

A CASE STUDY ON READING COMPREHENSION SUB-SKILLS OF EFL TEXTBOOKS

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: April 2023 Revised: August 2023 Published: October 2023	<i>The aim of this research was to describe the reading comprehension sub-skills Ethiopian EFL textbooks teach in high schools from the impetus that secondary school EFL students have poor reading comprehension abilities. A quantitative descriptive case study was the design of the study, for the research was grounded on measuring the sub-skills categorized under five major reading comprehension levels adapted from Anderson et al. (2001), Barrett (1972), and Day and Park 2005 taxonomies. To this end, grade eleven and grade twelve EFL textbooks were the cases of study which were selected drawing on the purposeful sampling technique while the reading comprehension questions were the data collection instruments. The data were collected using the quantitative content analysis method. Along with the researcher, the study involved an inter-rater in order to augment the reliability of the results. He was selected among the English staff based on a random sampling technique. The data were analyzed by drawing on descriptive statistical methods. The findings of the research indicated that the comprehension questions of the instructional materials are characterized by the initiations of a preponderance of text-based comprehension sub-skills in general and recognition of comparison and details sub-skills in particular. Additionally, all sub-skills of the comprehension levels are not included except those residing in the literal comprehension. The study also found out that the questions do not teach the comprehension levels in line with their difficulty sequence. Based on the findings, it is stipulated that material designers of grades eleven and twelve EFL textbooks should keep the order of reading comprehension categories and balance the distribution of the sub-skills within each comprehension level.</i>
Keywords Comprehension sub-skills; High School EFL textbooks; Reading exercises; Sociocultural theory;	
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INTRODUCTION

Unlike teaching first-language reading, teaching reading as a foreign language has a compensatory role in providing students with the comprehensible input necessary for the acquisition of the target language (Ellis, 2003; Krashen, 1982). For instance, while learning reading in English as a foreign language in primary and secondary schools, students would have a double prong of opportunities: imitating how the language systems form together meaningfully (cohesion of the language) and understanding what meaning is conveyed in the print media (coherence of the language). This shows that teaching reading in EFL contexts presents students with the chance to acquire the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of the target language. In the case of syntactic features of the language, students would be able to develop the knowledge of how phonological, morphological, lexical, and grammatical aspects work in the mesh. Semantic knowledge, on the other hand, helps students to use syntactic information such as determiners (the, a, this, those, etc.), word order, subordinate clauses, tense, modality, and pronominal forms (anaphoric inferences) to construct local and global

text comprehension. Teaching reading is also very essential to develop students' pragmatic knowledge, an elevated target language use over the construction of text comprehension such as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating textual information.

Teaching reading in EFL has also an indispensable purpose for academic activities that usually demand secondary and university students' reading comprehension abilities to acquire profound subject matter knowledge, set for examinations, and do project or research works (Barton & Jordan, 2001; Nuttall, 1986; Palinscar, 2013). Since the genre of content-based subject matters are characterized by expository texts, organizations of contents highly demand understanding skills of reorganizing, inferring, and synthesizing texts. Research findings carried out in different contexts also show that there is a high correlation between students' reading comprehension proficiency and their academic achievements (Cimmiyotti, 2013; Cromley, 2009; Ercikan et al., 2015; Grabe, 2009). This is to say that learning reading comprehension skills is a milestone to reading to learn other content subjects such as geography and biology. Thus, poor reading comprehension ability of students at all levels is one of the basic sources of their academic failure.

In the case of Ethiopia, the problem of primary and secondary schools students' reading comprehension proficiency is quite serious to pursue their higher education (Ministry of education Strategy Center, 2018) where 90 % percent of the work done requires different levels of text- and situation-based comprehension abilities (Nuttall, 1986; Kintsch, 1998). Similarly, research findings clamor on the impediment of such a challenge on the quality of education in general and students' academic achievements in particular (Abiy 2005; Chanyalew & Abiy 2015; Simachew & Dawit 2019). Despite the presence of other factors, the present researcher from the viewpoint of the sociocultural theory believes that the problem is attributed to the EFL textbooks which is the main source of learning a variety of reading comprehension skills and sub-skills (Graves 2000; Korkut & Ertaş 2016; Rezat 2016).

The practice of teaching EFL including reading in Ethiopia is mainly determined by the pedagogical objectives residing in the textbooks- the cultural artifacts that mediate students with the objects they are required to achieve. Thus during EFL lessons, students are always expected to have textbooks to engage in pre-, while-, and post-reading exercises. EFL textbooks become poor mediating materials for students when they do not ask students comprehension questions that can initiate different thinking levels. For instance, textbooks that do not elicit students to answer critical and creative questions have a repercussion on their critical and creative comprehension abilities. The problem becomes severe when the instructional materials do not address the comprehension sub-skills found at lower and higher cognitive levels. In this regard, Sunggingwati (2003) suggests that "One way of looking at (comprehension) questions is to examine the kinds of thinking process involved in asking and answering them" (p. 85).

