

An Analysis of Reading Comprehension Questions in the English Textbook Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila

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ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced to reform Indonesia's education system by fostering independent, enjoyable learning tailored to students' interests and talents, with an emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. This study evaluates the effectiveness of reading comprehension questions in the Grade 11 English textbook Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila (published by Yrama Widya) in promoting higher-order thinking skills through Barrett's Taxonomy. Using a descriptive content analysis approach, 118 questions across 10 units were analyzed, including 53 essay, 53 multiple-choice, and 12 true/false questions. Findings indicate a strong focus on literal comprehension (64.41%), with limited emphasis on inferential comprehension (20.34%), appreciation (4.24%), reorganization (3.39%), and evaluation (7.63%). This imbalance suggests the textbook may inadequately support the Merdeka Curriculum's goals for critical thinking and problem-solving. The study recommends a more balanced distribution of question types to better align with the curriculum's objectives, thereby enhancing students' critical and creative thinking skills in line with educational improvement goals.

Keywords: Barrett's Taxonomy, Educational Assessment, Higher-Order Thinking, Merdeka Curriculum, Reading Comprehension

ABSTRAK

Kurikulum Merdeka diperkenalkan untuk mereformasi sistem pendidikan Indonesia dengan menumbuhkan pembelajaran mandiri, menyenangkan, sesuai minat dan bakat siswa, dengan penekanan pada pemikiran kritis, kreativitas, dan pemecahan masalah. Penelitian ini mengevaluasi efektivitas pertanyaan pemahaman membaca dalam buku teks Bahasa Inggris Kelas 11 Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila (diterbitkan oleh Yrama Widya) dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berpikir tingkat tinggi melalui Taksonomi Barrett. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis isi deskriptif, 118 pertanyaan dalam 10 unit dianalisis, termasuk 53 pertanyaan esai, 53 pilihan ganda, dan 12 pertanyaan benar/salah. Temuan menunjukkan fokus yang kuat pada pemahaman literal (64,41%), dengan penekanan terbatas pada pemahaman inferensial (20,34%), apresiasi (4,24%), reorganisasi (3,39%), dan evaluasi (7,63%). Ketidakseimbangan ini menunjukkan bahwa buku teks tersebut mungkin tidak cukup mendukung tujuan Kurikulum Merdeka untuk berpikir kritis dan memecahkan masalah. Studi ini merekomendasikan distribusi jenis pertanyaan yang lebih seimbang agar lebih selaras dengan tujuan kurikulum, sehingga meningkatkan keterampilan berpikir kritis dan kreatif siswa sejalan dengan tujuan peningkatan pendidikan.

Kata Kunci: Taksonomi Barrett, Asesmen Pendidikan, Berpikir Tingkat Tinggi, Kurikulum Merdeka, Pemahaman Membaca

INTRODUCTION

As a pivotal component guiding the implementation of educational goals, the curriculum plays a crucial role in shaping the education system (Ramadani et al., 2021). In recent years, Indonesia's education system has undergone significant changes with the introduction of the newest curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum aims to revolutionize education by promoting independent and enjoyable learning experiences tailored to students' diverse interests and talents. It emphasizes freedom in curriculum development and implementation to address individual learning needs and challenges (Aegustinawati & Sunarya, 2023). This transition marks a departure from previous educational frameworks criticized for their heavy reliance on rote learning and standardized testing. Instead, the Merdeka Curriculum prioritizes critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, aligning with global educational trends that advocate for 21st-century competencies (Rahmawati et al., 2023).

The emphasis on critical thinking is particularly relevant to the teaching of reading comprehension, a fundamental aspect of language learning and literacy development. Reading comprehension involves not just decoding words but also understanding and interpreting texts on multiple levels (Snow, 2002). The Merdeka Curriculum encourages the development of these skills, enabling students to engage deeply with texts, analyze underlying meanings, evaluate arguments, and synthesize information, moving beyond mere memorization to promote a more nuanced and thorough understanding of reading materials.

Indonesia's consistently low PISA scores in literacy reflect significant challenges in reading comprehension among its students (OECD, 2021). These scores indicate that many students struggle with basic reading skills, which can hinder their ability to understand and interpret texts effectively. Factors contributing to low reading comprehension in Indonesia include students' lack of motivation, low prior knowledge, and poor English vocabulary (Nanda & Azmy, 2020). Additionally, poor reading habits and motivation are influenced by family and neighborhood environments, limited access to good libraries, and the negative impact of electronic media (Suwandi et al., 2015). Discrepancies between the teaching of reading in Indonesia and international standards, along with a lack of diverse and suitable learning strategies, further exacerbate the issue (Tahmidaten & Krismanto, 2020).

