

An Analysis of Reading Comprehension Exercises in the English on Target Textbook for Indonesian Senior High Schools

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Abstract

This study investigates the reading comprehension exercises presented in the English on Target textbook published by Erlangga for Grade XI Indonesian senior high school students. Employing a descriptive qualitative research design, the study analyzes all reading passages and accompanying comprehension tasks across eight chapters of the textbook. Document analysis was used as the primary data collection technique, focusing on the cognitive demands of each reading question. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy served as the analytical framework to categorize reading comprehension questions into lower-order and higher-order thinking skills, including remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, and evaluating. The findings reveal that the textbook addresses six major reading comprehension skills: identifying main ideas, locating specific information, understanding vocabulary in context, making inferences, identifying authorial purpose, and recognizing text organization. Literal comprehension tasks, particularly those requiring factual recall and identification of explicit information, dominate the early chapters. However, inferential and evaluative questions appear more frequently in later units, indicating a gradual progression toward higher-order thinking skills. In terms of exercise formats, five main types were identified: multiple-choice questions, vocabulary-based items, true/false and matching tasks, open-ended comprehension questions, and grammar-integrated reading activities. Multiple-choice exercises constitute the majority of tasks, while open-ended and evaluative questions are less frequent. Although the textbook demonstrates an effort to scaffold students' reading development from basic comprehension to more complex cognitive engagement, lower-order thinking skills remain predominant. These findings suggest that teachers may need to supplement the textbook with additional inferential and evaluative reading activities to better support higher-order literacy development in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill in second and foreign language learning because it enables learners to construct meaning from written texts, expand vocabulary knowledge, and engage with a wide range of ideas and information. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, reading plays a crucial role not only as a receptive skill but also as a foundation for developing other language abilities, such as writing, speaking, and critical thinking (Samaraweera, 2023). Through reading

activities, learners are exposed to authentic language use, varied text structures, and different communicative purposes, which support both linguistic development and cognitive growth. Consequently, the quality of reading instruction and materials has a significant impact on students' overall language proficiency.

In Indonesia, reading instruction in senior high schools is strongly influenced by the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, which emphasizes literacy development and the integration of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). The curriculum encourages students to go beyond literal comprehension by engaging in inferential, analytical, and evaluative reading processes. Students are expected not only to identify explicit information in a text but also to interpret meanings, evaluate arguments, and relate textual content to broader social and real-life contexts (Harahap & Natsir, 2021). This curricular orientation reflects a shift from traditional memorization-based learning toward more critical and reflective literacy practices. As a result, English reading materials used in classrooms are expected to support this cognitive progression by incorporating tasks that stimulate higher-level thinking.

English textbooks play a central role in achieving these instructional goals, particularly in Indonesian EFL classrooms where textbooks often serve as the primary source of input and classroom activities (Sidik, 2018). Textbooks guide teachers in selecting texts, designing learning tasks, and assessing students' comprehension. A well-designed English textbook should provide not only linguistically appropriate texts but also reading exercises that systematically develop students' comprehension skills from lower-order to higher-order levels. Reading exercises should encourage students to identify main ideas, understand details, make inferences, analyze text organization, and evaluate the author's purpose. Therefore, evaluating the cognitive quality of reading comprehension exercises in textbooks is essential to determine whether they align with curricular expectations.

Despite the emphasis on HOTS in national curriculum documents, numerous studies have reported that many English textbooks used in Indonesian schools still focus predominantly on Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS). Research has shown that reading comprehension questions frequently require students to recall factual information or identify explicitly stated details, while inferential and evaluative questions are limited in number (Ariawan & Kholidi, 2023; Maryamah et al., 2024). This imbalance may restrict students' opportunities to develop critical reading skills and may result in reading instruction that does not fully support the goals of the 2013 Curriculum. Consequently, students may become proficient in answering literal questions but struggle with tasks that require deeper interpretation and evaluation of texts.

Several textbook evaluation studies have highlighted similar patterns. For example, (Rahmi & Ahsani, 2024) found that reading comprehension questions in school examinations and textbooks tended to emphasize recall and basic understanding rather than analysis or evaluation. Likewise, (Sukmawijaya et al., 2020) reported that HOTS-based reading questions were inconsistently distributed across textbook units, leading to uneven cognitive development. These findings suggest that while curriculum documents promote higher-order literacy, the instructional materials used in classrooms may not fully operationalize these goals. This mismatch between curriculum intentions and textbook content underscores the importance of systematic textbook analysis.

