

Contextualizing cognitive levels of RC questions in the *Life Today* textbook for grade 12 by Kemdikbud Publisher

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Abstract

For senior high school students studying English as a foreign language, reading comprehension is an essential ability since it promotes critical literacy development and academic preparedness. Despite the *Life Today* textbook's formal implementation under the Merdeka X Curriculum, few studies have rigorously investigated whether the reading comprehension questions' cognitive levels correspond with the anticipated development of higher-order thinking abilities. The purpose of this study is to examine the cognitive levels that are reflected in reading comprehension problems from the *Life Today* textbook for Grade XII across four different text genres. 160 reading comprehension questions from narrative, argumentative, hortatory exposition, and discussion texts were examined using the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy in a qualitative content analysis method. While Applying is subtly included into productive tasks, higher-order thinking abilities, especially Evaluating and Creating, are regularly integrated through assessment and enrichment activities, albeit in lesser quantities. Overall, the findings show that the *Life Today* textbook supports students' reading literacy and critical thinking abilities in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum's learning objectives by integrating cognitive demands in an organized and systematic manner.



Keywords: *Reading comprehension; Life Today textbook; Revised Bloom's Taxonomy; cognitive levels; Merdeka Curriculum*

1. Introduction

Strong reading comprehension and well-developed critical thinking abilities are essential for higher education, especially when interacting with academic books published in English. Because of this, students' reading preparedness is essential to their academic performance. A key component of learning English is reading, particularly for kids getting ready to go to college. Through reading exercises, students may comprehend literary content, recognize key concepts, and extract the author's most important information. These skills provide students with a fundamental competency that allows them to engage successfully in academic learning environments that require in-depth and critical reading comprehension.

The ability to truly comprehend a text's significance as opposed to just reading it through to the end is known as reading comprehension. Students are expected to recognize the major concepts, analyze important details, and make inferences from what they have read during the comprehension process. These abilities make it easier for students to understand the text's general goal and the author's intended message.

Meaning extraction, word recognition, focus, memory, reading fluency, and the integration of vocabulary knowledge and word awareness are all part of this skill's intricate cognitive process (Yagmour & Obaidat, 2022). Reading is now seen in English language instruction as an active process of meaning-making that involves critical, inferential, and reflective thinking rather than just literal decoding. According to the requirements of 21st-century education, students must understand texts in terms of their social, cultural, and contextual aspects in addition to their language.

In order to overcome learning loss brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, Minister Nadiem Makarim of Indonesia introduced the Merdeka Curriculum, an educational strategy that gives teachers more freedom to modify teaching and learning methods to fit the needs, interests, and abilities of their students. This curriculum promotes more autonomous, comfortable, and pleasurable learning without undue pressure (Aji et al., 2023). Critical literacy is one of its fundamental tenets, and its application places an emphasis on contextual and relevant learning experiences. As a result, it is anticipated that students would interact with texts at a greater level.

Kemdikbudristek's official English textbook for Grade XII senior high school, *Life Today*, is made to offer real, genre-based reading texts that tackle modern topics like digital literacy, renewable energy, social media ethics, and environmental sustainability. By interacting with narrative, exposition, and discussion texts that examine social concerns and cultural contexts, students can hone their English language skills with this textbook. Numerous text genres, such as narrative, exposition, and discussion texts, are clearly presented in the textbook (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Examining *Life Today's* reading component is therefore crucial to comprehending how the textbook fosters students' literacy development, especially in light of the cognitive demands placed on pupils.

The term "reading comprehension" describes reading exercises that prioritize comprehending textual material over just finishing a reading assignment. Students must recognize key concepts, analyze pertinent data, and make inferences from the text in reading comprehension exercises. With this method, reading is no longer a mechanical task but rather a meaningful learning process. In order to prepare students to manage longer and more complicated academic texts at the university level, it is imperative that senior high school pupils develop RRC abilities.

