

# An Analysis of Cognitive Dimensions in Reading Assessment Tasks of the *English for Nusantara* Grade 8 Textbook

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## ABSTRACT

Reading assessment plays a crucial role in English language teaching, as it helps measure students' comprehension and supports the development of thinking skills. In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes learner autonomy and high-order thinking skills (HOTS), requiring textbooks to provide assessment tasks that go beyond factual recall. This study aims to examine the cognitive dimensions of reading assessment tasks in the *English for Nusantara* Grade 8 textbook. Using a descriptive quantitative design, this study analyzed reading assessment through content analysis based on Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. The reading questions were coded and categorized into one of six cognitive dimensions, and categorized as LOTS or HOTS. The findings reveal that lower-order thinking skills (LOTS) dominate the reading assessment tasks, with remembering (56.0%) and understanding (21.33%) being the most frequent, rather than HOTS questions. It implied that the reading assessment task in the *English for Nusantara* Grade 8 Textbook may not fully support the development of HOTS that promote students' critical and analytical reading abilities. These findings suggest that while the textbook partially aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum, greater emphasis on HOTS-based reading assessment is needed to better support students' critical thinking and the development of reading comprehension.

**Keywords:** Bloom's revised taxonomy, *English for Nusantara*, High Order Thinking Skills, reading assessment

## INTRODUCTION

Reading assessment is one of the significant components of English language learning because it is capable of helping teachers evaluate students' comprehension, learning progress, and interpretation of the reading text (Alderson, 2000; Brown, 2004). In reference to Brown (2010), assessment plays a significant role in identifying strengths and weaknesses, enabling teachers to verify whether students are progressing as well as ensuring that teaching practices are entirely effective. In Indonesia, the application of Merdeka Curriculum reflects the importance of reading assessment because the adopted curriculum is characterized by a bias for adapting learning, critical learning, and higher-order cognitive skills. English textbooks as learning aids have a great responsibility in ensuring that the assessment tasks are in line with the goals of the learning curriculum, which plays a significant part in developing literacy skills (Cunningsworth, 1995; Sánchez and Valcárcel, 1999). Thus, examining how reading assessments are presented in textbooks becomes crucial for determining whether the materials effectively align with the Merdeka Curriculum and contribute to meaningful



reading instruction. In relation to these demands, reading assessment in textbooks should not only focus on literal comprehension but also promote High-Order Thinking Skills.

High-order thinking skills (HOTS) are a major part of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. HOTS are extremely useful in developing students' critical analytical skills, which include analysis, evaluation, and creation of information. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) identifies such skills as high-level cognitive tasks that are far more complex than recalling and understanding. In English language learning, developing HOTS skills helps students in English language learning to make implicit meanings, judge an author's thoughts, relate the text to what is already known, and form a critical opinion on a reading activity (Grabe & Stoller, 2013). Hence, the reading tasks in English language textbooks are required to develop HOTS, making the students highly analytical, critical, and thoughtful readers (Berg, 2004). Thus, there is a need to conform to the latest developments in learning standards to facilitate students' learning process (Istiqomah & Maunah, 2020). The latest development has revealed that the types of exercise activities commonly used in textbooks significantly impact students' motivation to develop HOTS (Erdiana & Panjaitan, 2023; Ragab et al., 2024). Therefore, it is necessary to have a support tool in English language textbooks that incorporates HOTS skills to assist students in developing high-level critical skills, particularly in reading activities.

Reading assessment tasks in a textbook are mostly varied in terms of the level of difficulty, depending on the amount of thinking a particular question demands. More complicated questions, therefore, demand students employ reasoning, interpretation, and judgement, which are part of HOTS (Damaianti et al., 2020). It is seen from studies that require the students to analyze, evaluate, or combine ideas that they are harder since they require much deeper thinking rather than remembering the information (Altan, 2022; Monari, 2020). Factors such as students' motivation and support from others can also affect how well they use HOTS when answering difficult questions (Budsankom et al., 2015). The types of questions are useful in a reading assessment because they assist the students to think critically about what they read, to relate the thoughts, and to make a deeper-level interpretation of what is read. It is in line with the revised Bloom's Taxonomy because it claims that high-level thinking skills encompass skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Hence, textbooks are useful because they help students apply HOTS, which are essential for achieving curriculum objectives. Therefore, it is essential to include HOTS questions within textbooks to improve critical thinking and reading comprehension skills in students.

