations or research, etc. Abaya (1993) confirmed that the importance of these questions as it provided an accurate indication of students' reading performance and the ability to understand a passage. On the other hand, Bloom (1956) argued that not only students need the questions, but also teachers. The latter make use of questions to evaluate their methods of teaching and improve the efficiency of the educational process.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Domain (BTCD)

The present study is concerned with the cognitive domain in the 12th grade English textbook. In the cognitive domain, Bloom classified six levels from the simple recall or recognition of facts, as the lowest level, into frequently more complicated and complex thinking levels, to the highest order which is listed as an evaluation as seen in Figure 1.1. The following represents the six levels of BTCD. Level l: Knowledge, it is the ability to remember information and what has been learned before, and this includes retrieving facts and simple information. Level 2: Comprehension, It is by making the student rephrase phrases as they are understood, clarifies meanings and interprets the symbols contained in the lesson, gives examples that differ from those mentioned, and concludes himself with some concepts related to the subject studied. Level 3: Application, the learner uses his conclusions in practical and practical applications and demonstrates similar concepts to what he has studied. Level 4: Analysis, learners examine the information and dismantle it to its parts and identify the causes and motives, and then the conclusions and supported by examples to confirm their validity, specifically the analysis of elements and relations between them. Level 5: Synthesis, it is gathering information by installing elements in different ways and sequences and offering alternative solutions. Introducing unique communication methods, introducing different plans and processes, abstracting relationships. Level 6: Evaluation, usually involves analyses or judgments that claim the use of arguments, debates, or explanations.

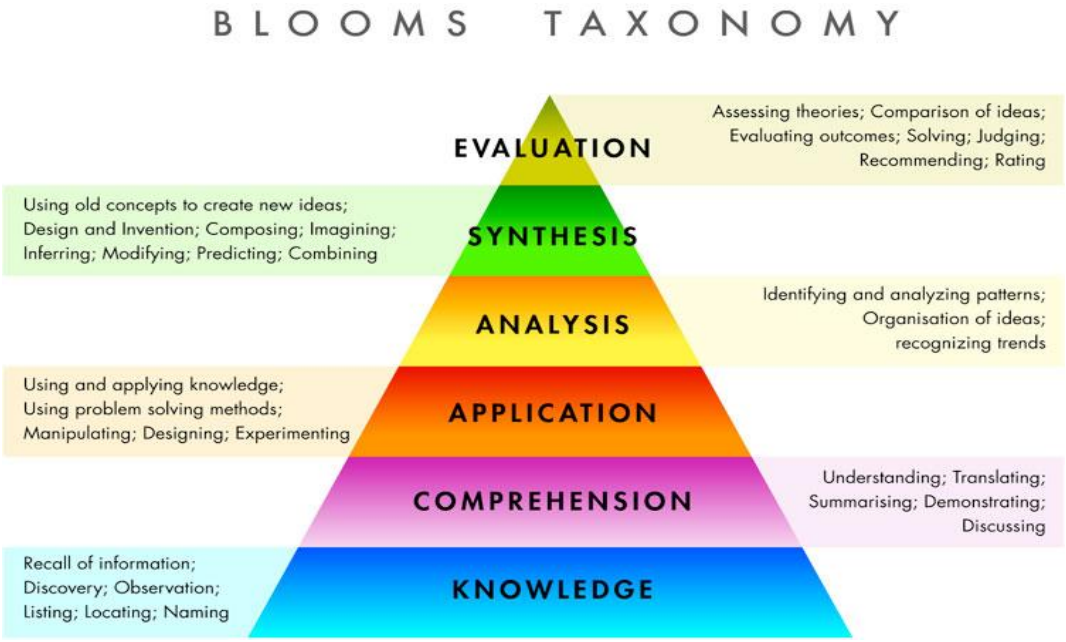

Figure 1: Bloom's Taxonomy

Past Research on BTCD

In a unique study which is most related to this study, Alul (2000) examined eighth grade English textbooks questions adopted in Palestine for the academic year 1999-2000 where she made use of BTCD to decide to which degree students developed higher thinking skills. Both, the questions included in the textbook and workbook, as well as the stories used were investigated and classified according to BTCD classification. An analysis paper was then made and keywords were used as criteria of the questions according to the taxonomy. The lower and higher-level question sequences were also counted, taking into consideration of calculating frequencies and percentages and transferring them into bar charts to help the investigation of the results. Results of the research revealed that there was, however, an advantage of lower level questions in the studied textbooks. In a gist, Alul (2000) recommended that more studies should be conducted on English Petra textbooks for the other classes. She also recommended that the Palestinian curriculum authors to improve their questioning methods in the new Palestinian curricula.

