Negative Politeness Strategies in Jordanian EFL Textbook Dialogs: A Content Analysis of *Action Pack 5* through *10*

Ruba Fahmi Bataineh
Al-Ahliyya Amman University and Yarmouk University, Jordan

Fatima AbdulKareem Salman[1]
Yarmouk University, Jordan

Hydayah Jobran ALRoumi
Yarmouk University and Ministry of Education, Jordan

Rabya Sha'ban Al Jawarneh
Yarmouk University, Jordan

Amani Ghazi Shkour
Yarmouk University, Jordan

Sherin Adnan Okour
Yarmouk University, Jordan

Dina AbdulHameed Al-Jamal
Yarmouk University, Jordan

Abstract: Social, humane and cultural values mandate that a certain level of politeness in day-to-day exchanges be maintained. Therefore, politeness strategies are among the first language functions taught in foreign language curricula. This study examines the inclusion of negative politeness strategies in the dialogs of the prescribed Jordanian English as a foreign language textbook, *Action Pack*, for grades 5 through ten. The content analysis is informed by the theoretical principles of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The dialogs in the fifth-through tenth-grade textbooks were content analyzed for speech acts denoting negative politeness, using both qualitative and quantitative measures. The analysis commenced with coding, after which the occurrences were identified and tallied per the codes. Ten negative politeness strategies were identified in addition to one, which comprised an amalgamation of two of these strategies in one speech act. The findings revealed that Jordanian *Action Pack* textbooks included more negative politeness strategies in grades 5 and 6 than in grades 7, 8, 9, and 10, with *being indirect* and *using questions to reduce imposition and offense* as the most frequent.
Keywords: content analysis, dialogs, Jordan, negative politeness, textbooks.

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[1] Corresponding Author: Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction at Yarmouk University, Jordan.
E-Mail: fatima_salman2@yahoo.com.

Politeness, a means of minimizing potential confrontation in discourse (Lakoff, 1989) and maintaining social equilibrium and friendly relations (Leech, 1983), is grounded in Goffman's (1955, 1967) notion of face, which is the positive public image one seeks to establish in social interactions. Brown and Levinson (1978) extended the notion of face to encompass positive face, or one's desire to be accepted by and connected to others, and negative face, or one's desire to be independent and unimpeded by others. Politeness generally relates to the relationship between oneself and others (Hill et al., 1986). Leech (1983) defines politeness as behavior that enables individuals to engage in social interaction in an atmosphere of relative harmony. At the heart of politeness theory is speech act theory, which studies how words are used not only to present information but also to carry out actions (Austin, 1962; Yule, 1996).

Speech acts are locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary (Austin, 1962; Yule, 1996). A locutionary act is the act of producing meaningful utterances denoting an actual condition (e.g., uttering *it's raining out there* to state a fact). An illocutionary act realizes the communicative force of an utterance, as it does something (e.g., uttering *it's raining out there* to request an umbrella), whereas a perlocutionary act refers to the effect of the utterance on another person's thoughts or actions, be it intended, unintended, or indeterminate (e.g., uttering *it's raining out there* while handing the other person an umbrella).

Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced four fundamental politeness strategies: *bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness,* and *off-record. Bald on-record* politeness involves conveying the message as is and is, thus, the least polite. *Positive politeness* is used to avoid offense by showing friendliness, whereas *negative politeness* is used to avoid offense by showing deference. One uses *off-record* politeness to avoid responsibility for a face-threatening act by letting the other person interpret the intended message. Even though all four strategies hold equal merit, the current research is primarily concerned with *negative politeness*.

Negative politeness strategies are used to minimize potential infringement on one's autonomy and preserve his/her sense of personal space (Brown & Levinson, 1978). They entail negative "a remedial action directed at the negative face of the addressee, who needs unimpeded freedom of action and consideration from the addresser" (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p.129) and, thus, create boundaries in both interaction and relationship. Negative politeness comprises ten strategies (viz., asking questions, using hedges, expressing pessimism, minimizing imposition, showing deference, apologizing, avoiding personalization of the speaker and hearer, stating the face-threatening act as a general rule, using nominalizations, expressing indebtedness—or lack thereof— and explicitly acknowledging the potential burden on the hearer).