Ethiopian Ministry of Education has a trend of designing new primary and secondary school EFL textbooks per decade (Ministry of Education, 2009). This implies that the instructional gaps in the textbooks have an adverse effect on the learning opportunities of students who employ the materials for a long period of time. Therefore, the impetus for the current research stemmed from the foremost mediating role textbooks have on students' reading comprehension abilities in high school EFL classes. To this end, the study was conducted to answer the question "What comprehension sub-skills do Ethiopian EFL textbooks elicit in grades eleven and twelve reading classes?"

Theoretical Underpinning

The comprehension questions EFL textbooks employ to teach reading are usually derived from reading comprehension taxonomies. With this regard, Bloom et al. (1956) and Anderson et al. (2001) devised the most widely used taxonomies of educational objectives deemed necessary to investigate cognitive demands of learning opportunities. The taxonomies

contain six components from which they are the same in the first four thinking levels known as knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis. However, they differ from each other in the order of the last two higher cognitive levels: evaluation and synthesis. Anderson et al. argue that the former level is a precursor for the latter one which is characterized by creating in general and hypothesizing, designing, and constructing in particular.

Marzano et al. (1988) devised a taxonomy of Core Thinking Skills which is composed of four categories characterized by their cognitive difficulty levels: acquiring and integrating knowledge, extending and refining knowledge, using knowledge meaningfully, and habits of mind. However, Marzano (2000) revised the taxonomy and incorporated prediction and summarization cognitive skills based on the assumption that the respective skills develop students inferential and text organization abilities (Sidek, 2010). Merging the two taxonomies of educational objectives, Sidek categorized the thinking skills into low and high cognitive levels. The former cognitive level involves three sub-levels known as focusing, recalling, and information gathering. The latter cognitive level, on the other hand, is comprised of representation, organizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, generating, integrating, and evaluating sub-skills.

In the context of teaching reading, Barrett (1972) and Day and Park (2005) designed reading comprehension taxonomies. Barrett, in particular, developed a reading comprehension taxonomy from the viewpoint of cognitive and affective domains. Brown (1995) contends that though the taxonomy was initially produced for teaching reading in English native speaking classes, it can serve as a parameter to select and organize comprehension levels for the preparation of EFL textbooks. The taxonomy involves five-level thinking skills: literal comprehension, reorganization, inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation. These thinking levels are akin to Kintsch's (1998) reading comprehension definition that refers to text-based and situation-based models (Grabe, 2009). Text-based comprehension "calls for understanding what the text itself is trying to signal" and the situation-based comprehension, on the other hand, "calls for the reader to combine background knowledge with text information and assists in an effective interpretation of the text in line with the reader's goals" (p.46).

Each thinking level of Barrett's (1972) taxonomy has its own sub-skills. For instance, the first comprehension level has six thinking sub-skills known as recognition/recall of details, character traits, main ideas, comparison, cause and effect relationships, and sequence of ideas. Reorganization comprehension ability is manifested by classifying, outlining, summarizing, and synthesizing sub-skills. According to the taxonomy, synthesis is meant to put textual ideas together with which students make generalizations (Barrett, n.d.). The next cognitive skill is inferential comprehension level which Grabe (2009) calls "the minimal inference links" (p. 40). It demands students to infer supporting details, main ideas, sequence, comparisons, cause and effect relationships, character traits, predict the coming outcomes in the text, and interpret figurative language.

Evaluation and appreciation reading comprehension levels refer to situation-based meaning construction ability which results from students' background knowledge of reading texts. Therefore, they are required to evaluate text-based information with the sublevels of judging reality or fantasy, fact or opinion, adequacy and validity, appropriateness, and worth, desirability and acceptability. Appreciation, the highest and affective comprehension level, consists of the reader's emotional response to the content, identification with characters or incidents, reactions to the author's use of language, and imagery.

Day and Park (2005), on the other hand, proposed a reading comprehension taxonomy with six cognitive levels (literal comprehension, reorganization, inference, prediction, evaluation, and personal response) that acknowledge Barrett's (1972) cognitive and affective perspective of comprehension taxonomy.