In 2010 Sidek studied the teaching of reading methods that are applied in the Malaysian EFL secondary curriculum. The Malaysian EFL secondary curriculum and the EFL secondary textbook were examined, and the primary focus of the analysis was on the reading questions. The results of the research pointed that reading questions and assignments were created to expect high cognitive level needs though notable stress appears to be set on reading questions and tasks that need students to analyze text information. While other high cognitive reading questions and tasks were included in the curriculum, the inclusion was in small quantities. The different arrangement of questions asking a high level of cognitive demands in the secondary reading curricula was a field of the EFL secondary curriculum that required to be properly remedied.

Similar to the previous studies, Al-Kateeb 2013 also conducted a study on Action Pack series for 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th grades using Bloom' taxonomy of the cognitive objectives. She investigated on the success of using English textbooks of Action Pack series for 7th, 8th,9th, and 10th graders and its correlation at improving pupils' level of (HOTS). A total of 1121

questions were investigated using BTCD. The outcomes revealed that there was a dominance of the low-level questions.

Olimat (2015) conducted a study on evaluating a total of 1121 questions in *Action Pack* series English textbooks for 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th graders according to Bloom's Taxonomy. Also to find the frequencies and percentages of the questions in the six levels of the cognitive domain. The researchers analyzed the reading and Listening questions in the textbooks. The results pointed that the writer of the textbooks focused on the lower thinking processes of comprehension .The results showed that the distribution of questions on the knowledge level was nearly the same in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades while on the 10th grade it was higher.

Ulum (2016) investigated the reading and writing questions in *Q: Skills for Success 4 Reading and Writing textbook to find the* distribution of the lower and higher cognition levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Results proposed that the textbook has a shortage of using the higher-level cognitive skills. The questions mostly concentrated on low cognitive levels, covering *knowledge* and *comprehension*, with percentages of 51% and 49%.

Methodology

This is a descriptive and analytical research which aims to describes "a setting or events in numerical terms" (Brown & Rodgers, 2002: 118). We intended on understanding to what degree, HOTS and LOTS questions are present and identifying the frequency of both levels' questions, included in the AP12 English textbook for grade 12. The criterion of the study is the existence of Bloom's cognitive domain in the reading texts questions of AP12 where we looked particularly at the reading questions from the reading passages in the Student's Book of AP12.

In order to carry out the research, several procedures will follow. First, we designed a card to analyse the reading questions. Then, we ensure two aspects: first, the content validity of the instrument by seeking consultation from a group of experts, and secondly, its level of reliability where we sought help from a group of analysts who specialised specialized in English education. Later, we read the questions thoroughly in order to identify the different cognitive levels and analyse the questions depending on the previous levels. If the questions contain several levels, each level is treated as an independent question. Next, we found out the frequencies for each question included in the textbook based on the analytical categories before giving the statistical treatment to find out the percentages. Finally, we conferred to itemise the results and proposed for suggestions.

In order to ascertain validity of the research instrument, the instruments were content validated by a panel of experts who specialized in methods, curricula, evaluation, and assessment. In terms of the reliability of the instrument, the researcher selected a random sample of 30 questions from 114 questions of the reading texts. Then the sample was analysed, followed by a non-biased analysis from a different analyst where the frequency and discrepancies were recalculated. At this point, we examined the consistency coefficient between the analyses. In the end, about 28 questions were agreed upon where two were not. We decided to use Holist's equation to calculate the reliability coefficient as illustrated below. This measure is the most popular coefficient because it is easy to understand and calculate, as well as this method also can be applied to more than two coders.

1. Consistency Ratio = $\frac{\text{Number of Coincident answers}}{\text{Number of coincident answers + Number of different answers}}$ x 100

Consistency Ratio = $\frac{28}{28+2}$ x 100

Consistency Ratio = $\frac{28}{30}$ x 100 = 96 %

The results show that the research instrument is reliable and can be used to analyse the questions. The total numbers of questions in the 12th grade English Student book in the reading section were 114 questions that matched with the analysis questions were approved upon 110.

