



An Analysis of Reading Comprehension Questions in English Textbooks *Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress* and *Pathway to English* Based on Barrett's Taxonomy

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Abstract

This descriptive qualitative research aimed to find out the cognitive levels of reading comprehension questions found in English textbooks "Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress" and "Pathway to English" and to investigate English teachers' opinions on the cognitive levels of Barrett's taxonomy. There are five levels in this taxonomy which are literal comprehension, reorganization, inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation. The instruments of this research were a checklist table and a semi-structured interview. The result of the analysis showed that there were 117 questions (27%) for the literal comprehension level, 98 questions (22%) for the reorganization level, 176 questions (40%) for inferential comprehension level, 25 questions (6%) for evaluation level, and 21 questions (5%) categorized into appreciation level. The percentages of cognitive levels in the textbooks did not meet the recommended proportion. From the interview result, it was found that the English teachers considered Barrett's taxonomy as the suitable and practical framework to analyse the cognitive levels of reading comprehension questions. The teachers also stated that Barrett's taxonomy aligns with Merdeka's curriculum objectives.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an important skill that language learners must have. It is a cognitive process that involves students comparing individual words, comprehending their meaning, and building mental representations of the text (Escar, 2022). It becomes a primary source of comprehensible input in language and the most needed skill to be employed by students (Eskey, 2002). Comprehension in reading has numerous advantages for students. By understanding or comprehending the reading text, students can gain more information that they need through various sources like journals, books, newspapers, and so on. It helps students to understand and interpret the information, as well as apply it as consideration to generate a conclusion, evaluation, or judgment. This ability will assist students to reach their learning objectives.

Although reading comprehension has been one of the main goals of English subjects in Indonesia, this ability remains difficult for students to master. In 2019, a study from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed that students in Indonesia performed at a low level of reading comprehension. The data collected in 2018 shows that around 85% of Indonesian 15-year-old students perform reading ability at level 1, which is the lowest proficiency level in PISA (2019). The student's mean reading scores were only 371 which is statistically below the OECD average. It makes Indonesia have the sixth-lowest reading performance rate among 79 participating countries. This study indicates that there is a need for the teacher and government must improve students' reading comprehension ability.

To deal with the information above, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in Indonesia developed and launched a new curriculum, that is widely known as the *Merdeka* curriculum. This curriculum aims to improve students' competency in literacy and numeracy and to develop their characters that reflect Pancasila students' profile. Through the implementation of this taxonomy, students are encouraged to improve the soft skills needed in the 21st century, such as communication, collaboration, leadership, and so on.

The current curriculum has some characteristics which differ from the previous curriculum. The first characteristic is that this curriculum focuses on improving students' soft skills and character through Project-based learning. Through project-based learning, students are encouraged to enhance their creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. After that, this curriculum only focuses on essential materials. Merdeka Curriculum presents fewer learning materials with more comprehensive discussions and practices for each lesson. By concentrating on crucial material, students are encouraged to improve their comprehension. Another characteristic of this new curriculum is that it allows teachers or local government to adjust several educational aspects, such as teaching materials and learning methods.

The implementation of the new curriculum and all of its objectives and characteristics cause significant changes in the educational elements, especially in the textbook as it serves as the representation and interpretation of the curriculum. This resulted in the publication of new textbooks that are organized based on the Merdeka curriculum standards. The publication of new textbooks allows many researchers to analyze and evaluate the quality of the textbooks in many aspects. In this study, the researcher will try to analyze to what extent the textbook can improve students' reading comprehension.

Improving reading comprehension necessitates active interaction with the text, critical thinking, and logical reasoning (Escar, 2022). Therefore, the effectiveness of a textbook in improving students' reading comprehension can be measured by analyzing to what extent the textbooks provide reading comprehension questions that promote different cognitive processes. As revealed by several studies, the use of different levels of reading comprehension questions can effectively improve students' critical thinking which results in the improvement of their reading comprehension ability (Hart, 2007; Hidayati, Inderawati, Loeneto, 2020; Nourdad, Masoudi & Rahimali, 2018) Moreover, according to Reeves (2012), stimulating students with a good proportion of the low, middle, and high-level questions is effective to enhance students' comprehension.

