

## An Investigation into Reading Comprehension Questions of Secondary EFL Textbooks in Ethiopia: Grades 11 and 12 in Focus

**Yihun Birhanu Aynalem (MA)**

**Alamirew Gebiremariam Tessemand, Ph.D.**

College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication  
Department of Foreign Languages & Literature; Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa,  
Ethiopia

[yihunbirhanu@gmail.com](mailto:yihunbirhanu@gmail.com)

---

---

### Abstract

The objective of this research was to investigate into the reading comprehension questions of EFL textbooks in Ethiopian government secondary school classes. The research was conducted using descriptive case study design based on sociocultural theory of teaching EFL. Data was collected from grades 11 and 12 EFL textbooks which were the case participants of the study. Reading comprehension questions of the textbooks were recorded into a grid of word file and the researchers analyzed independently and iteratively using descriptive content analysis. In doing so, reading comprehension levels adapted from Barrett (1968) taxonomy were used. The inter-rater value between the researchers was computed using consistency ratio formula of Cohen's Kappa, and the agreement coefficient value for identifying comprehension sublevels was 0.84. This value refers to a substantial consistency of the results presented and interpreted. Based on the descriptive content analysis, the findings of the study showed that EFL textbooks of teaching reading are dominated by literal comprehension level in general and recognition/recall of details (L1) and recognition/recall of comparison (L4) sublevels in particular. They deemphasized reorganizational sublevels such as classifying (R1), outlining (R2), summarizing (R3), and synthesizing (R4). Though inferential comprehension was the next preponderant thinking level next to literal comprehension, it was prevailed by inference of comparison (I4) sublevel which demanded the contextual meanings of words. Evaluation and personal response comprehension sublevels, on the other hand, were of insignificant representations. Grounded in the findings, it is recommended that secondary EFL textbooks of teaching reading should elicit comprehension questions proportional to different thinking levels that students can capitalize on developing their general comprehension abilities.

**Keywords:** Ethiopia, Secondary EFL Textbooks, Reading comprehension taxonomies, comprehension sublevels

---

---



Courtesy: <https://www.neaea.com/textbook/english-textbook/>

## 1. Introduction

From the viewpoint of sociocultural theory (SCT hereafter), language teaching refers to the educational milieu in which students learning opportunities result from the mediating artifacts that guide them to achieve higher mental functions (Wertsch, 1991). Unlike Piaget (1970) who contends that children's cognitive developmental is a pre-requisite for their learning, and hence cognitive constructivism is the priority, Vygotsky (1978) attributes the origin of humans' higher mental constructions to the social and cultural situations in which they grow up. Such an epistemological argument has an implication on the conceptualization and implementation of mediated language teaching in the actual educational settings. For students' potential or missed learning opportunities of language, SCT proponents contend, the goal-oriented mediating instructional artifacts such as EFL textbooks deemed relevant to the present study have a significant impact.

EFL textbooks are thus the mediating artifacts (instructional tools) that guide students to the object of learning the target language (Richards, 2001). In the context of teaching reading, they determine what reading comprehension levels students need to learn during lessons. This is to say that the design and practice of teaching reading comprehension arise from the theoretical perspective of educational objectives of thinking levels that textbooks comprise of. With this regard, researchers made use of a variety of taxonomies of cognitive demands designed by Bloom (1956), Marzano et al (1988), and Anderson et al. (2001). Bloom, in particular, divided the thinking processes which are hierarchically complex into six categories- knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Anderson et al. (2001) reviewed this taxonomy of cognitive domains and redefined it by transposing the last two higher order cognitive levels. Such a repositioning results from the assumption that evaluation is a precursor thinking skill to a creative work otherwise known as synthesis.

Marzano et al.'s (1988), Core Thinking Skills taxonomy, on the other hand, was designed in response to identifying specific thinking skills that are characterized by simple and complex levels. To this end, the researchers grouped the specific skills into four categories that refer to the hierarchical complexity of the skills. These include Acquiring and Integrating Knowledge

---

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 21:12 December 2021

Yihun Birhanu Aynalem (MA) and Alamirew Gebiremariam Tessemand, Ph.D.

An Investigation into Reading Comprehension Questions of Secondary EFL Textbooks: Grades 11 and 12 in Focus

(focusing skills, information gathering skills, and remembering skills), Extending and Refining Knowledge (organizing, analyzing skills, generating skills, integrating skills, and evaluating skills), Using Knowledge Meaningfully (decision-making and creative problem solving skills), and Habits of Mind (creative thinking skills and critical thinking skills). Revising their taxonomy, Marzano et al. consider the role of predicting as a unique type of inference because it helps students to activate background knowledge and establish a purpose. They also incorporate summarization into the revised taxonomy of thinking skills in which it "involves at least three cognitive activities – condensing information, selecting what is important (and discarding what is not), and combining original text propositions" (Marzano *et al.*, 1988, p. 104). Sidek (2010, p. 16) summarizes and condenses these thinking skills into lower and higher levels as stated below.