Many senior high school students still struggle to understand English books, especially those with intricate structures and academic language, despite continuous curriculum modifications and advancements in textbook design. According to (Fauzia et al., 2023), children frequently have trouble focusing, comprehending lengthy phrases, digesting texts without prior information, and making inferences from their reading. In order to overcome these difficulties, students often reread books, translate them into their own language, or become distracted while reading.

Additionally, rather than encouraging analytical, interpretive, and evaluative reading skills, classroom reading education frequently places an emphasis on responding to literal comprehension questions. Additionally, reading assignments are often unrelated to students' real-world experiences, which restricts their ability to engage and create meaning. As a result, reading instruction has not been entirely effective in fostering critical literacy. The way *Life Today* provides its reading materials and activities in tackling these educational problems is called into question by this situation.

Because reading is the basis for other language abilities, such as speaking and writing, research on reading teaching in *Life Today* is essential. Students with strong reading comprehension are able to formulate concepts, make arguments, and provide critical written and spoken responses. A variety of genre-based reading texts, including narrative, argumentative, hortatory exposition, and discussion texts, are presented in *Life Today*. Each of these texts has unique language characteristics and communicative goals. This study focuses on the reading component in order to investigate how well the textbook's reading texts and comprehension exercises improve students' reading literacy in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum's Phase F learning outcomes.

Recent research has shown how genre-based strategies might improve students' English reading abilities. When training specifically addressed text structure, communicative intent, and linguistic aspects, students' reading

comprehension improved, according to (Gunawan, Muh. Said & Munawir, 2022). These results imply that genre understanding helps students approach texts in a more purposeful and strategic way.

Furthermore, according to a development research by Lubis and Risnawaty (2024), vocabulary help is crucial for enhancing reading comprehension. Their results showed that pre-reading vocabulary enrichment activities combined with reading materials greatly improved students' comprehension. This emphasizes how crucial it is to assess if pre-reading textbooks like *Life Today* offer sufficient assistance.

While the *Life Today* textbook's reading texts are thought to be pertinent and contextual, there are still issues with text difficulty and a lack of reading assistance, especially for students with lower reading competency, according to other research. (Bahri et al., 2024) highlighted that teacher preparedness has an impact on how well genre-based reading instruction works. Instructors with a solid grasp of genre-based pedagogy typically assist students in recognizing the goals and structures of texts more successfully. This implies that in order to guarantee successful reading teaching, teachers' pedagogical expertise must be supplemented by high-quality textbook contents.

Few studies have looked at the methodical presentation of reading content in national textbooks that are in line with the Merdeka Curriculum, despite the fact that several have investigated English reading skills and genre-based training. The appropriateness of reading texts in *Life Today* in terms of genre traits, text difficulty, and the kinds of comprehension questions offered, in particular, is not well examined. Furthermore, little is known about how these texts include global themes to help students develop critical literacy. Through a targeted examination of *Life Today's* reading component, this study seeks to close these disparities.

Both theoretical and practical contributions are provided by this work. Theoretically, by mapping the cognitive demands of instructional materials using the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, it enhances the corpus of research on reading literacy within the framework of genre-based English language teaching and the Merdeka Curriculum. Practically speaking, the results should help English teachers make the most of *Life Today's* reading materials and implement teaching methods that correspond with the necessary cognitive levels. Additionally, textbook developers may use this study as an assessment tool to enhance the caliber of reading materials and comprehension exercises.

Additionally, this study offers insightful information to a variety of stakeholders. It provides teachers with advice on how to use *Life Today* reading texts to help students improve their critical reading abilities at various cognitive levels. It is anticipated that better reading education will increase students' understanding and knowledge of current global challenges. The study could be used as a reference for scholars and researchers for additional research on reading literacy and cognitive framework-based textbook evaluation. Lastly, the results could influence future curriculum development and textbook creation for educational officials.