In analyzing the cognitive levels of reading comprehension questions, the use of appropriate taxonomy is needed. The classification of the cognitive level was first introduced by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 widely known as Bloom's Taxonomy. According to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), cognitive levels are classified into six categories that are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In 2001, this taxonomy was revised by Anderson & Krathwohl and then consisted of six levels such as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. This taxonomy is popular and widely used by teachers in constructing or analyzing questions for many subjects and language skills. However, when it comes to analyzing the cognitive levels in reading comprehension, Bloom's taxonomy may not be the best choice.

Reeves in his study (2012) evaluated taxonomies for categorizing the cognitive levels of questions. He revealed that Bloom's taxonomy does not include the cognitive process specifically involved in comprehending reading text. According to Reeves (2012), the more suitable taxonomy for analyzing the cognitive levels in reading is the taxonomy that is specifically designed for reading, that is Barrett's Taxonomy. Barrett's Taxonomy, designed by Thomas C. Barrett in 1967, is a framework that was originally designed to assist teachers in analyzing comprehension questions in reading (Clymer, 1968). This taxonomy is organized by extracting several ideas and categories from Bloom (1956), Sanders (1966), Letton (1958), and Guszak (1965). One obvious difference between this taxonomy with Bloom's Taxonomy is that it has an appreciation level that aims to trigger and involve students' emotions and comments toward the text. This cognitive level is in line with the Merdeka curriculum standard that requires teachers to improve student's critical thinking and develop their character Pancasila student profile.

Moreover, Reeves (2012) also stated that Barrett's Taxonomy can be considered as the more practical framework for analyzing reading comprehension levels since it contains a more detailed and practical classification of comprehension levels than Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. Barrett's Taxonomy consists of five cognitive levels which are arranged from simple to complex: (1) literal comprehension, (2) reorganization, (3) inferential comprehension, (4) evaluation, and (5) appreciation. Each level has several sub-categories to make it easier to understand.

A lot of studies have been conducted to analyze the cognitive level of reading comprehension questions based on Barrett's Taxonomy. Rahma (2019) studied the levels of reading comprehension questions made by English teachers in SMAN 2 Sidoarjo using Barrett Taxonomy. Another study comes from Göçer (2014) that investigated the distribution of cognitive levels from Barrett's Taxonomy in Turkish written examination questions. A study by Ahmad (2016) analyzed the distribution of comprehension levels of Barrett's taxonomy in the English national examination. Another study comes from Aqeel and Farrah (2019) with the title "Eighth Grade Textbook Reading Comprehension Questions and Barrett's Taxonomy: Teachers' Perspectives at Hebron District, Palestine". Moreover, Amalya, Anugerahwati, and Yaniafari (2020) also investigated the types and frequency of reading comprehension questions included in the English coursebook "Bright" according to Barrett's Taxonomy.

Those studies have analyzed the cognitive level of reading comprehension questions. However, as far as research is concerned, only limited studies analyze the comprehension questions found in the English textbook published for Merdeka Curriculum, especially by using Barrett's Taxonomy. The researcher analyzed the English textbook "Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress" for SMA/SMK/MA and "Pathway to English" for SMA/MA which is used for 10th-grade students. The textbook "Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress" was published by Kemendikbudristek and "Pathway to English" by Erlangga in 2022. Due to the current publication of these textbooks, the analysis of the contents in the textbooks can provide significant outcomes for English language learning.

Another topic that the researcher is concerned with investigating is teachers' opinions on the classification of comprehension level in Barrett's Taxonomy. As stated by Kemendikbudristek, the Merdeka curriculum requires teachers to adjust or create learning materials and assessments according to the analysis of students' needs and abilities. Therefore, a discussion about Barrett's Taxonomy as the appropriate framework for reading from the teacher's point of view is needed. This needs to be discussed since the teacher is the one who will directly provide the reading comprehension questions for the students.

In short, this study aims to answer the research questions as follows:

1. What are the cognitive levels of reading comprehension questions found in the English textbooks "Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress" and "Pathway to English" based on Barrett's Taxonomy?
2. What are teachers' opinions on the cognitive levels of Barrett's Taxonomy?

METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative research design. As stated by Nassaji (2015), descriptive research is a research design that examines the qualities of a phenomenon rather than discovering causes or mechanisms. Moreover, According to Moleong (2010:6), descriptive qualitative is a study that addresses holistically comprehending the phenomenon of the research subject such as perception, motivation, behavior, action, and so on in the form of words and sentences. Based on the above information, the use of a descriptive qualitative research design is suitable for this research because the data of this research regarding the cognitive levels in the textbooks and teachers' opinions on Barrett's taxonomy are collected in the form of words and sentences.

The first data of this research were all reading comprehension questions found in English textbooks "Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress" and "Pathway to English" which were currently used in the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum. Each of the textbooks consisted of six chapters which covered the learning material for two semesters. In total, the two textbooks consisted of 108 reading activities with 437 reading comprehension questions. The researcher used a checklist table and the indicators to classify the questions into the five cognitive levels in Barrett's Taxonomy which are (1) Literal Comprehension, (2) Reorganization, (3) Inferential Comprehension, (4) Evaluation, and (5) Appreciation. The researcher used the checklist table and the indicator from cognitive levels in Barrett's taxonomy. Then, the

researcher analyzed the distribution of the cognitive levels in Barrett's by calculating the percentages of each cognitive level based on the following formula:

$$P = (n/N) \times 100$$

P: Percentage

n: Number of questions in one level of Barrett's Taxonomy

N: The total number of question

After that, research determined if the proportion in the textbooks fell into good criteria according to the proper percentages recommended by Reeves (2012). The proper rate for each cognitive level is explained in the table below.

Table 1. The Proper Proportion of Cognitive Levels of Barrett's Taxonomy

Cognitive Levels in Barrett Taxonomy		Proportions
1. Literal Comprehension	Lower-Level Questions	40%
2. Reorganization		
3. Inferential Comprehension	Middle-Level Questions	40%
4. Evaluation	Higher-Level Questions	20%
5. Appreciation		

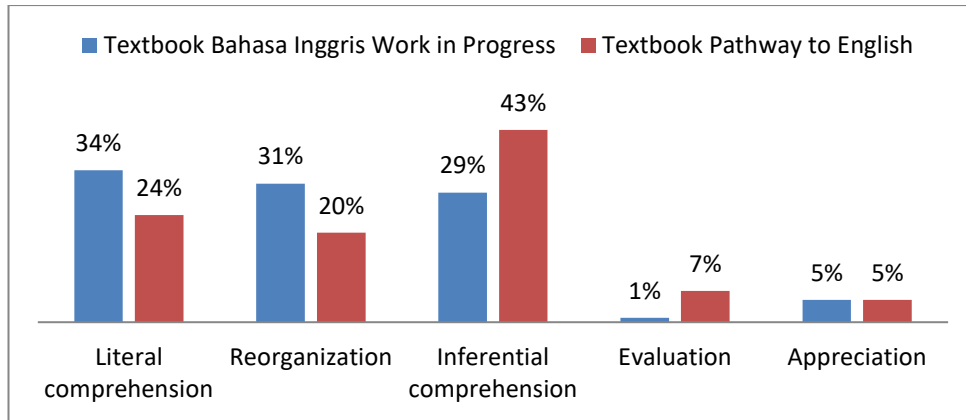
The second data of this research were the teacher's opinions on the cognitive levels in Barrett's taxonomy. Three English teachers who have implemented the *Merdeka* curriculum were chosen as the respondents in this study. The researcher used semi-structured interview questions to collect data from teachers regarding their opinions of the classification of the cognitive levels in Barrett's Taxonomy. Then, the analysis of the data was done by following the three stages of data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) which are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding

To find out the cognitive levels in the textbooks, the researcher collected and analyzed 437 reading comprehension questions which were taken from the English textbooks "Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress" and "Pathway to English" using Barrett's Taxonomy. The result of the analysis data can be seen in the following charts.

Chart 1. The Distribution of Cognitive Levels of Barrett’s Taxonomy per Textbook



The chart above shows the percentages of reading comprehension questions in each textbook based on the cognitive level classification proposed by Barrett’s Taxonomy. It can be seen that the most dominant level of questions in the English Textbook “Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress” is literal comprehension questions with 29 questions (34%). The second most frequent questions in the textbook are at the reorganization level, with 27 questions (31%). After that, this textbook presents 25 reading comprehension questions (29%) in inferential comprehension level. Meanwhile, the two fewer questions found in the books are at the level of evaluation and appreciation. There is only one reading comprehension question at the evaluation level (1%) and 4 reading comprehension questions at the appreciation level (5%).