### **Lower Level:**

- a. Focusing: Attending to a specific information and disregarding others
- b. Recall/Remembering: Retrieving information from long-term memory
- c. Information gathering: Obtaining information through one or more senses or seeking information through inquiry

### **Higher Level:**

- d. Representation: Organizing information such as the use of graphic organizers (e.g., maps, charts).
- e. Organizing: Comparing, classifying, ordering, representing
- f. Applying: Using relevant prior knowledge within a new situation
- g. Analyzing: Identifying details, relationships and patterns, main ideas as well as errors
- h. Synthesizing: identification of the most important components and deletion of insignificant information.
- i. Generating: Inferring, predicting, and elaborating information.
- j. Integrating: Summarizing and restructuring
- k. Evaluating: Establishing criteria and verifying.

In the case of reading comprehension levels, Barrett (1972), Smith (1969) and Wallen (1972) developed different taxonomies of reading comprehension similar with Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives. For instance, Sanders' (1966) taxonomy includes memory, translation, interpretation, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. From the viewpoint of Bloom's taxonomy, the second and third levels coalesce to the same category (comprehension) so that Sanders' classification can be the same with the old taxonomy with the exception of application skills. Wallen's (1972) taxonomy, on the other hand, involves recall, interpretation, extrapolation, and evaluation. This taxonomy of reading comprehension is akin to Bloom's classification since its second and third levels of thinking skills refer to comprehension and analysis respectively. Therefore, in the shed of Bloom's taxonomy, it can be rendered into recall

(knowledge), interpretation (comprehension), extrapolation (inference/analysis), and evaluation. The taxonomy disregards application and synthesis skills from lower and higher levels respectively.

Barrett (1968), on the other hand, devised reading comprehension taxonomy from the perspective of cognitive and affective dimensions. The taxonomy was “originally designed for native speakers of English, but nevertheless proved useful for refining and organizing our ESL reading objectives” (Brown, 1995, p. 83). It consists of five kinds of reading objectives: literal comprehension, reorganization, inferential comprehension, evaluation and appreciation from which only the first two belongs to lower level or text based comprehension questions. According to the taxonomy, these two categories “deal with the facts as presented orally or in the books the students have read” (p.1). Each reading comprehension level has its own sublevels. For instance, literal comprehension consists of ‘recognition’ and ‘recall’ sublevels. These include recognition/recall of details, main ideas, a sequence, comparison, cause and effect relationships, and character traits.

Reorganization level where “the reader may utilize the statements of the author verbatim or he or she may paraphrase or translate the author’s statements” (Barrett, 1968, p.12), has four specific levels: classifying, outlining, summarizing, and synthesizing. In the context of this taxonomy, synthesis refers to “the putting together of facts to reach a generalization or concept or definition” (p. 1), and hence the present study considers the skill as reorganizing propositional information of a text to construct microstructure meanings.

The remaining comprehension levels refer to inferential (elaborative inference in the present case), evaluation, and appreciation skills. Inferential comprehension involves inferring (elaborating) supporting details, main ideas, sequence, comparisons, cause and effect relationships, character traits, predicting outcomes, and interpreting figurative language sublevels. Under the objective of evaluation, judgments of reality or fantasy, judgments of fact or opinion, judgments of adequacy and validity, judgments of appropriateness, and judgments of worth, desirability and acceptability are the specific objectives. Appreciation, the highest level, is characterized by reader’s emotional response to the content, identification with characters or incidents, reactions to the author’s use of language, and imagery.

Drawing on Barrett’s (1968) taxonomy, Day and Park (2005) design a reading comprehension taxonomy which comprises of six levels of cognitive demands. These include literal comprehension, reorganization, inference, prediction, evaluation, and personal response.

Investigating reading comprehension questions of EFL textbooks can enhance awareness about what potential learning opportunities student have during lessons. Therefore, this study examined the comprehension questions that the textbooks employ in secondary schools EFL classes.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The tradition of teaching reading in primary and secondary schools EFL classes in Ethiopia is manifested by the provisions of tailored (readymade) textbooks so that students are required to make use of the reading comprehension questions enshrined in the textbooks. Some research findings indicate that the objectives of textbooks that do not address different levels of language abilities and types of strategy uses have a weak role on students' language learning opportunities (Graves, 2000; Korkut & Ertaş, 2016; Rezat, 2006). For instance, Graves (2000) claim that textbooks become an impediment on the learning process when they are characterized by irrelevant contents with students' needs, exclusion of important items, and imbalanced variety of task-types.

