

AN ANALYSIS OF READING COMPREHENSION QUESTION LEVEL ON "TALK ACTIVE " ENGLISH TEXTBOOK

Yeri¹, Ivan Achmad Nurcholis², Yupika Maryansyah³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Muhamadiyah Bengkulu

Correspondence

Email: yeri69109@gmail.com
ivanachmadn@umb.ac.id
yupikamaryansyah@umb.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the levels of reading comprehension questions found in the *Talk Active* English textbook for tenth graders. The research employed a descriptive approach and utilized Clymer's taxonomy, as cited by Brassel (2008:17–18), which categorizes reading comprehension into three levels: literal, inferential, and critical. These categories were organized into a checklist table for analysis. Results indicated that out of ten units in the textbook, seven contained questions from each level, totaling 80 questions overall. Specifically, the distribution included 56 literal comprehension questions, 14 inferential questions, and 10 critical comprehension questions. The study suggests that teachers should evaluate students' reading abilities when choosing textbooks to ensure that the material is suitable for their grade level and learning needs.

Keywords: *reading comprehension question, level reading comprehension question, English textbook*

INTRODUCTION

The use of textbooks in classrooms plays a crucial role in the educational process, providing essential support for both teachers and students. English textbooks, in particular, assist teachers by offering diverse resources to enhance creative teaching methods, fulfilling various educational needs. Besides instructional content, these textbooks often include assessments, enabling teachers to evaluate student abilities effectively. According to Robertson and Nunn, as cited by Nurianti (2020), teachers rely on textbooks as primary tools to prepare and conduct learning activities, underscoring their importance in education. Furthermore, textbooks facilitate structured learning activities, promoting active language practice and engagement among students.

The senior high school English textbook includes various types of reading test questions designed to gauge students' proficiency. These questions require students to use the reading material in the textbook as a guide to provide their answers. The reading exams typically consist of multiple-choice and essay questions, which play a crucial role in the learning process. Additionally, posing questions about the text helps students monitor their comprehension while reading (Işır & Uyar, 2022). However, understanding reading comprehension remains a significant challenge. Nurcholis et al. (2019) support this observation, noting that while

students may acquire textual knowledge, such as understanding narrative and descriptive texts, they still face difficulties in grasping the meaning of the text. To address these challenges, lecturers employ various strategies, including having students read aloud and translate paragraphs, rather than relying on a single method.

Reading comprehension questions can be categorized into different levels of understanding. Cheryl (2000) and Elly (2010), as cited in Safitri and Melati (2023), identified three key levels: literal, inferential, and critical or evaluative. These levels are widely used by experts to classify reading comprehension questions in English textbooks. According to Clymer and Brassel (2008:17–18), literal comprehension represents the lowest level, requiring readers to recall or retell explicit facts from the text. For instance, a question might ask, "Where was the cat?" Inferential comprehension, the next level, requires readers to deduce or interpret implied information in the text, such as, "Will the cat climb the tree again?" The highest level, critical or evaluative comprehension, involves making judgments about the text, supported by reasoning. An example question is, "The cat had good reason to climb the tree because it wanted to catch the bird. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain." Barrett's taxonomy, as elaborated by Javed et al. (2015), supports these categorizations, emphasizing the development of modules to improve ESL students' comprehension. This taxonomy addresses literal, inferential, and reorganization skills, aiming to enhance reading comprehension in Malaysian secondary schools.

This study focuses on analyzing the reading comprehension questions in the Yudhistira English textbook *Talk Active* designed for tenth-grade students. While the textbook covers various chapters, including self-introduction, compliments and congratulations, good plants, gorgeous Indonesia, school events, past activities, recounts, biographies, and popular songs, this research specifically examines the levels of comprehension questions. According to Clymer, as cited in Brassell and Rasinski (2008), the effectiveness of a textbook can be assessed by analyzing the distribution of reading comprehension questions, ranging from lower to higher levels of difficulty. This approach helps teachers enhance students' reading comprehension skills. After reviewing the *Talk Active* textbook, the researcher identified the presence of questions addressing different comprehension levels. To gain a deeper understanding, this study aims to determine the specific distribution of reading comprehension question levels in this English textbook, which is widely used by tenth-grade senior high school students.