Besides, the English textbook “Pathway to English” is dominated by reading questions at the inferential comprehension level. There are 151 questions (43%) at this level. The second most dominant level of question found in this textbook is literal comprehension, with 88 questions (24%). At the reorganization level, there are 71 questions (20%). Meanwhile, the total of evaluation and appreciation questions is 24 (7%) and 17 (5%).

From the finding above, it can be stated that the textbook “Pathway to English” present a better proportion of cognitive levels than the textbook “Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress.” The quantity and quality of reading comprehension questions in the textbook “Pathway to English” is quite good as it consists of 351 questions which are dominated by inferential comprehension questions. Meanwhile, the textbook “Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress” only presents 86 questions which are dominated by literal comprehension questions.

Moreover, the distribution of the cognitive questions in the textbooks in total can be seen in the following table.

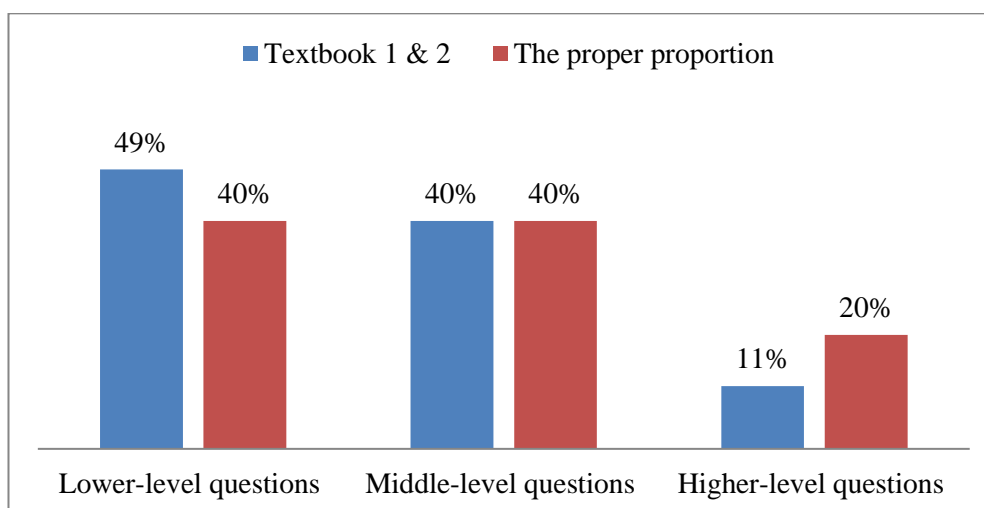
Chart 2. The Distribution of Cognitive Levels of Barrett’s Taxonomy in the Two Textbooks

Level of Reading Comprehension Questions	Frequencies	Percentages
1. Literal Comprehension	117	27%

2. Reorganization	98	22%
3. Inferential Comprehension	176	40%
4. Evaluation	25	6%
5. Appreciation	21	5%
Total	(437)	(100%)

The table above shows the frequencies and percentages of all reading comprehension questions found in the two textbooks. It shows that there are 117 questions (27%) included in the literal comprehension level, 98 questions (22%) categorized into the reorganization level, 176 questions (40%) included in inferential comprehension, 25 questions (6%) classified into evaluation level, and 21 questions (5%) categorized into appreciation level. Ultimately, the most dominant cognitive level is the inferential comprehension

Moreover, the researcher also investigated if the cognitive levels in the textbooks meet the desirable proportions. The result is as follows:



The table above shows that the distribution of reading comprehension questions in the two textbooks does not align with the proper proportion. 49% of questions (215 out of 437 questions) are presented at a lower level (literal comprehension & reorganization), which is 9% more than the recommended proportion. It can be stated that most of the questions in the textbooks are at literal comprehension and reorganization. 49% of questions in the textbook focus on the stated information in the text. Meanwhile, the middle-level questions found in the two textbooks represent recommended percentages, of 40% (176 out of 437 questions). It indicates that the two textbooks consist of a sufficient number of middle-level questions (inferential comprehension) which involve students to infer, guess or predict the unstated information in the text. Nevertheless, there are only 11% of question (46 out of 437 questions) which are categorized into higher-level questions (evaluation & appreciation). Therefore, the addition of higher-level questions, questions at the evaluation and appreciation level is needed.