Beyond the Indonesian context, studies conducted in other EFL settings have reported similar challenges. Research in Southeast Asian countries indicates that reading materials often prioritize surface-level comprehension due to practical considerations such as ease of assessment and time constraints (Laila & Fitriyah, 2022). Multiple-choice questions, for instance, are widely used because they are efficient to administer and score, yet they may limit students' opportunities to articulate reasoning or express critical responses. Although such exercise formats have pedagogical value, overreliance on them may reduce students' engagement with deeper levels of meaning. This suggests

that the issue of limited cognitive depth in reading exercises is not unique to Indonesia but reflects a broader trend in EFL textbook design.

One English textbook that is widely used in Indonesian senior high schools is *English on Target* published by Erlangga. Designed to align with the 2013 Curriculum, this textbook presents various text genres, including descriptive, recount, narrative, explanation, and analytical exposition texts. The reading sections are accompanied by comprehension questions and language-focused activities intended to support both language learning and literacy development. Given its extensive use, evaluating the reading comprehension exercises in *English on Target* is important to understand how effectively the textbook supports students' cognitive and reading development. However, empirical studies specifically examining the reading comprehension exercises in this textbook remain limited, creating a research gap that needs to be addressed.

Previous studies on textbook analysis have often focused on identifying the presence of HOTS or categorizing question types without providing a comprehensive chapter-by-chapter analysis. As a result, less attention has been paid to how reading skills and exercise types are distributed across textbook units and how they progress throughout the book. Addressing this gap, the present study conducts a systematic analysis of all reading comprehension exercises in *English on Target* for Grade XI students. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy is employed as an analytical framework to classify reading questions according to their cognitive demands, allowing for a clearer understanding of the balance between lower-order and higher-order thinking skills (Irawan & Diptoadi, 2022).

Based on the issues outlined above, this study aims to analyze the reading comprehension exercises found in the *English on Target* textbook published by Erlangga for Indonesian senior high school students. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What reading comprehension skills are addressed in the *English on Target* textbook for Grade XI students?
2. What types of reading comprehension exercises are used in the textbook?

By addressing these questions, the study is expected to contribute to the field of EFL textbook evaluation by providing empirical evidence on the cognitive quality of reading exercises in a widely used Indonesian textbook. The findings may offer valuable insights for teachers in selecting and supplementing reading materials, for textbook writers in designing more cognitively balanced exercises, and for curriculum developers in ensuring better alignment between policy objectives and instructional resources.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design with document analysis as the primary method of inquiry. A qualitative approach was selected because the data consisted of textual materials in the form of reading passages and comprehension exercises, which required interpretive and categorical analysis rather than numerical or statistical measurement. Descriptive qualitative research is appropriate for examining educational materials as it allows researchers to explore patterns, instructional intentions, and cognitive demands embedded in texts and tasks (Mardiyana et al., 2023). The study focused on identifying reading comprehension skills and exercise types presented in the textbook and examining their alignment with the cognitive objectives of the 2013 Curriculum.

Data Source

The data source of this study was the textbook *English on Target* for SMA/MA Grade XI, published by Erlangga and written by (Sarwoko, 2017). This textbook was selected because it is widely used in Indonesian senior high schools and is officially designed to support the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum. The textbook consists of eight chapters containing various

text genres, such as descriptive, narrative, recount, explanation, and analytical exposition texts. Each chapter includes reading passages followed by comprehension questions and language-related exercises. All reading passages and their accompanying comprehension questions across the eight chapters were included as the data of this study to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using document analysis, which involved systematic reading, identification, and extraction of reading comprehension exercises from the textbook. The researcher carefully examined each chapter and identified all questions directly related to reading comprehension, excluding exercises that focused solely on writing, speaking, or isolated grammar drills without a reading component. Each reading comprehension question was treated as a single unit of analysis. In total, 115 reading comprehension questions were identified and compiled for further analysis. Document analysis was chosen because it enables an in-depth examination of instructional content without intervention in classroom practices (Desyantarningsih & Artini, 2022).

Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, which categorizes cognitive processes into six levels: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Ekalia et al., 2022). In this study, Bloom's Revised Taxonomy was used as an analytical framework to classify reading comprehension questions according to their cognitive demands. The taxonomy was selected because it is widely applied in textbook evaluation studies and provides a clear structure for distinguishing between lower-order and higher-order thinking skills in reading comprehension.