However, there is “no single taxonomy proved to be wholly suitable and superior to its counterparts” (Freeman 2014, p. 6), and the present researcher modified the most difficult comprehension level, appreciation, into personal response (Day & Park 2005), an umbrella term that incorporates appreciation and synthesis which are beyond the evaluation level. Like Barrett’s (1972) taxonomy of appreciation, Anderson et al.’s (2001) taxonomy of synthesis is the most demanding thinking skill than evaluation, a precursor behavior to creative work. Therefore, the theoretical framework of teaching reading comprehension sub-skills that the present study described the Ethiopian EFL textbooks drew on the following adapted five major categories of a reading comprehension taxonomy.

1. Literal comprehension: Recognition or recall of details (L1), main ideas (L2), sequences (L3), comparisons (L4), cause and effect (L5), and character traits (L6).
2. Reorganization: classifying (R1), outlining (R2), summarizing (R3), and synthesizing (R4)
3. Inference: inferring supporting details (I1), inferring main ideas (I2), inferring sequence (I3), inferring comparisons (I4), inferring cause and effect (I5), inferring character trait (I6), predicting outcomes (I7), and interpreting figurative language (I8).
4. Evaluation: judgments of reality or fantasy (E1), judgments of fact or opinion (E2), judgments of adequacy or appropriateness and validity (E3), and judgments of worth, desirability, and acceptability (E4).
5. Personal Response: emotional response to the content (PR1), identification with characters or incidents (PR2), imagery (PR3), and generating or producing (PR4).

RESEARCH METHOD

The current research was conducted to describe the extent to which Ethiopian secondary school EFL textbooks provide students with the opportunity to learn reading comprehension sub-skills residing under different major categories of the comprehension taxonomy stated above. To this purpose, the following are essential components of the section.

Research Design

Since the purpose of the study was “to present a detailed, contextualized picture of a particular phenomenon” (Heigham & Crocker, 2009, p.71), a descriptive case study research design was used to explore the comprehension sub-skills employed to teach reading in Ethiopian EFL textbooks. Additionally, this strategy of inquiry is relevant to answering research questions generated from theoretical constructs (Yin, 2003). In line with this premise, the present research problem was investigated based on a review of various reading comprehension taxonomies deemed relevant to answer the research question.

Participants

EFL textbooks of grades eleven and twelve classes were the case participants of the research since they are envisaged as a milieu in which students need to have the chance to learn different types and levels of comprehension abilities. The Ministry of Ethiopian Education stipulates that grades eleven and twelve EFL textbooks are expected to enhance students’ comprehension abilities that can break them in higher institution academic activities (Ministry of Education, 2009). For instance, the textbooks need to engage students in text-based and situation-based reading comprehension questions. To this end, the case participants were selected based on the purposive sampling technique. To enhance the reliability of data collection, the study involved a PhD TEFL instructor who worked with the researcher in the same higher institution. For such a purpose, the participant instructor was selected among the staff of the English department using a simple random sampling technique.

Instruments

Reading comprehension exercises were the data gathering instruments in which the comprehension sub-skills of grade eleven and twelve EFL textbooks were identified. In the context of this study, an exercise is defined as a “controlled or open-ended practice of some aspect of language” (Richards, 2022). It is thus characterized by either questions within the same instruction or a question provided with its own independent instruction. With respect to open-ended characteristic, an exercise is akin to a task. On the other hand, reading comprehension questions refer to not only interrogative sentences but also describe imperative sentences. These include the following examples: ‘What is the main idea of the text?’ and ‘Find six phrasal verbs in the text and discuss their meanings’.

Procedures and Ways of Data Collection

First the reading comprehension questions of each EFL textbook were separately documented into a four-column grid devised by the present researcher. Sequentially, the four columns of the grid were labelled with headings known as number of questions, exercises, occurrences of the sub-skills, and frequencies of the sub-skills. See Appendix A.

Second, a checklist was generated based on the comprehension taxonomies of Anderson et al.’s (2001), Barrett (1972), and Day and Park (2005). See Appendix B. Based on this checklist, the researcher collected the data using the quantitative content analysis method which comprises of recording and context units of analysis. To this end, the specific comprehension sub-skills were the recording units while the comprehension questions of the instructional materials were the context units. To this end, he iteratively read the instructional texts of the textbooks and the respective comprehension questions, identified the comprehension sub-skills, and documented their occurrences and frequencies into the four column grid. Such practices were essential to enhance the reliability of the recorded data. The frequencies of the sub-skills, in particular, were identified by counting the sign “+” coded by the researcher.

Then, the participant PhD TEFL instructor was briefed by the researcher what and how he coded the data. After that he followed the same steps that the main researcher did under the guidance of the given checklist. Finally, the coded data were checked by computing the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) value in SPSS. Based on the software analysis, the consistent coefficient value for the quantitative content analysis of the reading comprehension sub-skills was 0.87. This shows that there is good inter-rating reliability between the two coders.