There have been several research studies that discuss the application of HOTS in English textbooks. It has been shown that most textbooks are still dominant in teaching LOTS, such as textbooks with title *Bright for grade 9*, *Smansa Nusantara for Class X, XI, XII*, *Bahasa Inggris SMA/MA/SMK/MAK kelas XII Edisi revisi 2018*, and *English SMK/MAK for Grade X, XI, XII* (Erdiana & Panjaitan, 2021; Febriyani et al, 2020; Fitriani & Kirana, 2021; Parel & Sujarwati, 2024; Shalihah et al, 2022). On the other hand, another researcher revealed that the textbook has a greater number of HOTS questions than LOTS, such as in the textbook *Work in Progress for Grade 10* (Husni, 2023; Manalu & Harahap, 2025; Putri et al, 2021). In Indonesia, research on assessments of previous textbooks has been conducted, but very limited research on the *English for Nusantara* textbooks following the Merdeka Curriculum has been carried out. Therefore, there is very limited information on the application of HOTS on the assessment tasks in the Grade 8 English textbooks.

Although textbooks are expected to foster the development of critical thinking, many textbooks still have reading assessment tasks that emphasize literal comprehension and factual recall. Such findings raise concern regarding whether the *English for Nusantara Grade 8* textbook provides an adequate number of HOTS-based questions. Since no research has focused specifically on the reading assessment tasks in the Grade 8 textbook, research would fill an important gap in the literature. It is not known whether the items of assessment

should require students to develop increasingly complex cognition in order to examine the text structure, assess the strength of arguments, or create new interpretations from what has been read. With limited empirical evidence available, further investigation shall be necessary to determine the degree to which this textbook promotes HOTS through its reading assessment activities.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the presence of high-order thinking skills in the reading assessment tasks of the *English for Nusantara Grade 8* textbook. Types of thinking skills found in the questions were categorized using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. The current study, therefore, is going to answer the following research questions: How are the cognitive dimensions and the distribution of LOTS and HOTS represented in the reading exercises of the *English for Nusantara Grade 8* textbook based on the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy? This present study is significant because it provides useful information to teachers, textbook writers, and policymakers by helping them understand how well the reading assessment tasks support students' learning needs and curriculum goals. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of reading assessment tasks in the textbook, educators will be better informed about how best to use or adapt the materials. Results are also supporting efforts toward the improvement of reading instruction so that students can meet the Merdeka Curriculum goals better and be prepared with strong critical thinking skills relevant in the 21st century.

## **METHOD**

This research employs a descriptive quantitative design, which describes and measures a phenomenon as it exists, without manipulating any variable. According to Creswell (2012), descriptive quantitative research allows researchers to summarize data through numerical analysis, such as frequencies and percentages. In this study, the approach helps in describing how reading assessment tasks in the Grade 8 English textbook are distributed across different types and cognitive levels based on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The taxonomy proposes six cognitive categories: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The first three categories represent LOTS, while the last three represent HOTS. Items that required recalling information were therefore categorized as Remembering (C1) skill, and those requiring interpretation were grouped as Understanding (C2). Items that require an application of the concepts to a new situation were classified under Applying (C3). The items that required breaking down information or identifying relationships were categorized as Analyzing (C4). Items that require judgment or giving an opinion were categorized as Evaluating (C5), and those items requiring the production of new ideas or responses were categorized as Creating (C6).

This study analyzed the reading assessment tasks in the *English for Nusantara* textbook for Grade 8 students. The textbook was selected because it is the recent textbook used for students as the official learning resource developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology for the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022. This textbook has five chapters consisting of reading texts and tasks related to reading comprehension. The task in this study was focused on the reading assessment questions in the reading texts. In addition, the research instrument was the checklist adapted from Pratiwi's (2014), according to the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy categories.