To operationalize the taxonomy, each cognitive level was defined in relation to specific reading comprehension skills (Junaidi et al., 2024). Questions categorized as remembering required students to locate explicitly stated information or factual details in the text. Understanding questions involved identifying main ideas or paraphrasing information. Applying questions required students to interpret vocabulary or expressions based on textual context. Analyzing questions focused on making inferences, identifying relationships among ideas, or recognizing text organization. Evaluating questions asked students to determine the author's purpose, express judgments, or assess viewpoints presented in the text. Questions at the creating level were not identified in the textbook and therefore were not included in the analysis.

Coding Procedures

The coding process was conducted in several stages. First, all identified reading comprehension questions were listed and labeled according to their chapter and page number. Second, each question was examined to determine the reading skill it targeted, such as identifying main ideas, finding specific information, understanding vocabulary in context, making inferences, identifying authorial purpose, or recognizing text organization. Third, the questions were categorized into cognitive levels based on the operational definitions derived from Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. For example, questions asking *"What is the main idea?"* were coded as Understanding level, while questions requiring students to *"Why do you think the author wrote this?"* were coded as Evaluating level.

To enhance reliability, the coding process was conducted through repeated analysis. Each question was coded at least twice at different times to ensure consistency in categorization. When ambiguities arose, the question was re-examined in relation to the reading passage and instructional context (Treude, 2024). This iterative coding process helped minimize subjectivity and strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings. Repeated analysis is commonly used in qualitative textbook studies to ensure stable and credible categorization of data.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, irrelevant items were excluded and the remaining questions were grouped based on reading skills and cognitive levels. In the data display stage, the categorized data were presented in tables to show the frequency and distribution of reading skills and exercise types across the textbook chapters. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying dominant patterns, progression of cognitive demands, and alignment between reading exercises and curriculum objectives. This systematic procedure allowed the researcher to present clear and organized findings while maintaining analytical rigor.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied methodological transparency by clearly explaining data sources, coding procedures, and analytical criteria. The use of established theoretical frameworks and repeated coding further strengthened the credibility of the analysis. Although the study relied on a single data source, the comprehensive coverage of all chapters enhanced the dependability of the findings. These strategies are consistent with recommended practices in qualitative educational research (Ahmed, 2024).

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the analysis of reading comprehension exercises found in the *English on Target* textbook for Grade XI senior high school students. The findings focus on two main aspects: (1) the reading comprehension skills addressed in the textbook and (2) the types of reading comprehension exercises used across the eight chapters. The data are presented descriptively and supported by frequency tables to illustrate the distribution of skills and exercise types.

Reading Comprehension Skills Identified

The analysis identified a total of 115 reading comprehension questions distributed across eight chapters of the textbook. These questions were classified into six major reading comprehension skills based on their instructional focus and cognitive demands. The identified skills include identifying main ideas, finding specific information, understanding vocabulary in context, making inferences, identifying authorial purpose, and recognizing text organization.

Table 1. Distribution of Reading Comprehension Skills found in the Textbook

Reading Comprehension Skill	Description	Cognitive Level	Frequency
		(Bloom's Revised Taxonomy)	
Identifying Main Idea	Recognizing the central topic or thesis of a text	Understanding	20
Finding Specific Information	Locating explicit details and factual data	Remembering	24
Understanding Vocabulary in Context	Determining the meaning of underlined or unfamiliar words	Applying	18

Making Inference	Drawing implicit conclusions from textual evidence	Analyzing	22
Identifying Purpose	Understanding the communicative goal of a passage	Evaluating	16
Recognizing Text Organization	Analyzing generic structure and logical sequence	Analyzing	15

The results show that finding specific information is the most frequently occurring skill, with 24 questions. This skill is commonly assessed through questions that require students to locate factual details explicitly stated in the text. Making inferences appears 22 times, indicating the presence of questions that require students to interpret implied meanings. Identifying main ideas accounts for 20 questions, while understanding vocabulary in context appears 18 times. Skills related to higher-level comprehension, such as identifying authorial purpose and recognizing text organization, appear less frequently, with 16 and 15 occurrences respectively.

Distribution of Reading Skills Across Chapters

The distribution of reading comprehension skills varies across the eight chapters. Early chapters tend to emphasize literal comprehension skills, such as identifying main ideas and locating specific information. In contrast, later chapters include a higher proportion of inferential and evaluative questions, particularly in texts dealing with social, environmental, and real-life issues. This pattern indicates a progression in cognitive demand across the textbook units.