Data Analysis

The study is characterized by an empirical research type which demands the researcher to delve into cases (EFL textbooks) to investigate a problem through measuring the presence and/or absence of the required elements (reading comprehension sub-skills) of a phenomenon (teaching reading comprehension), and descriptive statistics is the best method of analyzing the data. Thus, the reading comprehension sub-skills collected from each EFL textbook were categorized under the major comprehension categories of the comprehension taxonomy known as literal, reorganizational, inferential, evaluation, and creation.

Then the data of each category were analyzed using the Excel Spreadsheets by recoding the specific comprehension sub-skills horizontally and their respective occurrences and frequencies vertically. After that, the findings were described under the headings of the major comprehension categories followed by discussions and conclusions.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Results

The study analysed the cognitive demands of 163 reading comprehension exercises in grades eleven and twelve EFL textbooks quantitatively drawing on the adapted taxonomy discussed in the introduction section. Of these exercises, the respective textbooks have 76 and 87 exercises. The study also found 754 questions of which 367 are found in the former textbook while the remaining 387 questions reside in the latter textbook. These numerical data are significant to identify the occurrences and frequencies of the specific comprehension sub-skills that the EFL textbooks initiate to teach reading.

Literal reading comprehension skills

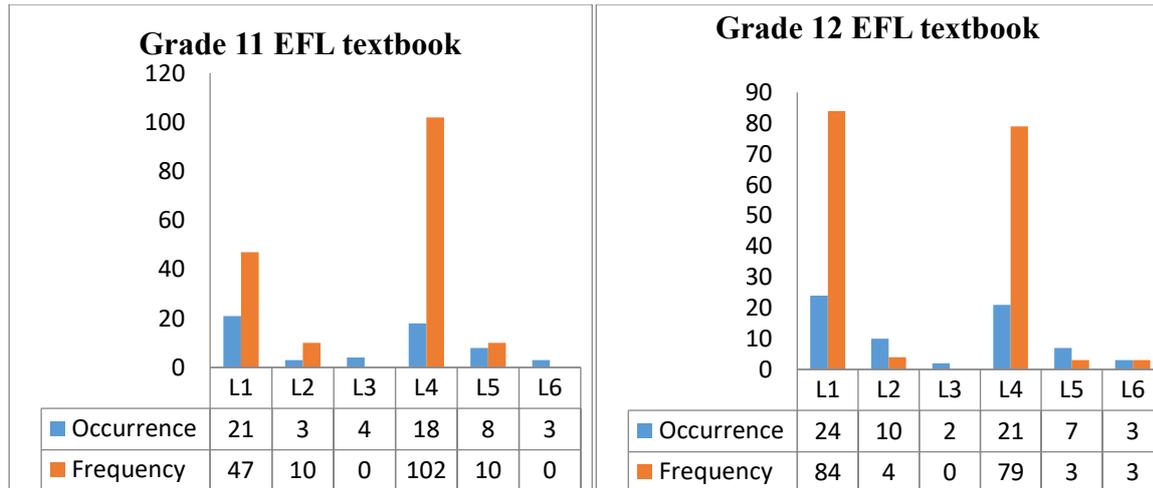


Figure 1. A Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Literal Thinking Comprehension Sub-Skills

Figure 1 indicates that grades eleven and twelve EFL textbooks elicit all sub-skills of literal comprehension ability within the respective 226 and 239 comprehension questions which represent more than half of the total number of the questions. The fourth comprehension sub-skill (L4) has the highest frequency within a reading exercise. Elicitation of comparison sub-skill is mainly characterized by memorization of synonym meanings of difficult words in the reading texts. Therefore, the textbooks give a high emphasis on the belief that teaching reading is a matter of developing students' vocabulary knowledge from texts.

Recognition of details (L1) is the next dominant mental function that comprehension questions demand in secondary EFL textbooks. This indicates that students are required to develop thinking skills of explicitly stated facts which are resulted from comprehending either the propositional or microstructure meanings of reading texts. In the case of comprehending propositional meanings, they could identify or produce the required detailed information from a particular semantic encoding of the text. In the case of understanding microstructure meanings, they need to identify or memorize details by recognizing different sentences containing the same specific idea.

Recognition of sequence (L3) and recognition of character threat (L6) are of insignificant attention in the textbooks to help students learn about text organizations and description of people's dispositions.