Textbooks are poor supportive tools of teaching reading when their pedagogical objects do not emphasize on different cognitive demands of comprehension levels. The teaching of reading comprehension questions that falls short of demanding students' higher thinking level have a detrimental role on their situation based reading comprehension skills that result from students' active interactions with the reading texts. Additionally, the lack of differentiations of reading comprehension levels would bar students from learning different comprehension sublevels. Research findings show that participant EFL students' reading comprehension abilities were a function of the breadth and depth of comprehension questions (Day & Bamford, 2005; Korkut & Ertaş, 2016).

The impetus for the present study is derived from the significant roles textbooks have on students learning opportunities of comprehension levels in secondary schools EFL reading classes.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The study has general and specific objectives followed by research questions.

#### **1.2.1 General Objective**

The main objective of the study is to examine the reading comprehension questions residing in secondary schools EFL textbooks. Based on this objective, the study focused on the following specific objectives.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objectives**

- 1.2.2.1 Identify low reading comprehension sublevels that EFL textbooks demand students in secondary school classes.
- 1.2.2.2 Investigate high reading comprehension sublevels that EFL textbooks ask students in secondary school classes.

Pursuing these specific objectives, the study aimed at answering the following four research questions

### **1.2.3 Research Questions**

- 1.2.3.1 What low reading comprehension sublevels do EFL textbooks demand students in secondary school classes?
- 1.2.3.2 What high reading comprehension sublevels do EFL textbooks ask students in secondary school classes?

## **2. Materials and Methods**

This section deals with the research design selected and the procedures employed to select participants, collect data, analyze data, and interpret results.

### **2.1 Research Design**

Carrying out a research in any discipline is established on the philosophical perspective that presupposes its own assumption about reality and knowledge of the world (Creswell, 2014). Therefore based on its purpose, the present study followed pragmatic paradigm through which the researchers investigated the reading comprehension questions as they have occurred in their social realities of EFL textbooks. The study also emphasized on frequency of comprehension questions occurrences in reading exercises. This implies that descriptive case study research design is the strategy of inquiry the study employed. Since the study investigated the comprehension questions with a purpose of gaining “a rich and detailed description of an instance” (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014, p.45), descriptive case study was deemed appropriate. Additionally, this design suited the paper for two reasons. First, it helps to answer research questions generated from theoretical constructs (Yin, 2003). For example, in the context of this study, the research questions are designed based on the reading comprehension taxonomy adapted from Barrett (1968) who describes comprehension levels and sublevels. Second, it allows the researchers to quantify the qualitative findings in tables and numbers.

### **2.2 Participants of the Study**

Grades 11 and 12 EFL textbooks were the case participants of the present study because the textbooks are required to develop students’ text based and situation based reading

comprehension abilities that prepare them for tertiary level education (MoE, 2009, p.23). In other words, students at this level are expected to be engaged into higher mental functions. Therefore, comprehension questions provided in these textbooks were selected using purposive sampling technique.

### **2.3 Data Gathering Instruments**

The data collected about the reading comprehension sublevels of the textbooks is qualitative by its nature. To this purpose, the researchers prepared a grid of comprehension questions which was useful to analyze each question. The grid was designed from four columns with number, comprehension questions, occurrences of sublevels, and their frequencies. See appendix B. Softcopies of reading texts of the textbooks were the other instruments used to identify the types of comprehension sublevels. The textbooks contain fifty seven texts to teach reading. Of which the first twenty six are found in grade 11.

### **2.4 Data Collection Procedures and Method of Analysis**

The researchers used the soft copies of grades 11 and 12 EFL textbooks in which the reading comprehension questions were extracted from each unit and recorded into a separate grid of word file. For convenience of investigating the qualitative data, softcopies of reading texts were also documented into a separate file based on their occurrences in each unit of the textbooks. Then, the researchers read the texts in depth unit by unit followed by answering the questions in the grid to identify the specific reading comprehension sublevels adapted from Barrett's (1968) taxonomy. See appendix A. Descriptive content analysis was the method of finding the results. Qualitative method of data analysis, in particular, drew on units of analysis known as context and recording units. The former feature refers to the comprehension questions, whereas the latter describes the comprehension sublevels. With regard to identifying occurrences and frequencies of the sublevels, the study emphasized on textbooks' reading exercises which can be characterized by either a task with independent instruction or different comprehension questions with common directive.

The quantitative data analysis was generated from the qualitative document analysis of comprehension questions in the textbooks. Therefore, the quantitative results were reported into tables to display the occurrences and frequencies of the sublevels. Then, findings of the two methods were presented and discussed in the same section. At the end, conclusions and recommendations were given.

To check the reliability of the data, the researchers read texts independently and identified the low and high reading comprehension sublevels residing in the textbooks. They did the reading and identification activities iteratively. Then, the inter rater value was computed

using the consistency ratio formula of Cohen's Kappa. In so doing, the researchers filled their responses into excel and computed the formula. The agreement coefficient value for identifying comprehension sublevels was 0.84.