This research content analyzed six of the twelve textbooks in the *Action Pack* series, prescribed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to Jordanian public and some private schools. The series reportedly aims to develop student abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing through a host of engaging activities. Research suggests that Jordanian students are generally weak in oral skills (Alhasan & Alhasan, 2022; Bataineh et al., 2013; Huwari, 2019; Mashoor & Bin Abdullah, 2020) and that more attention is needed to promote these skills relative to reading and writing. As the *Action Pack* is the MOE-prescribed national EFL textbook series, these researchers are performing a content analysis of the oral activities (viz., dialogs) to gauge the inclusion of the negative politeness strategies put forth by Brown and Levinson (1978).

Textbooks play a key role in foreign language education, as they often serve as the only resource of language input and the only contact learners have with the foreign language apart from the teacher. As the majority of foreign language programs around the world rely heavily on commercially-produced textbooks (Richards, 2001), it is imperative that these

textbooks provide knowledge and skills that enable learners to function in a world that is rapidly becoming smaller in terms of accessibility and communication. More relevant to the scope of the current research, the textbook may very well be the only source of pragmatic knowledge, which has been increasingly deemed as rudimentary for communication (Kubota, 2016; Wattananukij & Pongpairoj, 2022).

To the best of these researchers' knowledge, even though content analyses were conducted on this (e.g., Al-Khazaleh (2020) on authenticity of reading content in *Action Pack 7*; Al Omari et al. (2015) on the inclusion of multiple intelligences; Al-Smadi et al. (2021) on pronunciation and spelling Activities in *Action Pack 10;* Maqableh and Al-Jamal (2023) on the inclusion of affective exercises in *Action Pack 1-3*) and other textbook series (e.g., Alemi & Razzaghi, 2013; Astuti, 2022; Bagheri Nevisi & Moghadasi, 2020; Meiratnasari et al., 2019) around the world, none has been conducted on politeness in the *Action Pack* series. Therefore, this study's content analyzes the use and frequency of negative politeness in six of the twelve *Action Pack* textbooks to both corroborate previous findings and contribute further to the literature.

Earlier content analyses of foreign language textbooks suggest that textbooks offer valuable pragmatic input to learners in terms of both developing their understanding and politeness strategy use (Lotfi et al., 2020; Ton Nu & Murray, 2020). There are reports that politeness strategies are evident in foreign language textbooks (Astuti, 2022; Bagheri Nevisi & Moghadasi, 2020; Candrawati et al., 2014; Meiratnasari et al., 2019). However, the lack of representation of politeness in foreign language textbooks potentially hinders learners' ability to effectively acquire necessary communicative skills (Alemi & Razzaghi, 2013).

Like much of the previous research, the current research adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness in collecting and analyzing the data. More specifically, it attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the most frequent negative politeness strategies used in the dialogs in fifth-through tenth-grade *Action Pack* textbooks?
2. Are there any differences in the frequency of strategy use in the dialogs in fifth-through tenth-grade *Action Pack* textbooks?

This research is potentially significant, as it not only examines the inclusion of negative politeness strategies in half of the textbooks in the *Action Pack* series, but also has the potential to contribute to literature by targeting a series that, to the best of these researchers' knowledge, has not been content analyzed for politeness yet. Several studies (Al-Khazaleh, 2020; Al Omari et al., 2015; Al-Smadi et al., 2021; Maqableh & Al-Jamal, 2023) have content analyzed one or more of the *Action Pack* series for authenticity, inclusion of multiple intelligences, pronunciation, spelling, and other language aspects, but learners' communication potential exceeds their knowledge of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary (Arini et al., 2022) to involve their ability to communicate successfully in a particular context (Taguchi & Roever, 2017).

Method and Procedures

The study utilizes a descriptive analytical research design. A seven-step content analysis (Denscombe, 2010) is conducted (viz., reading a textbook, selecting sample per selected criteria, breaking the text into component units, categorizing data (per Brown and Levinson's (1987) negative politeness taxonomy), coding data, counting frequencies, and analyzing data and drawing connections with existing theories and prior research).