Table 1. Cognitive Categories and Their Indicators

Cognitive Dimension Category	Cognitive Level	Indicator
Low-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS)	Remembering (C1)	Identifying, recalling, recognizing, or retrieving explicit information from the text
Low-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS)	Understanding (C2)	Explaining ideas, interpreting meaning, summarizing, classifying, or describing information from the text
Low-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS)	Applying (C3)	Using information, concepts, or procedures from the text in a new or familiar context
High-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)	Analyzing (C4)	Comparing, differentiating, organizing, examining relationships, identifying causes and effects, or drawing connections
High-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)	Evaluating (C5)	Judging, critiquing, defending opinions, checking validity, or making decisions based on criteria
High-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)	Creating (C6)	Producing new ideas, generating responses, developing solutions, or constructing original interpretations

The cognitive level of each reading assessment was determined using certain indicators related to every cognitive level. Additionally, the categories were divided into two main types, such as LOTS consisting of remembering, understanding, and applying, and HOTS, comprising analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Data collection systematically followed several steps. First of all, the researcher carefully reviewed the whole book to find all the reading sections. Next, every reading assessment question was copied and listed in another paper for analysis in the checklist instrument. The questions were checked and filtered to guarantee that they purely assess the reading skills of the students. The list of questions was checked twice for completeness. After collecting the data, the researchers followed several steps to assess the findings. The six steps of content analysis include document analysis, tabulation, coding, classification, analysis, and reporting, according to Krippendorff (1989). The researchers first analyzed the textbook and then found all the reading questions in it. These questions were then tabulated into a prepared checklist table. The researchers then coded each item using a coding system based on the cognitive dimension of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy to find out the categorization of each question. Since the researcher worked with a co-rater during this process, accurate categorizations were made. Once the classification was completed, the researcher did some arithmetic to calculate the percentage of each cognitive category, thus discovering which were the most and least common dimensions. This, therefore, allowed for an evaluation of the distribution of lower-order and higher-order thinking skills in the *English for Nusantara Grade 8* textbook. In addition, all results were organized and reported by the researchers based on the completed analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Findings*

The analysis of the 75 items of reading assessment questions from the English for Nusantara Grade 8 textbook found that Lower-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) presented 62 reading questions (82.67%) and High-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) presented 13 reading questions (17.33%) in the reading assessment task. The most frequent question types that dominate the reading assessments in the five chapters are considered in LOTS dimensions, which are Remembering (C1) questions, accounting for the largest percentage with 56% of all questions, followed by Understanding (C2) questions with 21.33%, while HOTS dimension processes occur less frequently, with Evaluation (C5) at 9.33% being the largest.

Table 2. Distribution of Cognitive Dimensions across Chapters

Cognitive Dimension	Ch 1	Ch 2	Ch 3	Ch 4	Ch 5	Total	%
<b>Low Order Thinking Skills (LOTS)</b>							
Remembering (C1)	12	10	4	8	8	42	56 %
Understanding (C2)	3	3	2	4	4	16	21.33%
Applying (C3)	1	1	0	1	1	4	5.33%
<b>Total</b>						<b>62</b>	<b>82.67%</b>
<b>High Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)</b>							
Analyzing (C4)	1	1	0	1	1	4	5.33%
Evaluating (C5)	1	1	1	2	2	7	9.33%
Creating (C6)	0	1	0	0	1	2	2.67%
<b>Total</b>						<b>13</b>	<b>17.33%</b>

In Table 2, Remembering (C1) is the most frequent cognitive dimension in all chapters throughout the textbook, with more than half the proportion (56%) of the total reading assessment questions. Most of these items mainly require students to recall explicit facts stated in the texts. The second most frequent cognitive dimension found was Understanding (C2). This suggests that basic interpretation and comprehension are also in focus. Higher-order thinking skills appear far less frequently, such as Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating. The frequency of assessing questions was above that of Analyzing and Creating, while at the same time, the Creating level questions were the least represented throughout the textbook. Such a tendency might denote that even though HOTS are present, they are not equally distributed, and the amount remains limited.