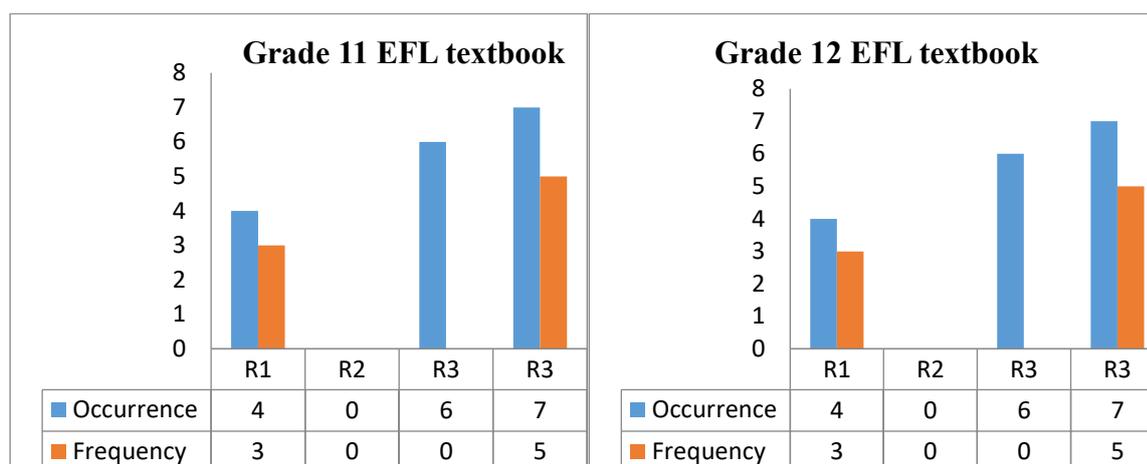
Reorganizational Reading Comprehension Skills

Figure 2 A Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Reorganizational Sub-Skills

Figure 2 shows that the comprehension exercises that initiate the total number of reorganization sub-skills are lower than those which ask the total numbers of the first and the fourth literal thinking sub-skills (L1 and L4). The highest number of occurrence and frequency of synthesis sub-skill (R4) is not different from the lowest occurrence and frequency of literal thinking sub-skills such as recognition of cause and effect, character traits, and main ideas. Both EFL textbooks ask the first comprehension sub-skill (classifying, R1) with a dominant pedagogical purpose of categorizing relevant textual ideas that refer to a particular heading. This is to say that the instructional materials do not initiate students to identify related textual concepts into subheadings that belong to the same topic as the following extracts describe.

- Read the text below and take notes about the achievements of the African Union (Grade 11 EFL textbook, p. 18).
- Each text is about a medical innovator. As you read make notes in the appropriate column of the table on the next page (p. 68).
- Look back at the text and identify the relevant arguments for or against China's one-child policy (Grade 12 EFL textbook, p. 25).

Among the eight occurrences of classifying sub-skill in the EFL textbooks, seven comprehension questions initiate the sub-skill based on a particular topic known as achievements of the African Union, medical innovators, advertisements, population statistics, lives of children in different parts of the world, multilaterals, and African civilizations. It is only the last comprehension question of the above extract in which the grade twelve textbook requires students to categorize specific ideas into two subheadings (arguments for arguments against China's one-child policy) that belong to the same topic, China's one-child policy. In the textbooks where students are required to read 58 texts of which the majority is informational, students have low opportunities to learn about the rhetorical organizations of closely related concepts of reading texts.

Inferential Reading Comprehension Skills

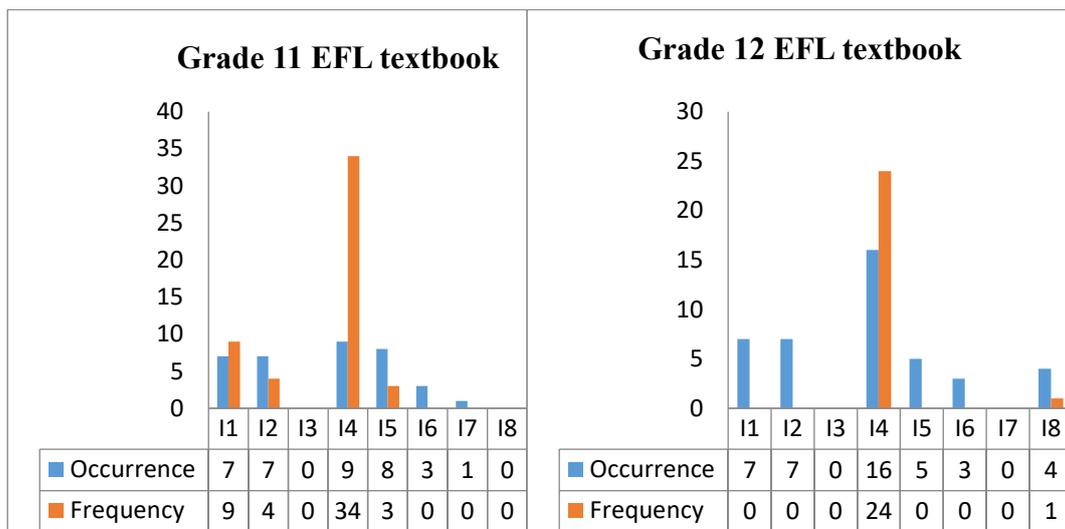


Figure 3. A Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Inferential Sub-Skills