To establish validity, the units of analysis (viz. strategies) were given to a jury of three experts in linguistics to ascertain their appropriateness for the purpose of the research. The intra-rater reliability of the content analysis was ascertained through test-retest, as the dialogs were reanalyzed three weeks later by the second researcher with a reliability coefficient of 0.97 between the two analyses. Moreover, two other independent analyses were conducted to ascertain inter-rater reliability: one by a doctoral candidate from the Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction at Yarmouk University and another by an assistant professor of pragmatics from the Department of English for Applied Studies at Jordan University of Science and Technology. The inter-rater reliability coefficients between the initial analysis and those of the first and second analysts and those of the two analysts themselves amounted to 0.97, 0.99, and 0.96, respectively.

The ten negative politeness strategies (viz., being indirect, using questions/hedges, expressing pessimism, minimizing imposition, showing deference, apologizing, avoiding personalization of the speaker and hearer, stating the face-threatening act as a general rule, using nominalizations, expressing indebtedness- or lack thereof- and explicitly acknowledging the potential burden on the hearer) were identified and supplemented with one which involves the amalgamation of two or more strategies, dubbed *multiple-strategy use*, to mark dialogs in which different strategies are used in one speech act, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
The Politeness Strategies under Study (illustrated)

No.	Strategy	Description	Example
1	Being indirect	The speaker speaks in a way that avoids a direct request/command so that the hearer does not feel imposed on	*I see students in the hallway* (instead of *class is about to begin*).
2	Using questions/hedges	Asking questions allows the hearer to either accept or decline. Hedging softens a statement by using less-than-certain phrasing (e.g., *perhaps, I wonder if*).	*Would you know where Oxford Street is* (instead of *Where is Oxford Street)?* *Perhaps he has taken the book, maybe* (instead of *He has taken the book).*
3	Being pessimistic	not expecting the FTA to happen to denote unwillingness to coerce the hearer to perform it	*You couldn't possibly forgive me, could you?*
4	Minimizing imposition	minimizing the imposition to lessen the seriousness of the FTA by suggesting that the imposition is not much and should not be taken seriously	*My apartment is just a couple of blocks out of your way.*
5	Giving deference	praising the hearer or using honorifics to make him/her feel appreciated or down-scaling one's own compliments to make the hearer seem more important	*Excuse me sir, but would you mind if I close the window?*
6	Apologizing	apologizing for impinging on hearer's face to minimize the effect of the FTA	*I'm sorry to interrupt you, but we are running out of time.* *I'm sorry I can't go shopping with you.*
7	Impersonalizing Speaker and hearer	sounding as if the speaker is addressing someone else or giving a general message (e.g., replacing *I* and *you* with *we,* using	*No one should be allowed to do this to a child.*

No.	Strategy	Description	Example
		indefinites) on the assumption that the hearer will get his/her intended meaning	
8	Stating the FTA as a general rule	disassociating the interlocutors from an FTA through giving a general message which applies to what the hearer is doing	*Students will please refrain from using dictionaries during the exam.*
9	Using obviating structures	using obviating structures (e.g., nominalizations, passives, statements of general rules) to minimize imposition on the hearer	*Cheating will not be tolerated.*
10	Going on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting hearer	redressing an FTA by explicitly claiming one's indebtedness to hearer or disclaiming his/her indebtedness of hearer to oneself	*I'd be forever grateful if you would tell me the truth now.*
11	Using multiple negative politeness strategies	using two or more strategies to minimize the FTA (e.g., apologizing, being indirect, asking a question).	*I'm sorry, but I don't suppose you'd mind being a bit quieter, would you?*

Findings and Discussion

The content of the *Action Pack* series, across grade levels, consists of reading passages, dialogs, letters, and exercises, but the current research focuses only on content analyzing the dialogs, which are the most likely component to involve communicative exchanges in which negative politeness strategies are likely to be manifested. The content analysis of a total of 37 dialogs, distributed into 14 in *Action Pack 5*, 14 in *Action Pack 6*, 3 in *Action Pack 7*, 3 in *Action Pack 8*, 1 in *Action Pack 9*, and 2 in *Action Pack 10*, yielded a total of 150 instances of negative politeness strategy use, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2
*Frequencies and Percentages of Negative Politeness Strategies in Action Pack 5-10*