Based on the background discussed above, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What cognitive levels are represented in the reading comprehension questions across four text genres in the *Life Today* textbook?
2. What action verbs are used to assess students' understanding in the reading comprehension questions?
3. How comprehensively does the textbook integrate cognitive demands based on Bloom's Taxonomy?

When learning English as a second language, especially in senior high school, reading comprehension is an essential skill. At this level, students are required to comprehend information that is overtly presented as well as to interpret meaning, make connections between concepts, and critically assess texts in order to recognize key concepts and subliminal messages. The *Life Today* textbook for Grade XII includes a variety of reading texts along with comprehension problems to help students build these skills. As a result, this review of the literature summarizes the results of five pertinent studies that deal with reading comprehension, instructional strategies, genre-based approaches, and textbook evaluation. Together, these studies provide valuable insights into how reading comprehension facilitates accurate information processing.

Research on reading comprehension consistently emphasizes that reading is an active, cognitive process rather than a passive activity. According to (Butterfuss et al., 2020), comprehension happens when readers actively create meaning by using cognitive processes rather than just identifying words or sentences. Readers must connect textual information to their past experiences and knowledge in order to comprehend it effectively. According to this viewpoint, in order to foster a deeper grasp of texts, reading comprehension questions should encourage higher-order thinking processes rather than just factual recollection.

Strategies for teaching reading in the classroom are essential for improving students' understanding. (Nadira et al., 2020) show that using structured reading techniques, like pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading exercises, greatly enhances students' comprehension of what they read. While-reading exercises encourage students to keep an eye on their comprehension, pre-reading exercises help activate prior knowledge and teach important vocabulary. Post-reading exercises help students think critically about the text and make connections to larger settings. According to these results, reading comprehension develops gradually and calls for well crafted questions that correspond with every phase of the reading process.

Asnawi et al.'s (2025) study on the use of Think-Aloud and Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) techniques offers additional proof of the significance of question design. According to their findings, a lot of students have trouble answering inferential and evaluative questions because they are not accustomed with the cognitive tasks involved. Pupils

typically do better on questions that have clear solutions, but questions that call for judgment and reasoning are frequently difficult. Students become more conscious of their cognitive processes and understand that different kinds of issues require different methods by using Think-Aloud and QAR techniques. These findings suggest that a range of comprehension questions should be included in textbooks to encourage students to interact with texts at various cognitive levels.

For senior high school reading education, the genre-based method is also an essential framework. (Bahri et al., 2024b) discovered that when students comprehend the structure and communicative function of various genres, their comprehension improves. Students who are familiar with the features of narrative, exposition, and discussion texts are better able to follow the structure of ideas and provide accurate answers to comprehension questions. However, because some teachers do not fully follow all instructional stages, the study also shows that genre-based instruction is not always applied optimally in classrooms. This result emphasizes the value of textbooks as teaching aids that strengthen genre knowledge through carefully crafted comprehension questions and well-organized texts.

According to an assessment of the Life Today textbook by Liani et al. (2024), teachers typically believe that the reading materials are appropriate for senior high school pupils, relevant, and contextual. The topics covered are thought to be interesting and up to date. However, the study shows that the accompanying comprehension questions are primarily literal, giving pupils little chance to hone their analytical and evaluative reading abilities. This demonstrates a disparity between the reading texts' quality and the comprehension questions' cognitive demands.

All five of the analyzed studies point to recurring difficulties in teaching reading. When working with complicated literature, students sometimes struggle with vocabulary acquisition, forming inferences, and identifying important concepts. According to research by Nadira et al. (2020) and Asnawi et al. (2025), pupils typically stay at a literal level of comprehension in the absence of adequate instructional support. This suggests that reading comprehension questions should be progressively crafted to help students go from basic comprehension to higher-order thinking.

From a methodological perspective, the majority of the examined studies use qualitative research techniques, such as content analysis, classroom observation, and reading task analysis. These techniques enable academics to look at how texts and comprehension problems are used in real classroom environments. These methods are pertinent to the current study, which examines how well the Life Today textbook's reading comprehension questions assist students' reading progress by examining their cognitive levels.