Interviews

The interview with Teacher 1 revealed that she knows "Barrett's Taxonomy" but has never read about it. She confirmed that she uses Bloom's taxonomy because she is taught and trained to use it through teacher training. After the researcher explained the cognitive levels in Barrett's Taxonomy and showed the table indicators of it, she considered Barrett's Taxonomy is suitable for reading and aligned with Merdeka curriculum standards. She mentioned that the students should be encouraged to answer questions like "if you are in that position, what would you do," which is represented in the appreciation level in Barrett's Taxonomy. Moreover, she also agrees that Barrett's is a more appropriate taxonomy for reading subjects.

From the interview with Teacher 2, it was found that the teacher knows about Barrett's taxonomy, but she does not understand it. She cannot mention either definition of Barrett's taxonomy or the cognitive levels. The teacher said that she uses Bloom's taxonomy since it was recommended in the teachers' community that she joined. (MGMP and KKG). After being exposed to Barrett's taxonomy, the teacher thought that the taxonomy could fit into C1-C6 competencies. She stated that this taxonomy is good as it arranges the cognitive levels from simple to complex. Similarly to respondent 1, the teacher also agrees that Barrett's taxonomy can help students to implement the standard of the Merdeka curriculum that encourages students to understand the contextual information in the written text, which is reflected at the appreciation level in Barrett's taxonomy. She also agreed that Barrett's taxonomy is the more suitable framework for reading..

The interview with Teacher 3 revealed that she has heard about Barrett's taxonomy have never read it. It can be stated that the teacher does not understand the cognitive levels proposed in Barrett's taxonomy. Moreover, the teacher argues that the taxonomy that she used is Bloom's taxonomy. After being explained the cognitive levels and indicators in Barrett's taxonomy, the teacher thought it was understandable and useful as a framework to provide a variety of questions. She also mentions that the classification of each level in Barrett's taxonomy is precise. Lastly, the teacher stated Barrett's taxonomy is more suitable for reading because it is more detailed and interesting.

Discussions

Based on the findings it can be stated that the textbooks cover all cognitive levels in Barrett's taxonomy (*literal comprehension, reorganization, inferential comprehension, evaluation and appreciation*). The total of each level of reading comprehension questions in the textbooks is 117 questions or 27% for literal comprehension, 98 questions or 22% for reorganization level, 176 questions or 40% for inferential level, 25 questions or 6% for evaluation level, and 21 questions or 5% questions for appreciation level. Comparing the two textbooks, the textbook "Pathway to English" is more recommended to use as it has a better quantity and quality of reading comprehension questions. In total, the textbook covered 351 reading comprehension questions and most of the questions were at inferential comprehension level. Meanwhile, the textbook "Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress" presented reading comprehension questions which four times lower than the other textbook. It only had

86 reading comprehension questions which were mostly constructed in literal comprehension level.

Furthermore, the percentages of the levels of reading comprehension questions in the two textbooks were under the criteria of the proper rate. There were 49% lower level which is 9% higher than the good proportion. The researcher found 215 out of 437 questions classified into lower levels which consist of 27% or 117 questions for literal comprehension and 22% or 98 questions for reorganization. Meanwhile, the inferential comprehension (lower-order question) consists of 40% or 176 questions. This proportion achieved the criteria of good proportion proposed by Reeves (2012) who stated that involving 40% of middle-level questions, the questions that are challenging for students, helps improve students' reading comprehension. This proportion achieved the criteria of good proportion. The textbooks only present 11% or 21 questions consisting of 6% or 25 questions for the evaluation level and 5% or 21 questions for the appreciation level. The finding revealed that the textbooks present less percentage of higher level questions. According to Reeves, a good proportion of higher level questions, which are difficult for students, are 20%. However, the textbooks only present 11% or 21 questions consisting of 6% or 25 questions for evaluation level and 5% or 21 questions for appreciation level.