Several previous studies provide a foundation for this research. First, Surtantini (2019) examined the levels of reading comprehension questions in the English students' textbook for grade X, addressing concerns related to Indonesian curriculum policy. The study revealed that while 21% of the comprehension questions targeted higher-order thinking skills, the majority—nearly 80%—focused on lower-order thinking skills. Similarly, Nurianti (2020) conducted an analysis of reading comprehension question levels in an English textbook for senior high school students. The findings showed that 38% of the questions required comprehension, 35% focused on recall, 4% involved application, and another 38% emphasized understanding. Overall, 77% of the questions indicated a prevalence of lower-order thinking skills.

Building on these studies, this research aims to analyze the levels of reading comprehension questions in the *Talk Active English* textbook used by tenth-grade senior high school students. Accordingly, this study is titled "An Analysis of Reading Comprehension Question Levels in the English Textbook 'Talk Active.'"

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyze and interpret the findings in order to answer the research questions comprehensively, drawing conclusions based on the data. The object of the study was the *Talk Active English* textbook, published by Yudisthira, used by tenth-grade senior high school students. The research instruments included a table checklist designed based on three levels of reading comprehension questions, as outlined by Clymer (cited in Brassel, 2008:17–18), which categorized questions into Literal, Inferential, or Critical levels. The table consisted of three columns: one for listing the questions, another for categorizing each question by its comprehension level, and a third providing explanations for each categorization. The data collection procedure involved borrowing the textbook, identifying the levels of reading comprehension questions, and gathering the relevant data. For data analysis, the researcher identified and recorded each question's comprehension level in the table checklist, explained their classifications, and concluded with a critical evaluation of the distribution of comprehension questions across the three levels.

FINDING

The English textbook *Talk Active* by Yudhistira, designed for tenth-grade senior high school students, consists of ten units that students are required to study. In this study, the researcher analyzed the levels of reading comprehension questions in each chapter. The findings are presented in Table 4.1 below.

Table 2 Level of Reading Comprehension Question

No	Unit	Level of Reading Comprehension Question		
		Literal	Inferential	Critical
1	Unit 1	0	0	0
2	Unit 2	3	1	1
3	Unit 3	10		
4	Unit 4	13	3	1
5	Unit 5			
6	Unit 6			
7	Unit 7	3	2	1
8	Unit 8	7	3	2
9	Unit 9	12	5	2
10	Unit 10	8		3
		56	14	10
		80		

All of the textbook's reading comprehension questions are presented in the table above. As shown, the textbook consists of 10 units, but only seven include reading comprehension materials. Units 1, 5, and 6 do not contain any reading passages. Unit 1 focuses on self-introduction, emphasizing speaking and listening skills. Similarly, Unit 5 concentrates on writing skills, requiring students to compose announcements and complete fill-in-the-blank tasks. Unit 6 focuses on teaching students to write sentences using the simple past tense. However, the remaining units include one or more reading passages accompanied by comprehension questions.

The analysis revealed that the textbook included three levels of reading comprehension questions: 56 literal, 14 inferential, and 10 critical, totaling 80 questions. Among these, literal comprehension questions were the most frequently used.

Literal Reading Comprehension Question

There are 56 reading comprehension questions categorized at the literal level in the textbook. Table 3 provides examples of these literal reading comprehension questions, including the following:

Table 3 examples of literal reading comprehension question

No	Question	Unit	Description
1	When is the picnic?	3	Students may readily locate the answer to the question, which explains time, in the text.
2	Where is the picnic being held?	3	The question explains location, and students may readily locate the solution in the text.
3	Who is the intended audience?	8	The question explains a character in the literature, and students can readily find the solution in the text.
4	What will we get when getting around the object?	6	The majority of the information requested in the question is found in the text itself; no evaluation or analysis of the text is necessary.
5	What does the first paragraph tell the reader	8	Evaluation of recall comprehension is simple.

The table above presents examples of literal reading comprehension questions found in the textbook. Literal comprehension, the most basic level of understanding, requires readers to recall or identify specific details provided in the text. It was found that the dominant level of reading comprehension in *Talk Active* for tenth-grade students was at the literal level, with most questions focusing on the names of characters and details of settings. These questions generally emphasize basic information, such as names, characters, places, and times in the story. They typically begin with question words like *what*, *who*, *when*, and *where*. Additionally, these questions often require students to recall detailed information or specific facts from the text.