Figure 3 indicates that the frequency of comprehension questions that elicit students to infer similar ideas (I4) in the reading texts predominate in the textbooks. The questions are mainly characterized by elicitation of contextual meanings of difficult words in the texts. However, the occurrence of such inferential sub-skill (I4) in a particular text gets better emphasis in the grade twelve textbook. Along with this predominance, there is one comprehension question in the grade eleven EFL textbook that asks students to infer comparable or contrasting ideas stated as “What are the similarities and differences between Martha’s ex-husband and her present husband? (p. 46)”. Inferential thinking sub-skills I3, I6, I7, and I8 have little or no occurrences and frequencies. This implies that the textbooks do not exploit the reading texts to teach both low- and high-level inferential comprehension abilities in secondary school EFL classes.

Evaluation Comprehension Skills

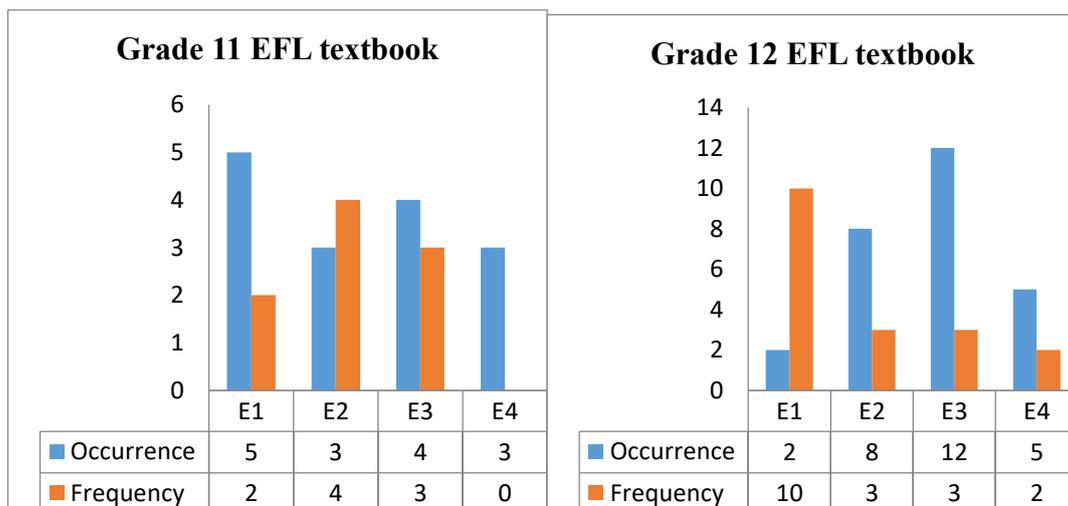


Figure 4. A Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Evaluation Sub-Skills

Figure 4 shows that evaluation sub-skills in grades eleven and twelve EFL textbooks account for five and ten percent of the entire comprehension questions respectively. The first sub-skill (E1), in particular, requires students to evaluate reading texts from the points of their

lived experience. On the other hand, the second sub-skill (E2) asks students to utilize the background knowledge they have about texts with the purpose of judging whether or not the ideas of the texts are familiar to them. Additionally, it initiates them to evaluate what the writer intends to convey and how far he/she attempts to persuade their convictions. The following are examples of the abovementioned sub-skills in the textbooks.

- How similar is the scene described with the neighbors and the holy man around the mother in her agony similar to what happens in your culture? (Grade 11 EFL textbook, p. 75).
- In what ways is it like your own? (Grade 12 EFL textbook, p.13).
- Have you been to this place? Have you seen the places or done things mentioned in the text? (Grade 11 EFL textbook, p. 123).
- Discuss with your partner any information in the text that a) you already knew and b) is new to you (Grade 12 EFL textbook, p. 39).

With regard to the other two evaluation thinking sub-skills of E3 and E4, the former occurs in a greater number of comprehension questions in the grade twelve textbook. It refers to the mental functions used to judge the comprehensiveness of texts and to reflect feelings of agreement from the perspective of individual students.

- What do you think of the leaflet? Can you think of any ways in which it could be improved? (Grade 11 EFL textbook, p. 86).
- Which of these statements do you agree with? Discuss them in your group. Say why you agree or disagree with them (Grade 12 EFL textbook, p. 26).