In short, it can be said that the English textbooks "Bahasa Inggris in Progress" and "Pathway to English" did not meet the *Merdeka* curriculum objectives which aimed to improve student's reading comprehension and critical thinking, the needed skills in the 21st century. Therefore, to help students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, there is a need for teachers to add higher-level questions or look for other learning sources that cover cognitive levels of reading comprehension questions with appropriate proportions.

The finding of this research has similarities and differences with a study conducted by Surtantini (2019). Her research investigated the reading comprehension level in an English textbook published by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia in 2017. Her study found that the higher-level questions in the textbook had the lowest percentage of 10 % (13 out of 122 questions). It consisted of 9 questions for evaluation and 1 question for appreciation. Similarly, the current study also found the same case where only 11 % (46 out of 437 questions) were included in higher-level questions (25 questions for evaluation and 21 questions for appreciation). However, Surtantini's study showed a very unequal portion of lower-level and middle-level questions. In her study, she found 81% lower-level questions and only 9% middle-level questions. Meanwhile, in this study researcher found the percentages of lower-level and middle-level questions were quite close or not too overlapping. There were 49% lower-level questions and 40% middle-level questions. Therefore, it can be stated that the textbooks used in the *Merdeka* curriculum have a better proportion of cognitive levels than the textbook in 2017 used in the 2013 curriculum.

Moreover, according to the interviews' results, it was found that Barrett's Taxonomy was unpopular among the English teachers. One of the teachers said that this taxonomy has never been discussed in any teachers's training or seminar. The three teachers being interviewed admitted that they do not have prior knowledge regarding the cognitive levels in Barret's Taxonomy. They use Bloom's taxonomy since it was suggested by teachers' communities like MGMP and KKG. However,

after reviewing the cognitive levels in Barrett's taxonomy with the researcher, all of the teachers stated that Barrett's taxonomy is more suitable for reading comprehension. They agreed that it is practical and has a more detailed classification of the cognitive levels. Moreover, the teachers also admit that this taxonomy aligns with the *Merdeka* curriculum objective which requires students to involve their emotions, comments, judgment, and evaluation toward the written text.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the cognitive levels of reading comprehension questions found in English textbooks "Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress" and "Pathway to English", the researcher concludes that the textbooks cover the five cognitive levels in Barrett's taxonomy: literal comprehension, reorganization, inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation. The total of each level of reading comprehension questions in the textbooks are 117 questions or 27% for literal comprehension, 98 questions or 22% for reorganization level, 176 questions or 40% for inferential level, 25 questions or 6% for evaluation level, and 21 questions or 5% questions for appreciation level.

Regarding the distribution of lower, middle, and higher-level questions in the textbooks, it can be concluded that these textbooks almost reach the criteria of good proportion but still below the suggested proportion. The lower-level questions, questions at literal comprehension and reorganization, present 9% of questions higher than the proper proportion. It indicated that the most dominant questions in the textbooks are at lower lower-level questions. However, the middle-level questions, questions at literal comprehension, appeared with adequate proportions. On the other hand, the higher level questions, questions at the evaluation and appreciation level, are far below the optimum percentages. It can be concluded that higher-level questions must be added to the textbooks.

Meanwhile, from the interview result, it was found that from the point of view of the teachers, Barrett's taxonomy can be used as the more suitable and practical framework for analyzing the cognitive levels of reading comprehension questions. The teachers also stated that the cognitive levels in Barrett's taxonomy were in line with *Merdeka*'s curriculum objectives. Moreover, researchers also found that the teachers were excited to know more and explore Barrett's taxonomy, as at the end of the interview section, all of the teachers kept the indicators table of Barrett's taxonomy

Suggestions

Concerning the findings of this research, the writer offered several suggestions. First, it was suggested to the teachers to add more reading comprehension questions at the evaluation and appreciation level. The teachers could also find other learning sources that can provide a good proportion of reading comprehension questions. Second, it was suggested for the authors of the textbooks to add more reading comprehension at higher-cognitive levels for the following textbooks. After that, the researcher hopes the government can promote Barrett's taxonomy to the teachers through workshops, seminars, or conferences. Moreover, for future researchers, it was suggested to analyze

the other aspects of the textbooks such as the content and curriculum alignment, the cultural context, the authenticity of the material, etc.

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