According to the reviewed literature, reading comprehension in English as a foreign language is a complex process that requires instructional tactics, learning methodologies, and textbook quality. The results highlight the significance of comprehension questions that go beyond memory recall and encourage inferential and evaluative reasoning. As a result, an assessment of the cognitive levels of reading comprehension questions in the Life Today textbook is required to determine whether the textbook effectively satisfies the learning goals of Grade XII students and promotes the comprehensive development of their reading comprehension skills.

2. Method

Research Design (Qualitative Content Analysis)

In this study, qualitative content analysis is used to explore how the textbook presents different text genres, what language features appear, what kinds of learning tasks are included, and how well the book supports the goals of English learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum. The analysis focuses on interpreting the information deeply by identifying themes, patterns, and structures within the content.

This design is appropriate because it provides flexibility for the researcher to describe, interpret, and evaluate the content of the book in rich and detailed explanations.

Research Object

This study focuses on the English textbook "Life Today" for SMA/MA Grade XII, which will be published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education in 2022. There are four primary sections in the textbook: narrative text, argumentative text, hortatory exposition, and discussion text. Each unit includes tasks such as listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting.

The analysis focuses on the following features of the textbook:

- 1) Types of texts in the book
- 2) Texts' schematic structures
- 3) Language characteristics include tenses, action verbs, modality, conjunctions, and lexicon.
- 4) Students are assigned learning activities and tasks.
- 5) Measure student learning with questions and exams.

This textbook was chosen because it is the official national textbook for Kurikulum Merdeka, which implies it is used in many Indonesian schools. As a result, evaluating this book can provide valuable information for instructors, students, and curriculum designers.

Data Collection Procedures

The data in this study were gathered using documentation techniques, which implies the researcher extensively read and examined the textbook. There are no interviews or questionnaires employed because the textbook serves as the primary data source.

Data collecting involves the following steps:

- 1) Finished reading the textbook from Units 1 to 4.
- 2) Identifying and coding significant sections for research purposes.
- 3) Gathering examples of text structures, language elements, and educational tasks.
- 4) Creating notes and summaries for each unit.
- 5) Categorizing data into "language features," "schematic structure," and "reading activities."

This phase is vital since it ensures that all relevant information is acquired prior to doing a more in-depth study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Following data collection, the researcher analyzes the information through many steps of qualitative content analysis:

- 1) Data Reduction.
 - a. The researcher prioritizes crucial and relevant facts.
 - b. Remove any unnecessary or redundant information.
- 2) Data Classification.
 - a. Reduced data is categorized according to study aims.
 - b. Examples include narrative text structures, modal verbs, and discussion activities.
- 3) Data Interpretation.
 - a. The researcher explains the significance of the data.
 - b. Interpretation involves finding patterns, themes, strengths and weaknesses.
- 4) Data Presentation
 - a. The researcher delivers the results narratively, backed by tables, examples, or textbook quotations.
- 5) Conclusion Drawing
 - a. The researcher summarizes the important findings.
 - b. The conclusions answer the research questions and connect the data with relevant theories.

This systematic process ensures that the analysis is logical, clear, and academically valid.

Data and Findings Validity

Several validity strategies are employed to ensure that the findings of this study are trustworthy and reliable:

- 1) Triangulation of Theories
 - a. Textbook findings are contrasted to theories on genre analysis, English instruction, and curriculum design.
 - b. Preventing prejudice improves interpretation accuracy.
- 2) Persistence in observation.
 - a. The researcher reviews and examines the textbook many times.
 - b. Repeated scrutiny can uncover important details missed during the first reading.
- 3) Provide clear documentation.
 - a. All data, notes, and coding categories are recorded methodically.
 - b. This ensures transparency and verifiability in the research process.