The fourth sub-skill is more difficult since it is determined by the moral values, educational backgrounds, and economic status students have towards the importance and desirability of the messages stated in the texts. The following questions refer to these instances.

- Which of the following measures are needed in your area? Rank them in order of importance (Grade 11 EFL textbook, p. 79).
- Do you think the points made are fair (Grade 12 EFL textbook, p.261)?

The questions call for students’ personal explications that can substantiate the points of their evaluations. The respective instructional materials provide students with the learning opportunity of the sub-skill in three and five reading lessons. However, this comprehension level has predominance over the reorganization level so that the emphasis of teaching reading in the textbooks does not follow the hierarchical structure of the reading comprehension taxonomy.

Personal response reading comprehension skills

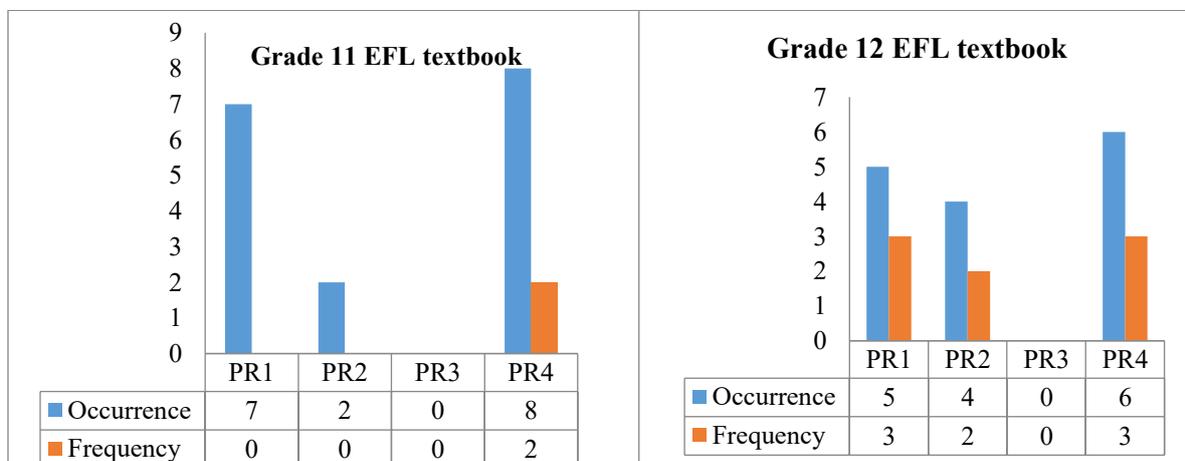


Figure 5. A Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Personal Response Sub-Skills

Figure 5 indicates that the EFL textbooks give similar emphasis to the sub-skills of the highest comprehension level, personal response. With regard to the first sub-skill (PR1), the comprehension questions ask students to reflect on their attitudes, hatred, dread, enjoyment, and excitement towards the texts they read. Questions of the second sub-skill (PR2), on the other hand, initiate them to put themselves in the characters' or peoples' positions provided in the reading texts and suggest their personal reactions, decisions, and sensitivity for or against the situations. They are also expected to predict what will be or happen provided that the reading texts they have already completed continue.

- Discuss these medical innovators. Which of them do you admire most (Grade 11 EFL textbook, p.71)?
- Did you find reading this text interesting (Grade 12 EFL textbook, p.18)?
- Do you think you would feel the same if you left home? If not, think of some other adjectives to describe how you would feel (Grade 11 EFL textbook, p. 158)?
- What do you think are going to be the next important developments (Grade 12 EFL textbook, p.45)?

The first two questions elicit the emotional responses students have about the contents of reading texts while the remaining questions ask them to identify with people or guess the future course of action.

The textbooks do not use comprehension questions for the third sub-skill of personal response known as imagery (PR3). This is to say that students have no learning opportunity of changing texts to illustrations and simulate actions. Creating (PR4) is the most difficult thinking sub-skill that the textbooks elicit for students with a relatively similar number of comprehension questions for emotional reactions to texts (PR1). The sub-skill is characterized by producing one's own ideas which are akin to the contents of reading texts and solving problems residing in the texts. Based on their background knowledge of the subject matter, students take the role of writing texts to reflect and suggest their personal experiences and remedies respectively.

- Have you or someone close to you ever been bitten by a scorpion, or dangerous insect, spider or snake? Describe what happened (Grade 11 EFL textbook, p. 75).
- Write a reply to the problem-page letters that university students face (Grade 12 EFL textbook, p. 65).

The instructional initiations of such a higher-level sub-skill are found in three comprehension questions of the grade twelve EFL textbook including the abovementioned examples.