No.	Strategy	Action Pack 5		Action Pack 6		Action Pack 7		Action Pack 8		Action Pack 9		Action Pack 10		Overall (5-10)	
		n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	n	%
1	Being indirect	11	30.6	36	54.4	2	15.4	1	6.3	3	37.5	2	18	55	36.7
2	Questioning and hedging	4	11.1	19	28.8	4	30.8	9	56.3	4	50	6	55	46	30.7
3	Being pessimistic	5	13.9	2	3	4	30.8	2	12.5	0	0	1	9	14	9.3
4	Minimizing imposition	3	8.3	0	0	0	0	2	12.5	1	12.5	1	9	7	4.7
5	Impersonalizing speaker and hearer	3	8.3	0	0	1	7.8	2	12.5	0	0	0	0	6	4
6	Giving deference	7	19.4	3	4.5	1	7.8	0	0	0	0	0		11	7.3
7	Apologizing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9	1	0.6
8	Stating the FTA as a general rule	0	0	4	6.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2.7
9	Using obviating structures	3	8.3	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	3.3
10	Going on record as incurring a debt or as not indebting the hearer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	Multiple-strategy use	0	0	0	0	1	7.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.6
	Total	36	24	66	44	13	9	16	11	8	5	11	7	150	100

Table 2 shows that the dialogs in textbooks 5 through 10 of the *Action Pack* series encompass eleven distinct politeness strategies. Table 2 also shows an inverse relationship between negative politeness strategy use and grade. However, this is readily explained by the relative decrease in the number of dialogs due to the shift to reading passages in the upper grades.

A number of negative politeness strategies were used in each textbook but with frequencies, which range between high, low, and none. More specifically, the highest frequency of occurrence was evident in *Action Pack 6* (viz. 66) as opposed to only eight occurrences in *Action Pack 9*. The most frequent strategy is *being indirect,* whereas the least frequent are *apologizing* and *multiple-strategy use*. No occurrence was found for *going on record as incurring debt or as not indebting hearer*, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Distribution of Negative Politeness Strategies in Action Pack 5-10
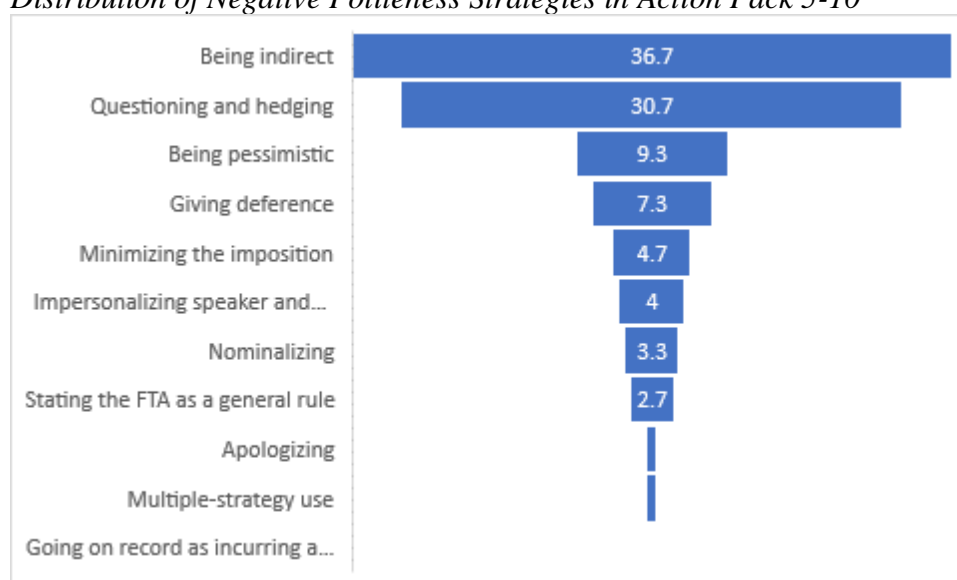
The dialogs in *Action Pack 5* and *6* were found to manifest a number of negative politeness strategies. However, *being indirect* was found to account for over 30 and 50 percent of these strategies, respectively. This was coupled with a total absence of *apologizing, stating the FTA as a general rule, going on record as incurring a debt or as not indebting hearer,* and *multiple-strategy use* in both textbooks.