Types of Reading Comprehension Exercises

In addition to reading skills, the analysis also examined the types of reading comprehension exercises used in the textbook. Five main types of exercises were identified: multiple-choice questions, vocabulary-based items, true/false and matching tasks, open-ended short-answer questions, and grammar-integrated reading activities.

Table 2. Types of Reading Exercises and Frequency of Occurrence

Type of Exercises	Description	Skill Targeted	Frequency
Multiple choice comprehension	Selecting the correct answer based on passage	Main idea, detail, inference	62
Vocabulary based item	Identifying meaning, synonym or antonym of target words	Vocabulary in context	18
True/False and Matching	Determining accuracy of statements or matching ideas	Detail comprehension	12
Open-ended short answer	Responding to inferential or opinion based questions	Inference, evaluation	14

Grammar integrated reading	Using reading texts to strengthen structural understanding	Form and function recognition	9
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The results indicate that multiple-choice questions dominate the reading comprehension exercises, accounting for 62 out of 115 items. Vocabulary-based questions appear 18 times and are primarily used to assess students' understanding of word meanings in context. True/false and matching tasks occur 12 times and mainly assess literal comprehension. Open-ended short-answer questions, which require students to generate responses based on inference or evaluation, appear 14 times. Grammar-integrated reading activities appear least frequently, with 9 items, and are mainly found in chapters focusing on grammatical topics such as passive voice and reported speech.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the *English on Target* textbook incorporates a variety of reading comprehension skills and exercise formats. Literal comprehension skills and multiple-choice exercise types are the most dominant features, while inferential, evaluative, and grammar-integrated reading tasks are present but less frequent. The distribution of skills and exercise types across chapters suggests a gradual increase in cognitive demand as students progress through the textbook.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the cognitive and pedagogical design of reading comprehension exercises in the *English on Target* textbook for Grade XI Indonesian senior high school students. By analyzing all reading exercises across eight chapters, this study offers a comprehensive picture of how reading skills and exercise types are distributed throughout the textbook, extending previous research that often examined only selected units or focused solely on the presence of higher-order thinking skills. The chapter-by-chapter analysis allows for a more nuanced understanding of how cognitive demands are gradually introduced and how reading instruction is structured within the textbook.

One of the key findings is the dominance of literal comprehension skills, particularly identifying main ideas and locating specific information. This pattern aligns with earlier studies reporting that Indonesian EFL textbooks tend to emphasize lower-order thinking skills due to their accessibility and ease of assessment (Ariawan & Kholidi, 2023; Maryamah et al., 2024). Literal comprehension tasks play an important foundational role in reading instruction, especially for EFL learners who are still developing vocabulary knowledge and grammatical awareness. However, when such tasks dominate instructional materials, they may limit students' opportunities to engage in deeper interpretive and evaluative reading processes. This finding suggests a pedagogical trade-off between ensuring comprehension accuracy and promoting cognitive depth.

Despite this dominance, the findings also indicate a deliberate inclusion of inferential and evaluative reading tasks, particularly in later chapters. The increased presence of inference-making and authorial purpose questions suggests that the textbook attempts to scaffold students' reading development from basic understanding toward higher-order thinking skills. This progression supports the view that reading comprehension develops hierarchically, requiring learners to master literal comprehension before engaging in more complex analytical tasks (Vitta, 2021). Compared to earlier textbook evaluations, *English on Target* demonstrates a more systematic integration of higher-order

skills, especially in chapters addressing socially relevant topics such as health, environmental issues, and disaster preparedness.

However, the uneven distribution of higher-order thinking tasks across chapters remains a concern. While some units provide opportunities for inferential and evaluative engagement, others rely heavily on multiple-choice and factual questions. This inconsistency may hinder the continuous development of critical reading skills, as students are not consistently challenged to analyze or evaluate texts throughout the textbook. Similar concerns have been raised by (Sukmawijaya et al., 2020), who argue that sporadic inclusion of HOTS-based questions is insufficient to foster sustained cognitive growth. Therefore, while *English on Target* shows improvement compared to previous textbooks, further refinement is necessary to ensure balanced cognitive development across all units.

Another important aspect of the findings is the predominance of multiple-choice questions as the main exercise format. Multiple-choice items are widely used in EFL contexts because they allow for efficient assessment and are suitable for large classrooms. However, overreliance on this format may constrain students' ability to articulate reasoning, justify interpretations, and express evaluative judgments. Open-ended questions, although less frequent, provide greater opportunities for students to demonstrate deeper comprehension and critical thinking. This finding highlights a pedagogical trade-off between assessment practicality and cognitive engagement, suggesting that teachers may need to supplement textbook exercises with additional open-ended or discussion-based activities (Aynalem & Tesmand, 2023).