With these tactics, the study's findings should be reliable, valid, and valuable for instructional reasons.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section describes the distribution of reading elements in the Life Today textbook. The contents are structured in a table that summarizes the essential points of each topic for clarity and structure. The table includes the unit number and title, the genre of the reading text, the theme or topic related to everyday life, the types of reading exercises with page locations, and the total number of questions for each text. The tabular style allows for a more in-depth review of the textbook's content in relation to the study's objectives, as well as the easy identification and comparison of how reading materials are structured and dispersed throughout different sections.

Table 1: Life Today Book Reading Materials

No	Unit	Type of Text	Reading Theme/Topic in Life Today	Activities and Pages	Total Questions
1	Unit 1. The Story of a Friendly Future	Narrative	The breaker of limitation from Gunung Mali	Reading, activity 3, page 13	27
		Narrative	Kilion and His Bright Amdui Village	Assessment, page 38	7
		Narrative	The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind	Enrichment, page 46	7
2	Unit 2. E-Money	Argumentative	Cashless society: What do we gain and lose when cash is no longer king?	Reading, activity 2, page 72	24
		Argumentative	E-payments – why, when and how to use them	Assessment, page 88	5
		Argumentative	Does Spending Without Using Physical Cash Make People Spend More?	Enrichment, activity 2, page 93	20
3	Unit 3. Netiquette	Hortatory Exposition	Are Social Media Platforms Safe?	Reading, activity 2, page 115	32
		Hortatory Exposition	Why You Shouldn't Overshare Personal Information on Social Media Site	Assessment, page 137	7
		Hortatory Exposition	<i>Untitled</i>	Enrichment, page 143	4
4	Unit 4. Carbon Footprints	Discussion	Do we need to stop eating meat?	Reading, activity 2, page 163	18
		Discussion	Environmental Impact of Online Shopping	Assessment, page 194	4
		Discussion	<i>Untitled</i>	Enrichment, page 199	5

The Life Today textbook is organized into four parts, each with its own set of text kinds and thematic aspects, as shown in the table. To expose students to a variety of reading styles, the book includes narrative, argumentative, hortatory exposition, and debate texts. Each unit has a variety of reading activities with varied levels of comprehension questions, such as assessments, extension assignments, and core reading exercises. This structure suggests that the textbook encourages students to read in order to engage with real-world situations rather than simply grasp text information. In summary, the Life Today textbook provides an organized and diverse framework for improving students' reading comprehension, as seen by its combination of text genres, themes, and question counts.

3.1 Cognitive Levels Represented in Reading Comprehension Questions

The reading comprehension problems in the Grade XII Life Today textbook cover a wide range of cognitive levels, according to the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. Table 2 shows that all four text genres (narrative, argumentative, hortatory exposition, and discussion) have levels ranging from C2 (understanding) to C6 (creating). This means that the textbook is designed to engage both basic and advanced cognitive capacities in a variety of genres.

Table 2: Cognitive Levels Identified in Reading Comprehension Questions across Four Text Genres in the *Life Today* Textbook

Chapter (Unit)	Text Genre	Total Questions (N)	Dominant Cognitive Levels	C-Levels Represented
Chapter 1	Narrative Text	41	C2 (Understanding), C4 (Analyzing)	C2, C4, C5, C6
Chapter 2	Argumentative Text	49	C2 (Understanding), C4 (Analyzing), C6 (Creating)	C2, C3, C4, C5, C6
Chapter 3	Hortatory Exposition	43	C2 (Understanding), C4 (Analyzing), C5 (Evaluating)	C2, C4, C5, C6
Chapter 4	Discussion Text	27	C4 (Analyzing), C5 (Evaluating)	C2, C4, C5, C6
Grand Total	Four Genres	160	Emphasis on C2 and C4	C2–C6

However, the distribution of cognitive levels is uneven. C2-level questions dominate the reading sections of most chapters, particularly in Narrative, Argumentative, and Hortatory Exposition texts. These questions mostly focus on identifying core concepts, comprehending meanings, and extracting information from the text. C4 (Analyzing) questions, on the other hand, are widely used in a variety of genres, particularly in Discussion Texts. This is consistent with the analytical needs of such works, which include evaluating opposing viewpoints, dissecting arguments, and understanding relationships between concepts. While advanced thinking skills such as C5 (evaluating) and C6 (creating) are less common, they are frequently incorporated into evaluation and enrichment activities. In summary, these results respond to the first research question by illustrating that the textbook fosters a gradual increase in cognitive challenges, extending beyond mere basic understanding.