Inferential Reading Comprehension Question

The textbook contains fourteen reading comprehension questions developed at the inferential reading comprehension level. Several examples of these inferential questions are listed in Table 4, as follows:

Table 4 examples of inferential reading comprehension question

No	Question	Unit	Description
1	How does the writer identify the object of description?	4	There are clue of the information in the text.
2	"Prepare the lifeboats!" What does this instruction mean?	7	There are clue of the information in the text.
3	Give an example from the text showing the use of past tense.	8	The text's content is related by the pupils' prior knowledge.
4	Why do you think the buffalo didn't want to answer the tiger's question, but told the tiger to ask himself?	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reader interprets any information that is suggested or inferred from a text. • Textual clues exist, and the pupils' prior knowledge connects the text's material.
5	"You were really ungrateful. You treated us badly." What is the synonym of the underlined word?	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reader interprets any information that is suggested or inferred from a text. • Textual clues exist, and the pupils' prior knowledge connects the text's material.

Several examples of inferential reading comprehension questions, which represent the second level of reading comprehension, were presented in Table 4 above. This level, referred to as inferential comprehension, involves the reader's ability to derive meaning from information implied or inferred in the text. The textbook *Talk Active* for tenth graders contains only 14 questions at this level. To answer these questions, students must identify clues within the text and connect them with their prior knowledge.

This indicates that inferential comprehension questions rank second in prevalence in the textbook. At this level, students begin to analyze or evaluate the text by interpreting hints provided, identifying examples, and making predictions about the text's content. It encourages students to express their thoughts and insights about the material, moving beyond surface-level understanding.

Critical Reading Comprehension Question

The textbook includes ten reading comprehension questions designed at the critical reading comprehension level. Examples of these critical reading comprehension questions are presented in Table 4 and are as follows:

Table 5 examples of critical reading comprehension question

No.	Question	Unit	Description
1	What are the expressions that you usually use to compliment and congratulate other people in Indonesian? List them	2	forming a view regarding the data in the text.
2	However, only a third of the kids who took the third class flight made it out alive. Which meaning does this statement seem to imply? Please elaborate on your viewpoint.	7	forming a view regarding the data in the text.
3	With your partner, list the facts about Roald Dahl in chronological order	8	The information in the text that the reader has read is interacted with.
4	If you were the farmer, what would you do with the tiger	9	forming a view regarding the data in the text.
5	What are the messages implied by the lyrics and the poem above?	10	Forming an opinion based on the facts in the text; evaluation and judgment call for careful consideration and critical thought.

Examples of critical reading comprehension questions, the highest level of reading comprehension, are presented in Table 4 above. This level, considered the most advanced in the taxonomy, requires thorough evaluation of the information provided in the text. The *Talk Active* textbook for tenth-grade students contains only ten questions at this level, indicating its limited use. This may be due to the textbook's target audience, as tenth-grade students may find it challenging to analyze, evaluate, and draw conclusions from complex material.

The summary of critical questions highlights that students are encouraged to form critical judgments by comparing ideas and expressing their opinions about the text. They are expected to apply standards learned from teachers, written references, and other credible sources. Through this process, students develop critical judgment skills by applying critical thinking to the problems or issues presented in the text.

DISCUSSION

Questions play a crucial role in identifying and clarifying the reader's purpose while reading. They influence the strategies used, the reading pace, the depth of comprehension, and the approach taken to understand the text. Essentially, questions are statements that require a

response, helping students focus on the subject matter and activate their prior knowledge. By including a variety of higher-level comprehension questions, textbooks can effectively foster the development of critical thinking skills among students (Akhmad et al., 2022).

The English textbook used by students includes several questions aimed at assessing their level of understanding. Questioning is an essential part of learning to read, as it helps gauge comprehension and promotes deeper engagement with the text. According to Clymer in Brassel (2008:17–18), reading comprehension questions can be categorized into three levels: literal, inferential, and critical.

From this research, it was found that seven out of ten units in the students' English textbook contain reading questions, totaling 80 questions. These are divided into three levels of comprehension: 56 literal comprehension questions, 14 inferential comprehension questions, and 10 critical comprehension questions. The findings highlight that literal questions dominate the textbook, consistent with Caldwell's (2014:225) observation that many textbooks tend to focus predominantly on literal comprehension while rarely incorporating higher-order questions.

Similarly, prior research by 氣象囁 et al. (2013) revealed that reading questions appeared in 10 out of 18 chapters in another English textbook, comprising 114 questions. These were distributed across 100 literal comprehension questions, 3 inferential comprehension questions, and 11 critical comprehension questions, again emphasizing the prevalence of literal comprehension as the dominant level in English textbooks.