The inclusion of grammar-integrated reading activities represents another noteworthy finding. These tasks illustrate the interconnectedness of grammatical knowledge and reading comprehension, supporting theoretical perspectives that view grammar and meaning construction as interdependent processes (Yu & Li, 2022). By requiring students to interpret grammatical structures within meaningful texts, grammar-integrated reading activities contribute to both syntactic awareness and comprehension development. However, the limited frequency of such tasks suggests that their potential benefits are not fully maximized. Greater integration of grammar and reading could enhance students' ability to process complex texts and support higher-level comprehension.

Compared with previous studies conducted in Indonesian and Southeast Asian EFL contexts, this study extends existing research by providing a comprehensive analysis of both reading skills and exercise types across all textbook chapters (Rochman, 2017). While earlier studies often concluded that Indonesian textbooks lack higher-order thinking tasks, the present findings suggest a more nuanced reality. *English on Target* demonstrates an effort to incorporate HOTS-oriented reading activities, although these efforts are not yet consistently implemented across all units. This contribution is significant because it highlights gradual improvements in textbook design while also identifying areas that require further enhancement.

Overall, the discussion indicates that *English on Target* occupies a middle position between traditional LOTS-dominated textbooks and fully HOTS-oriented instructional materials. The textbook provides a solid foundation for reading comprehension development but does not yet fully realize the curriculum's emphasis on higher-order literacy (Zainil et al., 2020). These findings underscore the need for teachers, textbook writers, and curriculum developers to work collaboratively to enhance the cognitive quality of reading materials and ensure that students are consistently exposed to tasks that promote critical and reflective reading.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the reading comprehension exercises presented in the *English on Target* textbook published by Erlangga for Grade XI Indonesian senior high school students. Using a

descriptive qualitative approach and document analysis, the study examined all reading passages and accompanying comprehension tasks across eight chapters to identify the reading comprehension skills addressed and the types of exercises employed. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy was used as the analytical framework to classify the cognitive demands of reading questions and to examine the balance between lower-order and higher-order thinking skills in the textbook.

The findings indicate that the textbook incorporates six major reading comprehension skills: identifying main ideas, finding specific information, understanding vocabulary in context, making inferences, identifying authorial purpose, and recognizing text organization. Literal comprehension skills, particularly those requiring factual recall and identification of explicitly stated information, dominate the reading exercises, especially in the early chapters. Although inferential and evaluative skills appear more frequently in later units, their overall distribution remains uneven. This suggests that while the textbook demonstrates a gradual progression toward higher-order thinking skills, lower-order thinking skills continue to play a dominant role in reading instruction.

In terms of exercise formats, five main types of reading comprehension activities were identified: multiple-choice questions, vocabulary-based items, true/false and matching tasks, open-ended short-answer questions, and grammar-integrated reading activities. Multiple-choice exercises were found to be the most frequently used format, offering practical advantages for assessment efficiency. However, open-ended and evaluative questions, which provide greater opportunities for critical engagement and reasoning, were less frequently included. Grammar-integrated reading activities illustrate the interrelationship between grammatical knowledge and meaning construction, yet their limited presence suggests that their pedagogical potential has not been fully utilized.

Implications

The findings of this study carry several important implications. For English teachers, the *English on Target* textbook can serve as a foundational resource for reading instruction, particularly for developing basic comprehension skills. However, teachers are encouraged to supplement the textbook with additional inferential, evaluative, and discussion-based activities to promote higher-order literacy development and critical reading skills. For textbook writers and material developers, the results highlight the need to create a more balanced distribution of cognitive demands by systematically integrating higher-order thinking tasks across all chapters rather than concentrating them in selected units. Greater inclusion of open-ended questions and grammar-integrated reading tasks may further enhance students' cognitive engagement. For curriculum developers and policymakers, the textbook represents progress toward alignment with the 2013 Curriculum, yet continued refinement is necessary to ensure consistent implementation of HOTS-oriented literacy objectives.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its focus on a single textbook and its reliance on document analysis without classroom observation or stakeholder perspectives. Future research may expand this line of inquiry by conducting comparative analyses of multiple textbooks, investigating how reading comprehension exercises are implemented in classroom practice, or exploring teachers' and students' perceptions of textbook effectiveness. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how reading materials influence literacy development in Indonesian EFL contexts.

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