The relatively heavy occurrence of negative politeness strategies, especially *being indirect*, in the dialogs of *Action Pack 5* and *6* suggests a certain level of complexity in the language used in these textbooks. Indirectness implies that the speakers are using language that requires the hearer to infer or read between the lines to understand the intended meaning, which requires a higher level of linguistic complexity and cognitive processing. The absence of *apologizing, stating the FTA as a general rule,* and *going on record as incurring a debt or as not indebting the hearer* further highlights the indirect nature of the language used. The use of multiple strategies in both textbooks also suggests that the language and tasks presented may require a higher level of cognitive effort on the part of the learner. In other words, the use of negative politeness strategies in *Action Pack 5* and *6* seems to suggest that the complexity of the tasks in *Action Pack 5* and *6* are probably above grade level and, thus, are better suited to learners with more advanced language skills.

Even though *questioning and hedging* occurred in both *Action Pack 5* and *6,* its frequency of occurrence was substantially higher in *Action pack 6* (4 vs.19). *Action Pack 5* and *6* also differed in terms of the strategies of *minimizing imposition* and *impersonalizing*

speaker and hearer that occurred, albeit with small frequencies, in *Action Pack 5* but were missing altogether in *Action Pack 6*. The strategies of *giving deference, being pessimistic,* and *using obviating structures* are also found in *Action pack 5* and *6*, but with relatively smaller frequencies.

Questioning and hedging and *being pessimistic* were the most frequent in *Action Pack 7, 8, 9,* and *10*, with the exception of *being pessimistic,* which was missing altogether in *Action Pack 9*. By contrast, with the exception of *giving deference* and *multiple-strategy use,* which each had a single occurrence in *Action Pack 7* and *apologizing,* which occurred once in *Action Pack 10, stating the FTA as a general rule*, *using obviating structures*, and *going on record as incurring a debt or as not indebting hearer* were missing altogether from *Action Pack 7, 8, 9,* and *10.*

The findings reveal a seemingly inverse relationship between grade level and frequency of negative politeness strategy use, as the frequency of occurrence of negative politeness strategies decreases with grade level, which, albeit consistent with previous research findings (e.g., Meiratnasari et al., 2019), was found to be brought about by a shift of genre in the textbooks under study, as the number of dialogs, deemed ideal incubators for speech acts and, by extension, politeness strategy use, decreased from 14, 14, and 6 in *Action Pack 5*, *6,* and *7* to 3, 3, and 1 in *Action Pack 8, 9,* and *10*, leaving room for reading texts on scientific and cultural topics. In other words, the reason for the decline in the use of negative politeness strategies may be attributed to a shift in the content organization of *Action Pack 7, 8, 9,* and *10*, which is structured into text-based modules rather than into dialog-based units.

Thus, even though the decline in the frequency of occurrence of negative politeness strategies in *Action Pack 7, 8, 9,* and *10* is evident, as they aggregated 48 occurrences of negative strategy use (vs. 102), it may be attributed to the different organization of *Action Pack 7-10* which is characterized by a gradual change from dialogs and everyday interactions to reading cultural, scientific and academic texts.

The findings suggest that the dialogs in *Action Pack 5-10* manifest a considerable number of indirect strategies, which may be deliberate given the fact that Jordanians are reported to generally soften their utterances (Alhaded & Shavtikova, 2021) to avoid directness. In other words, the use of indirect language is aligned with the use of negative politeness strategies to both mitigate utterances, reduce threat, and save face, which, in turn, fosters positive social relationships and eliminates confrontations.

Conclusion, Pedagogical Implications, and Recommendations

The current research reports on a content analysis of the negative politeness strategies in the dialogs of *Action Pack 5* through *10* textbooks. The findings revealed that even though negative politeness strategies are manifested in the textbooks under study, the frequency of occurrence ranges between high and none. These findings, albeit somewhat heartening, highlight areas that may require elaboration or further attention on the part of textbook designers and content writers alike.