### 3. Results and Discussion

As hinted in the sample grid in appendix B, the researchers recorded 760 comprehension questions from which the first 366 are found in grade 11 textbook, and the remaining 394 reside in grade 12 textbook. There were also 161 exercises of which 75 belong to grade 11 EFL textbook while 86 reside in grade 12 textbook. These figures are significant to present and discuss the results of the study. Therefore, the reading comprehension sublevels findings stated in the subsequent tables were generated from these exercises in general and the specific comprehension questions in particular.

**Table 1: Occurrences and Frequencies of Literal Comprehension Sublevels**

Literal comprehension sublevels (L)		11 <sup>th</sup> textbook		Total	12 <sup>th</sup> textbook		Total
		Occr.	Frq.		Occr.	Frq.	
L1	Recognition/recall of details	22	46	69	23	81	104
L2	Recognition/recall of main ideas	2	9	11	9	3	12
L3	Recognition/recall of sequence	4	-	4	1	-	1
L4	Recognition/recall of comparison	19	100	119	20	78	98
L5	Recognition/recall of cause and effect	10	9	19	8	3	11
L6	Recognition/recall of character traits	2	-	2	4	4	8
Total		59	164	223	65	169	234

Table-1 indicates that the literal comprehension questions (223 and 234) take more than half of the total number of comprehension questions in both EFL textbooks. Among these questions, the highest instructional emphasis is devoted to the practices of recognition/recall of comparison (L4) followed by recognition/recall of detail (L1), for they are characterized by high occurrence and frequency of comprehension questions. This is to say that students have greater opportunities to learn these sublevels within and across reading exercises. The total numbers of comprehension questions of the other sublevels except recognition/recall of cause and effect (L5) of grade 11 textbook were lower than the occurrences of the abovementioned sublevels.

The findings agreed with Sunggingwati's (2003) study that investigated comprehension levels of high school textbooks of *Let's Learn English* 1, 2 and 3 and found out that literal comprehension questions were dominant with 73.6%, 87.4%, and 78.55% respectively. Within this lower comprehension level of the three textbooks, (L1) took the highest portion described as



58.34%, 46.98% and 43, 19%. However in the present study, it accounted for 50% in grade 12 EFL textbook while 54 % of the literal comprehension questions of grade 11 textbook was dominated by (L4). Fitria, Syarif, and Refnaldi (2014) who conducted to analyze secondary school English textbooks in Surabaya also stated that (L1) had a mean value of 67.62 from the aggregate comprehension questions of all sublevels.

**Table 2: Occurrences and Frequencies of Reorganization Sublevels**

Reorganization comprehension sublevels (R)		11 <sup>th</sup> textbook		Total	12 <sup>th</sup> textbook		Total
		Occr.	Frq.		Occr.	Frq.	
R1	Classifying	3	2	5	5	7	12
R2	Outlining	-	-	-	-	-	-
R3	Summarizing	6	-	6	7		7
R4	Synthesizing	6	5	11	4	2	6
Total		15	7	22	16	9	25

Table-2 shows that compared with occurrences and frequencies of literal comprehension. Reorganization comprehension is given insignificant emphasis in secondary EFL textbooks. For instance, outlining is the absent sublevel in both grades 11 and 12 EFL reading lessons. Additionally, the highly initiated sublevels have no greater difference from the lowest initiated literal comprehension sublevels known as recognition/recall of main ideas. Within such insignificant occurrence of reorganization comprehension level across reading texts, students have relatively similar learning opportunity of the sublevels in grades 11 and 12 EFL classes. For instance, the textbooks require students to categorize related actions or incidents in tabular form as the instructions of the comprehension questions described below indicated.

*24. Read the text below and take notes on the main points in your table (p. 18).*

*345. Read the advertisements and complete the notes below for each one (p. 281).*

*421. Complete this table with population statistics from the text (p.25).*

*527. When you have read the texts, complete the table below with the key points from the texts (p. 108).*

The above reading comprehension questions demand students not only to recall specific information from the text but also place the information into the required classified headings of the given matrixes or tables. Compared to grade 12 EFL students, grade 11 students have better learning opportunity of cognitive engagement of synthesis (R4), the highest sublevel of reorganization comprehension ability.

Under emphasis of this cognitive level was approved by similar findings of previous studies (Kusumawardani, 2011; Surtantini, 2019). However, the finding was in sharp contrast

with Kusumawardani's report of outlining 1.95 % and summarizing 0.97% in Bahasa secondary EFL textbook.