Using textbooks that include comprehension questions can address these challenges by providing structured opportunities for students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, as well as other essential competencies (Duke & Pearson, 2009; Pressley & Afflerbach, 2012). Barrett's Taxonomy categorizes comprehension questions into five levels: literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, reorganization, evaluation, and appreciation (Barrett, 1986). This framework helps educators design questions that foster deep understanding, analytical thinking, and

the ability to evaluate and synthesize information. By engaging students with well-crafted questions and exercises, textbooks can foster a deeper understanding of texts, promote analytical thinking, and enhance students' ability to evaluate and synthesize information effectively.

Recent research highlights the gap in reading comprehension instruction, particularly in fostering skills beyond literal understanding. Although many studies, like those by Krismadayanti and Zainil (2022) and Amalya et al. (2020), recognize students' challenges with higher-order questions in Barrett's Taxonomy—such as inferential and evaluative levels—most comprehension assessments continue to emphasize lower-order, literal questions. This gap indicates a need for a more comprehensive approach to questioning, ensuring that students are adequately challenged to develop critical reading skills that can support more advanced comprehension tasks (Krismadayanti & Zainil, 2022; Amalya et al., 2020; Ertem, 2023).

Given these issues, this study aims to analyze the levels of questions used in the English textbook "*Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila*" by Yrama Widya, written by Otong Setiawan Dj., based on Barrett's Taxonomy. This book was chosen due to its recent publication and alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum. This study examines all reading comprehension questions in the book to determine their alignment with Barrett's Taxonomy and their contribution to students' reading comprehension. With the research question, "What are the reading comprehension levels in the English textbook 'Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila' for grade 11th?", this study purposes to analyze the level of reading comprehension questions for senior high school students.

METHOD

This study utilizes a descriptive and content analysis approach within a qualitative research framework to examine reading comprehension questions in the English textbook *Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, intended for 11th-grade senior high school students. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the entire textbook, comprising 10 units and a variety of question formats (essay, multiple-choice, and true/false), was selected for examination.

Barrett's Taxonomy served as the theoretical framework for categorizing cognitive processes, spanning from basic recall to advanced levels of synthesis and evaluation (Barrett, 1986). This taxonomy provides a structured approach to classify reading comprehension questions, enabling the researcher to systematically identify and categorize each question according to Barrett's five levels of comprehension: literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, reorganization, evaluation, and appreciation. Each question type within the textbook was meticulously analyzed to determine its cognitive level, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of the question design.

The analysis was carried out through two primary methods: frequency analysis and qualitative interpretation. Frequency analysis quantified the distribution of each comprehension level, highlighting patterns and trends that reveal the textbook's emphasis on specific cognitive skills. This quantitative insight provided an overview of the cognitive demands placed on students by the textbook's questions. Concurrently, a qualitative interpretative analysis was conducted to place the findings within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum's educational goals, which prioritize critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Rahmawati et al., 2023). By examining how the questions align with these goals, the study sought to assess the textbook's effectiveness in promoting deeper cognitive engagement.

To maintain reliability, a rigorous and systematic categorization approach was employed throughout the analysis. This involved detailed coding and verification to ensure consistency in the application of Barrett's Taxonomy across all question types. Such methodological rigor aligns with best practices in educational assessment and content analysis, as recommended by previous research (Johnson, 2002; Goh & Taib, 2006). This combined approach provides a robust evaluation of the cognitive demands embedded in the reading comprehension questions, offering insights into the alignment between the textbook's content and the Merdeka Curriculum's objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The analysis of reading comprehension questions in the English textbook Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila reveals a predominant emphasis on literal comprehension across essay, multiple-choice, and true/false questions. This section presents the distribution of comprehension levels by question type according to Barrett's Taxonomy.

1. Essay Questions

Table 1. Reading Comprehension Level in Essay Questions

Unit	Type of Question	Literal Comprehension	Inferential Comprehension	Appreciation	Reorganization	Evaluation
1	Essay	6 questions	2 questions	1 question	1 question	-
4		7 questions	4 questions	3 questions	2 questions	-
8		12 questions	1 question	1 question	-	1 question
9		9 questions	2 questions	-	-	1 question
Total		34 questions	9 questions	5 questions	3 questions	2 questions

In Unit 1, out of 10 essay questions, 6 (60%) are categorized as literal comprehension, 2 (20%) as inferential comprehension, 1 (10%) as appreciation, and 1 (10%) as reorganization. Unit 4 has 16 essay questions, with 7 (43.75%) focusing on literal comprehension, 4 (25%) on inferential comprehension, 3 (18.75%) on appreciation, and 2 (12.5%) on reorganization. In Unit 8, there are 15 essay questions, with 12 (80%) focusing on literal comprehension, 1 (6.67%) on inferential comprehension, 1 (6.67%) on appreciation, and 1 (6.67%) on evaluation respectively. Unit 9 contains 12 essay questions, with 9 (75%) focusing on literal comprehension, 2 (16.67%) on inferential comprehension, and 1 (8.33%) on evaluation. Overall, out of 53 essay questions analyzed across these units, 34 (64.15%) targets literal comprehension, 9 (16.98%) focuses on inferential comprehension, 5 (9.43%) on appreciation, 3 (5.66%) on reorganization, and 2 (3.77%) on evaluation.