3.2 Question Words Used to Explore Students' Understanding

In response to the second research question, the findings reveal that the textbook uses a range of question terms to evoke varying levels of cognitive processing. As shown in Table 3, question terms related with C2 (Understanding), such as what, which, identify, and explain, are commonly employed to aid students' comprehension of literature. Instead of simply recalling material, these prompts direct students to evaluate meanings, recognize crucial information, and exhibit knowledge.

Table 3: Question Words and Their Cognitive Functions Based on the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy

C-Level	Key Question Words	Sample Question Types	Cognitive Function
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C2 (Understanding)	What, Which, Identify, Explain	Identifying communicative purpose; explaining main ideas	Interpreting meanings, concepts, and general understanding of the text
C4 (Analyzing)	How, Why, Analyze, Differentiate	Analyzing text structure, arguments, and language features	Breaking down text components and identifying relationships
C5 (Evaluating)	Do you agree, Why, Justify, Assess	Evaluating arguments, values, or recommendations	Making judgments based on criteria or evidence
C6 (Creating)	Design, Formulate, Create, Recommend	Creating solutions, conclusions, or new text outlines	Generating original ideas or synthesizing information

As the cognitive effort increases, the question words become more analytical, such as how, why, analyze, and differentiate, requiring pupils to scrutinize text structure, analyze arguments, and detect language aspects. Question words like justify, appraise, design, and formulate promote evaluative and creative thinking at higher cognitive levels. This systematic variety in question words demonstrates that the textbook's linguistic prompts are designed to match with Bloom's Taxonomy. The data thus give clear proof that question wording serves as an educational tool for exploring and developing students' understanding, directly answering the second research question.

3.3 Integration of Cognitive Demands Based on Bloom's Taxonomy

Regarding the third study question, the data indicate that the Life Today textbook incorporates cognitive demands in a systematic and complete manner. The organization of learning activities throughout the reading, assessment, and enrichment sections follows a clear scaffolding pattern. Reading activities prioritize comprehension and analysis, whereas assessment and enrichment activities promote evaluation and creation.

Although the C3 (Applying) level is not clearly represented in reading comprehension questions, it is implicitly incorporated in productive tasks like writing, problem solving, and text production, particularly in the Argumentative Text unit. This suggests that application is evaluated using performance-based activities rather than direct comprehension questions. Taken together, the consistent presence of higher-order thinking skills across all four chapters, despite their lower proportion, shows that cognitive demands are not offered at random. Instead, they are deliberately integrated across text genres to help students develop their cognitive capacities in accordance with the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy.

4. Conclusion

According to the conclusions of this study, the Life Today textbook for Grade XII incorporates a range of cognitive levels into its reading comprehension questions, from C2 (Understanding) to C6 (Creating), in accordance with the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. Although the questions are primarily focused on Understanding (C2) and Analyzing (C4), the textbook uses a structured scaffolding approach to incorporate higher-order thinking skills, particularly Evaluating (C5) and Creating (C6), through assessment and enrichment activities. The variety in question terms and task kinds across text genres suggests an intentional alignment of linguistic prompts with targeted cognitive demands.

While the Applying level (C3) is not clearly represented in direct comprehension questions, it is implicitly addressed in productive and performance-based activities. Overall, the findings indicate that the Life Today textbook promotes the development of students' reading literacy and critical thinking skills in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum's learning objectives, though a greater inclusion of higher-level comprehension questions in the main reading sections could improve students' critical reading competence.

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