**Table 3: Occurrences and Frequencies of Inferential Comprehension Sublevels**

Inferential comprehension sublevels (I)		11 <sup>th</sup> textbook			12 <sup>th</sup> textbook		
		Occr.	Frq.	Total	Occr.	Frq.	Total
I1	Inference of details	8	7	15	6	-	6
I2	Inference of main ideas	6	5	11	7	-	7
I3	Inference of sequence	-	-	-	-	-	-
I4	Inference of comparison	8	32	40	15	23	38
I5	Inference of cause and effect	9	2	11	6	-	6
I6	Inference of character trait	2	-	2	2	-	2
I7	Predicting outcomes	1	-	1	-	-	-
I8	Interpreting figurative language	-	-	-	3	1	4
Total		34	46	80	39	24	63

At this level of text comprehension ability, table 3 shows that the textbooks prioritize the practice of inference of comparison sublevel, for the sublevel have greater occurrence across reading exercises and greater frequency within exercises. For instance, in grade 11 EFL textbook all the comprehension questions initiate students to generate their own synonym meanings of words otherwise known as top down lexical inference. There are two comprehension questions which demand them to infer similar or different conceptual ideas as stated below.

*57. In what ways was Oweka's second wife like or unlike Maria's mother? (p. 46).*

*99. To what extent do you think the traditional treatment for the scorpion sting cured the mother and to what extent did her body cure itself? (p. 75).*

These instances require students to guess similar and/or different ideas that characterized the activities of wives or the curing potential of the traditional treatment and her antibody. Grade 12 EFL textbook also contains one comprehension question "689. What developing countries, like Ethiopia, can learn from such stories" (p. 205) that demands (I4) thinking skills of similar concepts.

The aggregate comprehension questions of the remaining inferential sublevels of the textbooks (40 + 25 = 65) are lower than that of inference of comparison sublevel (40 + 38= 78), and hence the cultural mediating artifacts of teaching reading have neglected these comprehension skills in secondary schools EFL classes. Especially the absence of inference of sequence (I3), inference of character trait (I6), inference of predicting outcomes (I7) that students

infer the incoming ideas of the reading based on the parts of the text they have read already, and interpreting figurative language (I8) was high. This was substantiated by previous studies that found out that reading comprehension questions of EFL textbooks are characterized by the imbalanced presence of inferential sublevels (Fitria, Syarif & Refnaldi, 2014; Surtantini, 2019). For instance, the findings of Fitria, Syarif, and Refnaldi's study showed that "English Texts in Use and Look Ahead" textbooks for senior high school grade X highly emphasized on inference of supporting details with a mean value of 6.24 followed by 1.90, 1.56, 0.68 and 0.52 values of inferences of main ideas (I2), cause and effect (I5), character trait (I6) and predicting outcomes (I7) respectively.

**Table 4: Occurrences and Frequencies of Evaluation Comprehension Sublevels**

Evaluation comprehension sublevels (E)		11 <sup>th</sup> textbook		Total	12 <sup>th</sup> textbook		Total
		Occr.	Frq.		Occr.	Frq.	
E1	Judgment of reality or fantasy	6	1	7	3	9	12
E2	Judgment of fact or opinion	3	3	6	9	2	11
E3	Judgment of adequacy or appropriateness and validity	3	3	6	13	4	14
E4	Judgment of worth, desirability and acceptability	4	-	4	6	1	7
Total		16	7	24*	31	16	50*

\* refers to the inclusion of numbers of undecided sublevels of evaluation comprehension questions in each EFL textbook. These include the following:

- 329. What is your opinion of the poem? (p. 253)*
- 416. What is your view of the customs described in the text? (p. 18)*
- 673. What is your overall reaction to the poem? (p. 189)*
- 681. What is your response to this story? (p. 205)*

Based on the checklist adapted from Barrett (1968), the present researchers agreed that the first comprehension question in grade 11 EFL textbook and the remaining questions in grade 12 textbook had no clear categories into one of the evaluation comprehension sublevels. Therefore, the researchers left them undecided.

Regardless of the abovementioned four comprehension questions, table-4 indicates that the evaluation sublevels of the textbooks have six and twelve percent representation of their respective total reading comprehension questions of 366 and 394. Questions of judgment of reality or fantasy demand students to judge texts with an eye towards exaggeration or existence. With this regard, the sublevel possesses the highest frequency within the recount text of grade 12

textbook that describes about a childhood memory. E2 sublevel, on the other hand, demands students to make use of their subject matter knowledge of the reading texts to evaluate the extent to which the information raised in texts is new for them or how far the writer is trying to sway their thoughts. Additionally, it requires them to judge the intention of the author. However, such learning opportunities of reading comprehension do not occur in different units of grade 11 EFL textbook except in two texts with which students are asked to answer the questions: 63 “Do you already study in any of the ways suggested?” (p. 55) and 176 “Do you think the text makes it sound attractive? Identify words or phrases which in your opinion persuade people to go there?” (p. 124).