2. Multiple-Choice Questions

Table 2. Reading Comprehension Level in Multiple Choice Questions

Unit	Type of Question	Literal Comprehension	Inferential Comprehension	Appreciation	Reorganization	Evaluation
3	Unit	6 questions	2 questions	-	-	2 questions
4	Unit	8 questions	5 questions	-	-	2 questions
5	Unit	1 question	1 question	-	-	1 question
6	Unit	3 questions	1 question	-	1 question	-
7	Unit	5 questions	-	-	-	-
10	Unit	10 questions	4 questions	-	-	1 question
Total		33 questions	13 questions	-	1 question	6 questions

The analysis of multiple-choice questions from different units of the textbook reveals a varied distribution of question types. In Unit 3, out of 10 questions, 6 (60%) focusing on literal comprehension, 2 (20%) on inferential comprehension, and 2 (20%) on evaluation. Unit 4 containing 15 multiple-choice questions, with 8 (53.33%) targeting literal comprehension, 5 (33.33%) focusing on inferential comprehension, and 2 (13.33%) involving evaluation. In Unit 5, consisting of 3 questions, each category—literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, and evaluation—is represented equally at 33.33%. Unit 6 includes 5 multiple-choice questions, of which 3 (60%) assesses literal comprehension, 1 (20%) involves inferential comprehension, and 1 (20%) requires reorganization of information. All 5 questions in Unit 7 are focus

on literal comprehension (100%). Unit 10 features 15 multiple-choice questions, with 10 (66.67%) addressing literal comprehension, 4 (26.67%) focusing on inferential comprehension, and 1 (6.67%) involving evaluation. Overall, out of 53 multiple-choice questions analyzed across these units, 33 (62.26%) targeting literal comprehension, 13 (24.53%) focusing on inferential comprehension, 1 (1.89%) requires reorganization, and 6 (11.32%) involving evaluation.

3. True/False Questions

Table 3. Reading Comprehension Level in True/False Questions

Unit	Type of Question	Literal Comprehension	Inferential Comprehension	Appreciation	Reorganiza tion	Evaluation
1	Unit	5 questions	1 question	-	-	1 question
6	Unit True/False	4 questions	1 question	-	-	-
Total		9 questions	2 questions	-	-	1 question

The true/false questions in the analyzed units predominantly emphasize literal comprehension. In Unit 1, out of 7 questions, 5 (71.43%) assess literal comprehension, 1 (14.29%) involves inferential comprehension, and 1 (14.29%) requires evaluation. Unit 6 features 5 true/false questions, with 4 (80%) targeting literal comprehension and 1 (20%) involving evaluation. Overall, out of 12 true/false questions analyzed across these units, 9 (75%) target literal comprehension, 1 (8.33%) focused on inferential comprehension, and 2 (16.67%) involve evaluation.

Discussion

The analysis of reading comprehension questions in the English textbook *Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila* for Grade 11 reveals a predominant focus on literal comprehension across essay, multiple-choice, and true/false formats. Specifically, 64.15% of essay questions, 62.26% of multiple-choice questions, and 75% of true/false questions primarily assess students' ability to recall factual information. While this foundational approach to comprehension supports basic understanding, it may limit opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking, a key aspect of developing critical cognitive skills in line with educational objectives. Such findings align with research by Setyosari et al. (2022), which underscores the importance of incorporating a variety of cognitive demands in educational materials to foster deeper comprehension and critical thinking skills.

Essay-type questions are intended to encourage detailed, constructed responses that can reflect deeper comprehension. For instance, in Unit 1, the question "What is geocaching?" prompts students to describe a concept directly from the text, targeting literal comprehension. Unit 4 presents a more interpretative prompt,

"Which exercises do you do on a daily basis?" which seeks appreciation by linking content to students' personal experiences. An evaluative example appears in Unit 8 with "Are you the opponent or the proponent of taking cell phones to school? Give your own arguments," requiring students to articulate and justify their viewpoints. These examples demonstrate some level of variety but reflect limited focus on inferential comprehension and critical thinking skills. Only 16.98% of essay questions target inferential thinking, and an even smaller 3.77% address evaluation, highlighting a gap in promoting higher-order thinking skills in line with educational frameworks such as Anderson & Krathwohl's (2001) taxonomy.