2. Percent of Agreement = $\frac{\text{Number of Coincident answers}}{\text{Number of coincident answers + Number of different answers}}$ x 100

Percent of Agreement = $\frac{110}{110+4}$ x 100 = 96.49%

The reliability coefficient for raters' agreement of codification scheme was established 96.49% that is acceptable. Also, this proves the reliability of the instrument.

Finding and Discussion

This part discusses the results of the research after analysing the questions from the AP12 textbook according to Bloom's Taxonomy of learning objectives in order to answer the first research question, which is "To what extent is the availability of the six levels of the cognitive domain according to Bloom's taxonomy in AP12 reading questions?".

The frequencies and percentages of all six cognitive categories were calculated the results were collected by carefully studying and learning all the contents of the textbook AP12 and listing all the questions that appeared under the reading section on each page. Each unit consists of one reading comprehension passage, along with 114 questions. We then used the research tool to analyse the questions and calculate the percentage for each level of the cognitive domain according to Bloom's taxonomy as presented in Table 1.

Question level	**Unit One**	**Unit Two**	**Unit Three**	**Unit Four**	**Unit Five**	**Unit Six**	**Unit Seven**	**Unit Eight**	**Unit Nine**	**Unit Ten**	**Total**	**Percentage**
Knowledge	4	3	10	11	8	6	3	0	3	1	49	42.98 %
Comprehension	2	3	1	3	2	1	1	5	4	0	22	19.29 %
Application	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	3	8	7.01%
Analysis	0	2	1	2	0	3	0	5	1	1	15	13.15 %
Synthesis	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	6	5.26%
Evaluation	2	3	0	2	1	1	0	3	2	0	14	12.28

												%
Total	10	12	14	18	13	12	6	14	11	5	114	100%

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of the Reading Questions of Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Domain in Each Unit in AP12

These same results are also presented in Table 2 to show the frequencies and percentages of the reading questions in the six levels of the cognitive domain in Bloom's taxonomy in the whole AP12 textbook.

Level of Question	Frequency	Percentage
Knowledge	49	42.98%
Comprehension	22	19.29%
Application	8	7.01%
Analysis	15	13.15%
Synthesis	6	5.26%
Evaluation	14	12.28%
Total	114	100%

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of the Reading Questions in the Six Levels of Bloom's Taxonomy in the Textbook AP12

Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentages of the six levels of the cognitive domain in Bloom's taxonomy. The frequencies in the table range from 6-49, while percentages range from 5.26% to 42.92%. The level that seemed most frequently was the knowledge level with 42.98%. The application and the synthesis levels have the lowest percentage and frequency. These results are not unexpected because they reinforce the findings of almost all the other studies that were presented in the review of related literature in this current study.

The major finding in this study as argued to other studies was that the analysis level rose at a frequency of 15 and a percentage of 13.15%. The remaining level of evaluation appeared at a frequency of 14 and percentage of 12.28%. This result is satisfactory since each reading passage has nearly one question on the evaluation level.

These findings confirm that the AP12 textbook writers placed the most load on the lower thinking levels of comprehension since they are probably restricted to the students' needs and levels. It is also found that these writers emphasised more on the comprehension levels because they are aware of the targeted audience who are mid-level students, instead of high-level students.

Since the textbook was designed for students whose mother tongue is not English, it can be concluded that the writers aimed for easier comprehension and coping factor. Students are more likely to accept easier learning materials with questions that request for mid thinking processes. These questions yield for clear responses and do not need any effort of synthesing nor evaluating.

Figure 1 shows that the textbook writers provided the other three levels of questions which required higher thinking levels. The first, which is the analysis level, is present more frequently than the other two levels of synthesis and evaluation. The evaluation level shows an almost low implication. The textbook writers might have concluded that level of most students, which is intermediate level, thus believing that these students needed to be more familiar with such type of question.