Compared with grade 11 EFL textbook, occurrences of E3 and E4 sublevels are more emphasized in grade 12 textbook. E3 sublevel in particular elicits students to evaluate the texts from the viewpoints of completeness or incompleteness and agreement or disagreement. Judgment of worth, desirability and acceptability is the other sublevel that occurs in six reading exercises and has one frequency within an exercise of grade 12 EFL textbook. This sublevel is the most difficult evaluative skill which is characterized by students’ moral code or value judgment towards characters’ actions or utterances in the text, educational, social, or economic policy of a country, and writer’s proposal. These include the underneath qualitative content analysis drawn from appendix B.

*479. Do you think the function was really important and urgent? How can you tell? (p. 83)*

*537. How useful is it? (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) (p. 110)*

*671. Do you think the poet’s comparison between the natural behaviour of vultures and the commandant of a concentration camp is fair? Justify your answer. (p. 189)*

These comprehension questions require students’ judgment of importance and acceptability of the ideas provided in the reading texts.

The abovementioned results show that EFL students’ leaning opportunity of text evaluation is low and hence their poor critical thinking skills are attributed to a hindrance of practicing high order cognitive demands of comprehension questions in the majority of reading exercises. This becomes a serious problem when textbooks provide insufficient attention for the teaching of evaluation comprehension abilities (Dockx, Bellens & De Fraine, 2020).

**Table 5: Occurrences and Frequencies of Personal Response Sublevels**

Personal response comprehension sublevels (PR)		11 <sup>th</sup> textbook		Total	12 <sup>th</sup> textbook		Total
		Occr.	Frq.		Occ.	Frq.	
PR1	Emotional response to contents	6	-	6	6	2	8
PR2	Identification with characters or incidents	2	-	2	3	2	5
PR3	Imagery	-	-	-	-	-	-
PR4	Creating	7	3	10	7	2	9
Total		15	3	18	16	6	22

Table 5 indicates that in grade 11 EFL textbook, the number of personal response comprehension questions is almost the same as the number of evaluation comprehension questions, the preceding high order cognitive demands. Grade 12 textbook, on the other hand, reduces students' learning opportunity of the former comprehension level by half of the later comprehension type. It also shows that the textbooks do not have any comprehension questions for the development of imagery comprehension ability. This underlies the problem that the instructional materials do not encourage students to practice mental images which result from the practices of transposing the reading texts to pictures or dramas and describing the physical or psychological states of characters, incidents or actions. Regardless of the presence imagery sublevel, the following are some of the questions that describe personal response comprehension sublevels.

- 71. Which of them (the medical innovators) do you admire most? (p. 71)*
- 502. Which text do you prefer and why? (p. 84)*
- 271. What would you do if you had been in the writer's situation? (p. 201)*
- 465. How do you feel about each problem? (p.63)*
- 195. Do you know anyone who benefits from tourism? How do they benefit? (p. 127)*
- 462. Write your own version of the poem. (p. 49)*

The first two comprehension questions demand students' personal feelings of interest, fear, amusement, and hate whereas the second two questions call for their personal experiences of and sensitivities to the events or actions described in the reading texts. Compared to the later comprehension sublevel, the former sublevel had a better place in the textbooks which initiate students to express their emotions towards the texts they have read in 11 comprehension questions across exercises. The highest sublevel (PR4) is represented by the last two questions in the above extract which require students to produce their personal ideas relevant to the subjects of texts they have read. Problem solving is the other feature of this sublevel that helps students develop their creative thinking skills through initiating them to generate action plans

deemed necessary to manage problems raised in the reading texts. With this regard, the study found out three comprehension questions in grade 12 EFL textbook stated as follows.

468. *With your partner discuss the advice you would give to each of the writers (p. 63).*

478. Write a reply to the letter you are given in the style of Sefanit's (p.65).

707. What more should be done to improve life in shanty towns? (p. 239).

#### 4. Conclusions And Recommendations

Reading comprehension questions of secondary EFL textbooks cover the cognitive and affective mental functions at different levels, but they do not provide balanced distributions for the comprehension levels. For instance, reorganization comprehension level is the least pedagogical objective of teaching reading in the textbooks. Additionally, students do not have the learning opportunity of all sublevels across the macro thinking level. This implies that the comprehension questions could be designed based on the general pedagogical objectives of reading comprehension abilities. Students' low achievements in reading examinations could be attributed to the missed learning opportunities of each sublevel of the reading comprehension questions of the textbooks.

Therefore, the design and practice of teaching reading in Ethiopian secondary EFL textbooks should incorporate all comprehension sublevels at equal level of emphasis. The teaching of a reading text needs to engage students into a variety of cognitive demands. Additionally, reading comprehension questions should pay a heed for problem solving mental functions as a result of which students can be critical and creative readers.