In multiple-choice questions, literal comprehension also prevails, as seen in questions like "When was Keraton Yogyakarta built?" (Unit 3), which simply assesses factual recall. However, more complex cognitive demands are occasionally introduced, such as an evaluative question in Unit 4: "What would be the writer's attitude toward companies requiring weekend availability?" which requires students to assess the writer's perspective. Inferential comprehension is also addressed in questions like "The word 'remote' in Paragraph 3 can be best replaced with..." (Unit 4), where students deduce meaning from context. Despite these instances, the overall structure of multiple-choice questions remains heavily weighted toward literal comprehension, comprising 62.26% of the total. This structure limits students' exposure to inferential comprehension (24.53%) and evaluation (11.32%), which is critical for fostering complex cognitive processes, as highlighted by Aynalem and Tesmand (2023), who emphasize that varied cognitive demands in assessments support deeper learning.

True/false questions, though often perceived as simple, occasionally incorporate varying levels of comprehension. Unit 1's question, "Geocaching is popular in many countries," tests literal understanding, while another true/false question in Unit 6, "Electric cars can reduce carbon emissions due to the use of coal-powered generators," requires students to infer the environmental implications of the statement. Although this indicates some attention to inferential comprehension, the dominance of literal comprehension in true/false questions (75%) further suggests an overemphasis on basic recall, with only 8.33% assessing inferential comprehension and 16.67% focusing on evaluation. These findings echo concerns in the literature, with Nurbaya et al. (2020) and Febrijanto et al. (2022) advocating for a more balanced question structure to enhance comprehensive reading skills.

Research consistently emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach to question design, which includes both foundational knowledge and advanced thinking skills. Goh and Taib (2006) recommend a distribution of question types that includes 50% literal comprehension, 30% inferential comprehension, 10% evaluative questions, and 10% creative or application-based questions. This distribution is supported by Johnson (2002), who notes that a varied question structure fosters students' ability to transfer and apply knowledge across different contexts, encouraging deeper comprehension. Moreover, Anderson & Krathwohl's (2001) taxonomy advocates for a comprehensive cognitive process, progressing from basic

recall (Remembering) to complex processes (Evaluating and Creating), reinforcing the necessity of diversifying cognitive engagement in assessments.

The current focus on literal comprehension questions in *Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila* may inadvertently limit students' development of advanced skills that align with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. A more balanced distribution, as suggested by best practices, would involve a shift to include a greater proportion of inferential (30%) and evaluative (15%) questions, alongside 15% creative or application-based questions (Goh & Taib, 2006). This would not only enhance comprehension but also foster cognitive flexibility, better equipping students to transfer knowledge and adapt skills to real-world situations, as advocated by the 21st Century Skills Framework (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2019).

The findings underscore a need for enhanced alignment between the textbook's reading comprehension questions and Barrett's taxonomy, a framework that recognizes the varying levels of comprehension required for skillful reading. Barrett's taxonomy suggests that comprehension extends beyond literal understanding to include inferential, evaluative, and appreciation-based skills. However, as noted by Krismadayanti and Zainil (2022), textbooks often overemphasize literal comprehension, thus underpreparing students for more demanding comprehension tasks. This concern is echoed by Amalya et al. (2020), who argue that comprehension questions should encourage critical engagement to prepare students for higher academic and professional demands.

To address this gap, restructuring the textbook to incorporate a wider range of Barrett's taxonomy levels is recommended. This approach would entail a balanced question distribution—such as 40% literal comprehension, 30% inferential comprehension, 15% evaluative questions, and 15% creative or application-based questions—which provides a comprehensive educational experience that develops both foundational understanding and advanced cognitive skills (Goh & Taib, 2006). Such a structure would enhance the instructional effectiveness of the textbook, supporting students' ability to navigate increasingly complex information and fostering the critical thinking skills necessary for the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum and the modern workplace (Rahmawati et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study of the reading comprehension questions in the textbook *Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA/MA Berbasis Profil Pelajar Pancasila* reveals a predominant emphasis on literal comprehension, particularly in essay and multiple-choice questions. While establishing foundational knowledge is essential, the heavy focus on literal comprehension may limit the development of higher-order cognitive skills in 11th-grade students. To align more closely with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum and global educational trends, a balanced approach to question design is recommended. Integrating a variety of question types—including literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, appreciation, reorganization, and evaluation—could encourage deeper cognitive engagement and promote critical

thinking. Implementing these changes would help educators create a dynamic, stimulating learning environment, equipping students with the skills necessary to address both academic and real-world challenges. This study emphasizes the importance of regularly assessing and updating educational materials to meet students' evolving needs and the demands of contemporary education. Future studies could delve into how different question types influence students' reading comprehension and critical thinking abilities, offering valuable insights for enhancing instructional practices and assessment strategies across diverse educational contexts.

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