As the textbook is often the only source of input in foreign language contexts and the driving force of teaching and learning in the foreign language classroom (Weninger, 2021), further attention to politeness strategies is rudimentary for the learners' communicative potential in and outside the language classroom (Lotfi et al., 2020). Integrating politeness strategies in language textbooks and teaching practices enables learners to enhance their communicative potential, promote cultural sensitivity, and navigate social interactions effectively both within and beyond the language learning environment.

The inclusion of negative politeness strategies in *Action Pack 5* through *10* textbooks, albeit limited, is commendable, especially since the inclusion of negative politeness strategies and the learners' ensuing exposure to them are in sync with Jordanian's cultural inclination towards indirectness (Olimat, 2020), especially in formal interactions. In other words, the inclusion of negative politeness strategies in foreign language textbooks not only aligns with Jordanian cultural norms but also provides learners with valuable exposure to the communication patterns of authentic interaction. However, it is imperative to supplement this inclusion with additional opportunities for learners to practice and develop their communicative potential through the appropriate use of politeness strategies.

Teaching pragmatics poses various challenges in the foreign language classroom, as instructional materials may focus on language usage over language use (Huth, 2020; Ishihara & Cohen, 2021). Oftentimes, textbooks are more concerned with the formal technicalities of language than the context in which they are used (Moyo, 2022; Pienaar, 2021). Effective textbooks and pedagogical practices alike should foster learners' communicative potential by increasing their awareness of communicative functions in authentic contexts and engaging them in collaborative tasks that focus on the practical use of language (Kasper, 1997).

The Jordanian basic education system has been reported to neglect the provision of contexts that foster foreign language learners' communication potential (Abed & Al-Absi, 2015; Rababah et al.*,* 2019). The Ministry of Education needs to provide Jordanian foreign language learners with opportunities that would both foster their communicative potential and help them improve their communicative skills. As the textbook is probably the only source of input and the major conduit of exposure for foreign language learners, improving their communicative potential is often contingent upon the quality of textbook content. More communication-related content is instrumental in reaching this goal.

Further similar research is recommended not only on *Action Pack 1*, *2*, *3*, *4*, *11,* and *12* but also on other components of the *Action Pack* series (e.g., activities, reading passages) to add to the present findings. Further research is also recommended on Jordanian foreign language learners' awareness of politeness and their potential use of politeness strategies in discourse completion tasks similar to those found in the dialogs under study.

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Notes on Contributors

Ruba Fahmi Bataineh is a professor of TESOL at the Department of English and Translation, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and the director of the Language Center at Al-Ahliyya Amman University (on sabbatical leave from the Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction at Yarmouk University), Jordan.

Fatima AbdulKareem Salman, a PhD candidate in TEFL at the Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction at Yarmouk University, Jordan, has worked as a university lecturer, teacher and translator for eighteen years in Jordan and Oman.

Hydayah Jobran ALRoumi, a PhD candidate in TEFL at the Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction at Yarmouk University, Jordan, is currently a teacher at the Ministry of Education.

Rabya Sha'ban Al Jawarneh a PhD candidate in TEFL at the Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction at Yarmouk University, Jordan, is currently a part-ime instructor at the University of Jordan.

Amani Ghazi Shkour is a PhD candidate in TEFL at the Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction at Yarmouk University, Jordan.

Sherin Adnan Okour is a PhD candidate in TEFL at the Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction at Yarmouk University, Jordan.

Dina AbdulHameed Al-Jamal is a professor of TEFL at the Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction at Yarmouk University, Jordan.

ORCID

Ruba Fahmi Bataineh, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5454-2206
Fatima AbdulKareem Salman, https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2560-4297
Hydayah Jobran ALRoumi, https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5208-255X
Rabya Sha'ban Al Jawarneh, https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3409-7908
Amani Ghazi Shkour, https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6173-6432
Sherin Adnan Okour, https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0018-8935
Dina AbdulHameed Al-Jamal, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0623-4604