Discussions

The impetus of the study was to describe what specific skills the reading comprehension questions Ethiopian EFL textbooks initiate to students in secondary school classes. In this section, it is significant to discuss the abovementioned respective results of such a statement from the viewpoints of previous findings and theoretical underpinnings.

With regard to literal reading comprehension questions, the occurrence and frequencies of sub-skills L1 and L4 were dominantly practiced in the textbooks. Other studies also confirmed the preponderance of these sub-skills in secondary school teaching reading EFL textbooks (Frehat & Smadi 2014; Igbaria 2013; Klanawong 2017; Riazi & Mosalanejad, 2010; Surtantini 2019). Thus, types of lower-order cognitive demands skewed to the initiation of limited thinking levels that denied students learning opportunities other related comprehension sub-skills. This contradicts the view that the design of instructional materials needs to assist students enhance connected comprehension abilities in the same thinking level (Good & Brophy, 1994).

In EFL textbooks, very few or no occurrences of reorganization comprehension questions were employed to elicit students to transfer text data into equivalent forms such as labeling pictures/maps and completing a table. However, in stark contrast with the result of the present study, Abu (2012) reported that reorganization comprehension questions were provided in every twelve units of grade twelve Palestinian English student textbooks, and it was the second dominant comprehension level next to literal thinking skill. Additionally, Surtantini (2019) found out that outlining was the only sub-skill of reorganization that the Indonesian secondary EFL textbook dealt with. Tomlinson (2011) states “The most effective materials are those which are based on a thorough understanding of learners’ needs that is their language difficulties...the stage of their conceptual development and so on” (p. 128).

Similarly, Fitria and Syarif (2014) reported that EFL textbooks used for teaching reading in secondary school classes highly initiated students to infer supporting details with a mean score of 6.25. The remaining sub-skills such as predicting outcomes, inference of character traits, cause and effect, and main ideas had an ascending emphasis with the respective values of 0.53, 0.67, 1.55, and 1.91. Thus, the imbalance of focus on the teaching practices of inferential comprehension sub-skills contributes to the obstruction of students’ critical reading abilities. Contrary to the finding of the fourth comprehension level, Fitria and Syarif (2014) and Klanawong (2017) indicated that teaching evaluation sub-skills got the place next to literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension levels. The move from teaching low-order thinking abilities to higher-order thinking ones should be gradual and sequential since the former mental functions are important to the development of the latter cognitive demands (Turner, 1988).

In sharp contrast with this finding, Sunggingwati (2003) reported that “The reading questions in the textbooks of Let’s Learn English 1, 2, and 3 do not present all levels of reading comprehension based on Barrett’s taxonomy...appreciation level is excluded” (p.90). Other previous studies, on the other hand, confirmed that reading exercises in EFL textbooks involved all components of the taxonomy with respect to their comprehension difficulty levels (Abu 2012; Klanawong 2017) With regard to teaching personal response sub-skills, the findings of the present study were with the results reported by Fitria and Syarif (2014). Therefore, students’ poor creative reading comprehension abilities are attributed to the insignificant instructional practice of identification with incidents (PR2) sub-skill in the grade eleven EFL textbook and the absence of imagery sub-skill (PR3) in both textbooks.

CONCLUSION

To summarize the main findings of the study, the textbooks require students to identify explicitly stated ideas (literal comprehension level) in 457 questions from its 754 comprehension questions. Reorganization comprehension level is by far lower than literal comprehension level, for it is represented by 45 questions. The textbooks prioritize the practice of inferential comprehension level next to literal comprehension level. They initiate students to infer ideas from 143 questions of which 78 are designed to elicit inference of comparison sublevel (I4) in general and inference of synonym meanings of words in particular. Critical and creative cognitive levels are the last thinking skills that the textbooks initiate in 68 and 40 comprehension questions respectively. In light of these findings of the study, it could be possible to arrive at the subsequent conclusions.

The findings of reading comprehension exercises implied that the philosophy of teaching reading comprehension in the EFL textbooks advocates meaning transmission, interpretation, and transaction theories. However, the first aspect of the meaning stance takes the largest sphere of the comprehension continuum; the majority of reading comprehension exercises in EFL textbooks requires students to identify what writers explicitly state in texts. In other words, the textbooks are designed with a dominant view that teaching reading is a

matter of passing examinations. Additionally, designers of the textbooks are not familiar with all micro-level cognitive demands of mental functions that can develop students' general reading comprehension facilities. Therefore, it is recommended that reading comprehension questions in EFL textbooks need to give students learning opportunities proportional to all comprehension levels in general and the sub-skills in particular. To this end, textbook designers should balance the number of questions eliciting literal, reorganizational, inferential, critical, and creative mental functions.

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