#### 5. Conflict of Interests

The researchers declare that they did not have any conflict of interests.

---

#### References

- Anderson,L., Krathwohl,D., Airasian,P., Cruikshank,K., Mayer, R., and Pintrich, P. (2001). A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. New York: Longman.
- Barrett, T. (1968). Taxonomy of Cognitive and Affective Dimensions of Reading Comprehension. Un published paper, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- Bloom, B. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals, by a committee of college and university examiners. Handbook I: Cognitive domain. New York, NY: Longmans, Green.

---

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 21:12 December 2021

Yihun Birhanu Aynalem (MA) and Alamirew Gebiremariam Tessemand, Ph.D.

An Investigation into Reading Comprehension Questions of Secondary EFL Textbooks: Grades 11 and 12 in Focus

- Day, R. and Park, J. (2005). Developing Reading Comprehension Questions. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 17(1), pp. 60-73.
- Dockx J., Bellens K., and De Fraine B. (2020). Do Textbooks Matter For Reading Comprehension? A Study in Flemish Primary Education. *Journal of Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol 10, pp. 1-19.
- Fitria, E., Syarif, H., and Refnaldi, R. (2014). An Analysis of Reading Comprehension Questions in Textbooks “English Texts In Use And Look Ahead” For Senior High School Grade X. *Journal English Language Teaching (ELT)*, 2(2).
- Graves, K. (2000). *Designing Language Course: A Guide for Teachers*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle Thomson Learning.
- Johannesson, P., and Perjons, E. (2014). *An Introduction to Design Science*. Springer.
- Kusumawardani, D. K. (2016). An analysis of reading comprehension questions in the textbook entitled "Bahasa dan Sastra (Peminatan Bahasa dan Budaya) for SMA/MA grade X" Based on Barrett's Taxonomy
- Marzano, R. J. et al. (1988). *Dimensions of thinking: A framework for curriculum and instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Piaget, J. (1970). *Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child*. New York: Orion Press.
- Rezat, S. (2006). A Model of Textbook Use. *Proceedings 30<sup>th</sup> Conference of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education*, V.4, pp. 409-416.
- Richards, J., and Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Cambridge University Press.
- Sidek, H.M. (2010). An analysis of the EFL secondary reading curriculum in Malaysia: approaches to reading and preparation for higher education. Doctor of Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh.
- Sunggingwati, D. (2003). *Reading Questions of Junior High School English Textbooks. BAHASA DAN SENI, Tahun.*
- Surtantini, R. (2019). Reading Comprehension Question Levels in Grade X English Students' Book in Light of the Issues of Curriculum Policy in Indonesia. *PAROLE: Journal of Linguistics and Education*, 9(1), 44–52.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological process*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1991). *Voices of mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## APPENDIXES

### Appendix A: Reading comprehension sublevels

Levels	Sublevels	Sample instances	
<b>Literal Comprehension</b>	<b>Recognition/Recall</b>	Details (L1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find the following information: date of flight, time in orbit, speed of the space craft, and the height reached.</li> <li>How much land was claimed?</li> </ul>
		Main ideas (L2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What important thing did the character find out?</li> <li>What uses were made of _____?</li> </ul>
		Sequence (L3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tell how Geraldine changed her white dress to red and yellow and what happened then</li> <li>Tell in correct order</li> </ul>
		Comparison (L4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for ideas which conflict with each other.</li> <li>How was this _____ different from others?</li> </ul>
		Cause and effect (L5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find the sentence that tells why _____ did (or was) _____</li> <li>Why was _____ so determined to _____?</li> </ul>
		Character traits (L6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read orally the parts which prove that he was clever, bold, kind, courageous, and intelligent.</li> <li>Describe her attitude toward life.</li> </ul>
<p>Reorganization requires the student to analyze, synthesize, and/ or organize ideas or information explicitly stated in the selection. To produce the desired thought product, the reader may utilize the statements of the author verbatim or he or she may paraphrase or translate the author's statements. R = Reorganization (R1, R2, R3...)</p>			
<b>Reorganization</b>	Classifying (R1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place the following under the proper heading.</li> <li>Which of the following _____ does not belong?</li> </ul>	
	Outlining (R2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organize the facts into main heads and subheads</li> <li>Divide the story into _____ parts.</li> </ul>	
	Summarizing (R3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What has happened up to this point?</li> <li>Tell the story in your own words.</li> </ul>	
	Synthesizing, putting textual ideas together (R4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What was the speed of the _____?</li> <li>On what day did _____ happen?</li> </ul>	
<p>Inferential comprehension is demonstrated by the student when he or she uses the ideas and information explicitly stated in the selection, his or her intuition, and his or her personal experience as a basis for conjectures and hypotheses. I = Inferential (I1, I2, I3...)</p>			
	Supporting details (I1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did she converse with the natives?</li> <li>Do you think _____?</li> </ul>	
	Main ideas (I2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the main idea of this _____?</li> </ul>	