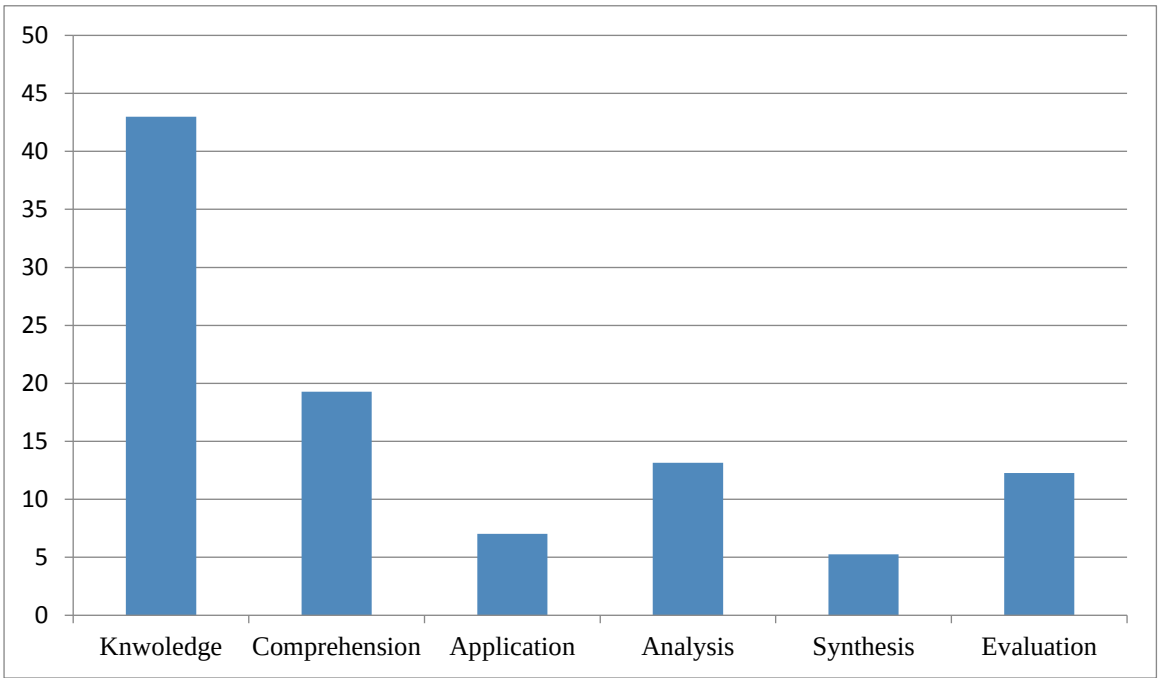

Figure 1 Frequencies for Six Cognitive Levels in AP12 Reading Questions

The findings of the current study show that all of Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive processes are present in the reading questions with preference for the higher-level ones in AP12. The most used lower cognitive process, according to the findings, is Knowledge. The reason behind the overuse of lower-order kind of questions in this textbook is possibly because of the awareness of Bloom's (1956) significance of knowledge and remembering thinking processes. According to Krathwohl (2002), knowledge is normally employed as a base to all the other educational objectives. Simultaneously, Gotcher (2012) explained that as an individual's knowledge raises, there will be a progress of his association with presence. Higher-order processes such as evaluating and synthesising must be based upon previous knowledge of our realities, which is, what we remember (Marzano& Kendall, 2007).

Conclusion

The current study aimed to examine the levels of the reading questions in AP12 based on Bloom's Taxonomy of learning objectives. The findings of this study identified that the most common learning objectives in the textbook are lower-order cognitive processes. In other words, the majority of the questions evaluated the three lower-level cognitive domains and only a few are found to direct higher cognitive processes among the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the main goals of the AP12 textbook were the improvement of lower-order cognitive skills. Therefore, it is recommended for the textbook writers to further develop the content of the textbook and obtain a balance between

lower-order questions and higher-order ones, multilevel questions should be used and included at the end of each reading passages.

In sum, the results of the current study indicate that questions prepared in AP12 should be adjusted to involve students more in higher-order cognitive skills such as evaluating, analysing and creating. As Gordon (2009) highlighted, using the higher-order cognitive processes can help students participate efficiently and actively in the subject at hand. The present study, while trying to evaluate the reading questions in AP12, did not combine the left activities in the textbook. Therefore, further research is needed to follow six cognitive levels of Blooms' Taxonomy to examine if the results are consistent in all activities. Another good topic for investigation might be the evaluation of other Action pack series taught in other school's grades in Jordan based on Bloom's Taxonomy.

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