The distribution thus explains that the proposed set of reading assessment tasks in the textbook is intended to measure students' surface-level comprehension rather than more profound, complex cognitive processing. Stronger representation of remembering and understanding would therefore mean that the students are more frequently required to find information and understand explicit meanings rather than being given ample opportunities to analyze relationships, evaluate ideas, or create original responses based on what they have read. This may reduce the possibility of students improving their higher-order thinking skills through the exercise of reading. Although the incorporation of some HOTS-based questions shows an attempt to keep pace with the current demands of the curriculum, their limited numbers and uneven distribution within chapters may reduce the overall impact of these activities on fostering critical and reflective reading skills among students.

Overall, LOTS questions comprise the majority of the reading assessment questions. Remembering comprises 42 questions (56.0%) of the total items that mainly require the students to recall explicit information from the text. An example is the question in Chapter 1, “*What did the people wear in the parade?*”, which requires details to be directly stated. Understanding is the next most frequent, with 16 questions (21.33%), and it requires interpretation or summary. For instance, the text in Chapter 4 asked the question “*How did the campaigns help reduce litter in NSW?*”, which will need students to understand and explain the information stated in the text. The category has the least representation with 4 questions (5.33%), wherein students are required to use textual information in a given task, such as identifying language features. For example, in Chapter 1, the question goes, “*Can you identify the time connectives in the text? Highlight them.*”

Table 3. Examples of LOTS Reading Assessment Questions found

Questions	Cognitive Dimension
“What did the people wear in the parade?” (p. 43, line 5)	Remembering (C1)
“How did the campaigns help reduce litter in NSW?” (p. 241, line 9)	Understanding (C2)
“Can you identify the time connectives in the text?” (p. 74, lines 27–28)	Applying (C3)

On the contrary, HOTS-type questions are fewer in number, but they are mostly of the reason and opinion types. Analyzing (C4) has 4 questions (5.33%) of the total, asking the examinees to state reasons or connections within the text. For instance, in Chapter 2, the question is *"Why did the animals in the forest run away on the second day?"* In the Evaluating (C5) category, there are 7 questions with 9.3% of the total questions, asking the examinees to make judgments with reasons, as in *"Which moral lesson can you take from the story?"* in Chapter 4. The lowest category is Creating (C6), which comprises only 2 questions with 2.67% of the entire number of questions. In the creation category, questions are limited to Chapters 2 and 5, asking the examinees to come up with different responses, such as *"If you were the man, what would you do?"*

Table 4. Examples of HOTS Reading Assessment Questions Found

Questions	Cognitive Dimension
"Why did the animals in the forest run away on the second day?" (p. 135, line 8)	Analyzing (C4)
"Which moral lesson can you take from the story?" (p. 149, line 20)	Evaluating (C5)
"If you were the man, what would you do?" (p. 149, line 21)	Creating (C6)

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the reading assessment tasks in the English for Nusantara Grade 8 textbook are heavily weighted toward LOTS, particularly remembering and understanding. Although HOTS-related questions are present across chapters, they occur in limited numbers, with creating-level questions being the least frequent, indicating restricted opportunities for students to engage in higher-level critical and creative reading.

### Discussion

The purpose of this research is to analyze how the cognitive dimension and the use of LOTS and HOTS are depicted in the English for Nusantara Grade 8 textbooks according to the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy framework developed by Anderson & Krathwohl (2001). It has been found that all six dimensions of cognition, namely remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, are included in the textbooks. Nevertheless, the distributions of the six dimensions were imbalanced because LOTS were depicted much more often than HOTS in the reading comprehension questions of the textbook. In total, the results showed that LOTS dominated the textbook, where 82.67% of all reading assessment tasks were LOTS, whereas only 17.33% belonged to HOTS. These results indicate that the focus of the textbook lies in providing information that can be learnt through memorization instead of teaching students critical and analytical reading. The relevance of lower-level assessments is evident because they provide basic cognitive skills that are required for learning; however, an overemphasis on lower cognitive levels can limit students' practice of higher-order skills. According to Berg (2004), assessment does not only require assessing students' knowledge but also promoting higher-order thinking skills among students.