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the poem or story saying?</li> </ul>
	Sequence (I3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will happen next?</li> <li>• What happened between _____ and _____?</li> </ul>
	Comparison (I4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does _____ resemble _____?</li> <li>• Are _____ and _____ related?</li> </ul>
	Cause and effect (I5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why was it necessary to _____?</li> <li>• Why did they _____?</li> </ul>
	Character traits (I6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does _____ tell us about her?</li> <li>• What kind of person is _____?</li> </ul>
	Predicting outcomes (I7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think will happen?</li> <li>• Read _____ and guess what will happen.</li> </ul>
	Figurative language (I8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is meant by the phrase, “continue unrolling the map”?</li> </ul>
<p>The students make an evaluative judgment by comparing ideas presented in the selection with external criteria provided by the teacher, other authorities, or other written sources, or with internal criteria provided by the reader’s experiences, knowledge, or values. E = Evaluation (E1, E2, E3...)</p>		
<b>Evaluation</b>	Judgments of reality or fantasy (E1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did _____ really happen?</li> <li>• What similarity or difference does the text have with the culture you live in?</li> </ul>
	Judgments of fact or opinion (E2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think _____ had anything to do with _____?</li> <li>• What strange ideas did _____ have?</li> </ul>
	Judgments of adequacy or appropriateness and validity (E3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is adequate information given about _____?</li> <li>• What part of the story best describes the main character?</li> <li>• Find proof from other sources that _____?</li> </ul>
	Judgments of worth, desirability and acceptability (E4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is _____ the right thing to do?</li> <li>• Is _____ acting fairly?</li> </ul>
<p>Personal response involves all the previously cited cognitive dimensions of reading, for it deals with the psychological and aesthetic impact of the selection on the reader (Barrett, as cited in Smith &amp; Barrett, 1974). It is also a level at which a reader is asked to reorganize the content of the text into a new structure through generating or producing (Anderson &amp; Krathwohl, 2001). PR= Personal Response (PR1, PR2, and PR3).</p>		
<b>Perso</b>	Emotional response to the content (PR1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you surprised?</li> <li>• Was this selection interesting? Funny?</li> </ul>

Identification with characters or incidents (PR2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What words will describe the feelings of _____?</li> <li>• Do you think he will follow the advice?</li> </ul>
Generating or producing (PR3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What solutions do you think is important to control early marriage in Ethiopia?</li> <li>• Give your own reasons why taxi drivers drive carefully?</li> </ul>

Adapted from Anderson et al. (2011), Barrett (1974), and Day and Park (2005)

### Appendix B: A Sample Grid of Reading Comprehension Questions

No.	Comprehension questions	Occurrence of sublevels	Frequency
1	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Exercise-1</b></p> <p>1. Find lines or phrases in the song that mean the following</p> <p><b>a</b> Africa was the place where thousands of years ago the first humans lived.</p>	Recognition/recall of comparison	2
2	<b>b</b> All Africans have many common interests and feelings that link their lives and what will happen to them in the future.	Recognition/recall of comparison	+
3	<b>c</b> Many Africans had to fight for their independence from colonial powers.	Recognition/recall of comparison	+
4	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Exercise-2</b></p> <p>2. The phrase ‘Let us’ is used several times in the anthem. This is a formal way in which a group, or a spokesperson for a group, can make a promise or pledge to do something important. Find the lines that begin ‘Let us ...’ and decide what promises or pledges the people of the African Union make as they sing the song.</p>	Recognition/recall of detail	0
5	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Exercise-3</b></p> <p>1 True or false</p> <p><b>a</b> Africa needs to work on its own, without the rest of the world.</p>	Inference of detail	3
6	<b>b</b> The United States of America will play a part in the AU.	Inference of detail	+
7	<b>c</b> The AU will work to reduce poverty in Africa.	Inference of detail	+
8	<b>d</b> Ordinary people will play a part in the AU.	Recognition/recall of detail	

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 21:12 December 2021

Yihun Birhanu Aynalem (MA) and Alamirew Gebiremariam Tessemand, Ph.D.

An Investigation into Reading Comprehension Questions of Secondary EFL Textbooks: Grades 11 and 12 in Focus

			3
9	<b>e</b> There will be equality for women in the AU.	Recognition/recall of detail	+
10	<b>f</b> Young people have an important role in the AU.	Recognition/recall of detail	+
11	<b>g</b> Africans who have left the Continent should not play a part in its development.	Recognition/recall of detail	+
12	<b>h</b> The goals of the AU must be achieved by 2030.	Inference of detail	+

=====