First, literal questions. The research found that the reading comprehension questions in the textbook primarily focus on easily identifiable elements, such as names, characters, places, times, main ideas, and other details directly presented in the text. According to Indah and Ramadhana (2020), textbook reading questions can be divided into two categories: low-order thinking skills and higher-order thinking skills. While higher-order thinking skills require students to engage in complex cognitive processes, low-order thinking skills merely ask students to recall factual information. Therefore, literal questions fall under the category of low-order thinking.

As explained by Clymer in Brassel (2008:17–18), literal comprehension is the simplest of the three levels of reading comprehension. It involves the ability to recall or recognize specific details from the text, such as character names, timeframes, settings, or other explicit information. At this level, students do not need to analyze or evaluate the material to form answers; instead, they rely directly on the information provided in the text to guide their responses.

This level also represents the dominant focus of the textbook. This finding aligns with research by Suntartini (2019), who observed that while 21% of comprehension questions assessed higher-level thinking, the majority—nearly 80%—focused on lower levels of reading comprehension.

The second level of reading comprehension questions in the textbook is the inferential level, categorized as the middle level of

comprehension. The analysis revealed 14 questions at this level, all of which require students to locate clues in the text and make connections between the information using their prior knowledge. To answer these questions, students need to engage in moderate analysis.

Day and Park (in Il- & Th, 2017) explain that students operate at the inferential level when they use their background knowledge to answer questions that are not explicitly addressed in the text. Similarly, Surtantini's (2019) findings show that comprehension questions created by senior high school teachers in Surabaya predominantly target the literal level, followed by the inferential level, and include only a small portion of critical-level questions.

Surtantini argues for a better balance between literal and more complex comprehension questions in students' textbooks. She emphasizes the importance of incorporating a variety of question types to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the material. This approach ensures that students are challenged to move beyond surface-level comprehension to develop deeper critical and inferential thinking skills.

The final level of reading comprehension questions in the textbook is the critical level, regarded as the highest and most complex category of reading comprehension. At this level, students are required to analyze, compare, and express their opinions. According to Clymer in Brassel (2008:17–18), answering critical questions involves significant engagement, not only with the text but also with other people or texts the reader has encountered. This process demands a high level of critical thinking and an in-depth investigation to form well-informed judgments and assessments.

Evaluating a reader's performance at this level can be challenging, as responses depend heavily on the reader's background knowledge, interests, and personality. Supporting this observation, research by Indah and Ramadhana (2020) revealed that 38% of reading comprehension questions fall under the understanding level, 35% under the remembering level, and only 4% under the applying level. This suggests that 77% of the questions align with low-order thinking skills, indicating a predominance of less challenging questions in the textbook. The infrequent use of higher-order questions may reflect the author's intent to cater to the students' capabilities, as critical comprehension questions are inherently more demanding to answer.

Literal questions, categorized as low-level questions, are more prevalent in the textbook because they are familiar and straightforward for both students and the textbook author to address. In contrast, critical questions—high-level questions—are rarely included in textbooks, as they often require students to engage in deeper thinking and analysis, which can take considerable time for teachers to facilitate. Additionally, the English textbook is designed for tenth graders, who may lack the vocabulary and background knowledge required to critically evaluate texts.

This raises the question: why does the author include a mix of literal, inferential, and critical questions? The intention might be to gradually develop students' comprehension skills, beginning with simpler questions to build confidence and progressing to more complex ones as students' abilities improve. This approach aligns with the goal of scaffolding students' learning, ensuring they are challenged while still being supported in their development.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that there are three levels of reading comprehension questions in the students' English textbook: Literal, Inferential, and Critical Comprehension Questions. The textbook contains 80 Literal Comprehension Questions, 14 Inferential Comprehension Questions, and 10 Critical Comprehension Questions. The dominant level of reading comprehension questions found in the textbook is the literal level.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of this study, the *English Talk Active* textbook used by tenth-grade students at Bengkulu City Senior High School includes reading comprehension questions in 7 out of its 10 units, with a total of 80 questions. These questions are categorized into three levels of reading comprehension: Literal, Inferential, and Critical. The Literal Comprehension section contains 56 questions, the Inferential Comprehension section includes 14 questions, and the Critical Comprehension section comprises 10 questions. These results indicate that teachers should consider students' reading comprehension proficiency when selecting or utilizing textbooks. This approach ensures the chosen textbook aligns with the students' grade level and learning objectives, promoting effective learning outcomes.

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