In terms of LOTS, the Remembering (C1) category was the most prevalent dimension at 56.00%, followed by understanding (C2) at 21.33%. In essence, most of the reading activities that were undertaken involved recollecting factual information from the texts being read. The questions that belonged to the remembering dimension required students to recognize information given in the passage, either in the form of names, occurrences, or any other description in the text. A good illustration is provided by the question: *"What did the people wear in the parade?"* Recalling information in a literal sense requires the remembering dimension, which is defined as recognizing and recalling learned facts, while understanding entails interpreting and explaining meaning. However, in the HOTS category, the Analyzing category (C4) accounts for 5.33%, Evaluation (C5) makes up 9.33%, and Creation (C6) makes up 2.67% of the reading exercises. This finding reveals that although there were some HOTS reading tasks in the textbook, their representations were still limited

in the assessment. The Analyzing category involved asking students to find out connections, comparisons, or interpretations of the text. On the other hand, the task that belongs to the Evaluation category is asking students to share their opinions about something in the text. The Creation category involved making students generate responses or ideas regarding the reading text.

Results from this study have proved to be similar to several other studies carried out before, which have indicated that English textbooks used in Indonesia tend to be more focused on LOTS than anything else. According to past literature, English textbooks like *Bright for grade 9*, *Smansa Nusantara for classes X to XII*, *Bahasa Inggris SMA/MA/SMK/MAK Kelas XII Edisi Revisi 2018*, and *English SMK/MAK for grades X to XII*, among others, were characterized by LOTS questions (Erdiana & Panjaitan, 2021; Febriyani et al., 2020; Fitriani & Kirana, 2021; Parel & Sujarwati, 2024; Shalihah et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the results differ from several studies where more questions based on HOTS have been found in English textbooks. The results obtained by researchers working with the *Work in Progress textbook for Grade 10* indicate a higher frequency of HOTS questions compared to LOTS questions (Husni, 2023; Manalu & Harahap, 2025; Putri et al., 2021).

These findings also imply some pedagogical significance for the English language teaching practices and textbook production. As the reading test tasks in the *English for Nusantara Grade 8* textbook are still dominated by LOTS, it is likely that there will be few chances for students to foster their critical reading, analysis, and reasoning skills using the textbook. There might also be questions about whether or not the textbook meets the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum concerning fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and higher-order cognitive skills among learners. Thus, English teachers should complement the textbook tasks with some extra reading questions oriented at higher-order thinking skills that require students to interpret, evaluate, compare, and create ideas based on their interpretation of texts. Similar recommendations can be given to the authors of English textbooks in Indonesia. Firstly, the current study addresses the issue of the lack of research on the topic under investigation. While there have been many studies on the representation of HOTS in English textbooks, few studies have focused on examining the presence of HOTS in the reading assessment questions of the *English for Nusantara Grade 8* textbook within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, the present study sheds light on the extent to which the *English for Nusantara Grade 8* textbook nurtures higher-order thinking skills among students when performing reading exercises.

## CONCLUSION

This study has presented an investigation of cognitive dimensions, and the distribution of both LOTS and HOTS assessment tasks was presented in reading activities within the *English for Nusantara Grade 8* textbook in relation to Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. The results indicate that all cognitive levels are represented in the examined textbook. These include remembering, understanding, and applying, which are considered LOTS level, and analyzing, evaluating, and creating, which are considered HOTS level. However, the presence of cognitive dimensions is found in the majority of reading assessment questions at LOTS, particularly remembering and understanding. HOTS such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating questions appear as well in a limited number, with creating-level questions being the least in all chapters. It indicates that while this partially aligns with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum in the dimensions of critical thinking and higher-order cognitive development, it does not yet adequately allow students to engage in deeper analysis, deeper evaluation, and creative interpretation of texts. Further inclusion of HOTS-based reading assessment tasks may be required for closer correspondence with the reading comprehension

and critical thinking competencies students need, ensuring that the material of their textbooks works more closely toward the realization of the intended curriculum objectives.

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