Article

An Analysis of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in the Reading Exercises of the Textbook *"English for Nusantara"* for the Eighth Grade of Junior High School Based on Bloom's Taxonomy

https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v10i4.1025

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A B S T R A C T

Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) are essential in developing students' critical and analytical abilities, particularly through reading activities. Many English textbooks still lack adequate integration of HOTS-based tasks, creating a gap between curriculum expectations and actual practice. This study aimed to analyze the distribution of HOTS in the reading exercises of the "English for Nusantara" textbook for eighth grade junior high school students. Employing a descriptive qualitative method and content analysis, data were collected from five chapters of the textbook used at SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Barat. A checklist based on Bloom's Taxonomy was used to identify HOTS elements. The findings revealed that only 23 out of 116 reading exercises (19.6%) contained HOTS components. The most common skill was analyzing (C4), followed by creating (C6) and evaluating (C5). These results indicate limited integration of HOTS in the textbook, which highlights the need for improvement in English instructional materials.

Keywords: *HOTS, Reading Exercises, Bloom's Taxonomy*

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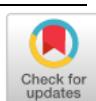
INTRODUCTION

The learning process in the classroom including English learning cannot be separated from the components that must exist in the learning process, namely learning materials and media. Puspitarini & Hanif (2019: 54) define learning media as a tool in the form of physical and non-physical used by teachers in conveying material to students to be more effective and efficient. One of the most important learning media to be used by students and teachers during the learning process is textbook. Aprilia & Ambarwati (2023: 99) say that textbooks are one of the most important components during the learning process because textbooks serve to support the function of national education. Textbooks facilitate the teaching and learning process by providing a structured framework, offering essential content, guiding teachers in lesson planning, and enabling students to engage with the material independently.

In the Indonesian education system, the use of textbooks in the learning process is mandatory for teachers and students. This is regulated by the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 2 of 2008, outlined in Chapter 6 on the Use of Textbooks in Educational Units, specifically in Article 6, Paragraph 2, which states that textbooks are used as a mandatory reference by educators and students in the learning process. From this regulation, it can be concluded that the presence of textbooks in the learning process is essential for both teachers and students.

One important component that must be present in a book is exercises. Nikmah (2022: 2) emphasizes that exercise is a set of questions in a book that tests a student's knowledge and skill. Exercises in textbooks are instrumental in assessing students' comprehension and

identifying areas where additional support is needed. Well-designed exercises encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, ensuring that students do not merely memorize information but understand and apply it in meaningful ways.

As one of the four English language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) reading is an important component in the English learning process. Safura & Helmanda (2020: 170) define reading as a cognitive process that involves decoding symbols to arrive at meaning. Reading serves not only as a means to gain information and knowledge but also as a gateway to improving other language skills. Through reading, learners expand their vocabulary, enhance comprehension, and develop critical thinking abilities.

However, reading proficiency of Indonesia students remains significant challenges. Studies and surveys often highlight the low interest in reading and the limited reading habits among many Indonesia students. Yanti et al. (2020: 309) state that students in Indonesia have a very low reading comprehension skill. Ramdhayani (2023: 68) conveys that Indonesia ranked 60th with a score of 396 out of a total of 65 participating countries in the category of reading category. Jasmine et al. (2024: 81) emphasize that the literacy level of students in Indonesia is still low compared to students in other countries and Indonesia is ranked as the third country with the lowest reading ability. Jatmiko et al. (2021: 142) also say that the results of the UNESCO research stated that the reading interest of the Indonesian people was only 0.001 percent. This figure reflects that in 1000 Indonesians, there is only one person who likes to read. In addition, Dimar et al. (2022: 125) explain that signs that students do not fully understand the content of a reading can be observed when they make numerous errors in answering questions related to the text, are unable to retell the content of the reading, and fail to identify the main topic of the passage.

From the above phenomenon, it can be concluded that students' ability to understand reading is very low. Therefore, teaching students to be able to understand reading texts well is very important to improve their reading skills, one of which can be done by doing exercise questions after reading. In the English textbook for the eighth grade of Junior High School entitled "*English for Nusantara*" used at SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Barat, there is a reading section in each chapter which aims to get students to read and then answer the exercise questions after reading. Through these exercise questions, it will certainly be able to test students' understanding of the reading they read.

Although the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" provides a reading section to test students' understanding after reading, it does not make students provoked to be able to think critically about the questions if the questions do not contain Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). HOTS is an essential concept in education that focuses on developing students' abilities to think critically, analytically, creatively, and evaluatively. Singh & Marappan (2020: 740) convey that the use of HOTS is to help students to be independent, problem-solver, and decision-makers in the future. Subsequently, Kareem (2022: 96) delivers that HOTS is important as they foster critical thinking skills of students to achieve high level of thinking critically. Although the "*English for Nusantara*" textbook for eighth grade includes reading texts followed by questions, it remains unclear whether these questions reflect HOTS. HOTS encourages students to think critically, analyze, evaluate, and create based on what they read. If the questions only test basic understanding, such as recalling facts or identifying information, the development of HOTS has not been fully supported.

This concern is in line with the learning objectives stated in the Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP) and the expected outcomes in the Capaian Pembelajaran (CP) documents for grade eight students of SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Barat. The ATP outlines several reading-related goals that inherently require the use of HOTS. For example, ATP 8.5, 8.6, and 8.7 ask students to write key events from their personal experiences, requiring them to recall, organize, and express ideas creatively, an application of the creating domain in Bloom's Taxonomy. ATP 8.8 and 8.9 expect students to connect and arrange events in an imaginative story, which not only involves sequencing but also demands analytical thinking to establish coherence and logic across the narrative. ATP 8.10 and 8.11 further deepen cognitive

engagement by asking students to interpret characters' behaviors and emotions in stories, which aligns with both analyzing and evaluating skills. Similarly, ATP 8.16 and 8.17 challenge students to categorize based on given situations, which is a task rooted in classification and critical comparison, both of which fall under analyzing. These objectives demonstrate that students are expected to engage with texts on a deeper cognitive level.

Furthermore, the CP for Phase D explicitly states that students should be able to read and respond to both familiar and unfamiliar texts independently and critically, and begin to demonstrate inferential skills when interpreting implicit information skills that are central to the HOTS framework. Therefore, if the reading questions in the textbook focus only on literal comprehension and neglect the analytical, evaluative, and creative dimensions outlined in both the ATP and CP, then the textbook fails to fully support the curriculum's goal of fostering critical and independent thinkers.

Several research have analyzed HOTS exercises in textbooks. Atiullah et al. (2019: 435) find that out of 158 reading comprehension questions in textbooks for 10th-grade students in Indonesia, only 24 were at the higher-order thinking level. Similarly, Laila & Fitriyah (2022: 80) examine 142 reading comprehension questions in textbooks for 12th-grade students published by the Ministry of Education and Culture and found that only 25 were classified as higher-order thinking questions. Research by Febrina et al. (2019: 13) on 11th-grade textbooks reveal that 66.8% of the reading comprehension questions were HOTS, while 33.4% were at the Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) level. Last, Astuti, (2023: 78) find out of 97 reading questions in the textbook 'English in Mind' for the seventh grade, only 21 HOTS questions. These findings are surprising as most analyses indicate that textbooks tend to have more LOTS questions than HOTS, suggesting that many textbooks are still insufficient in providing higher-order thinking question.

Due to the importance of the alignment between textbook and HOTS questions in reading exercise, the researcher wanted to conduct further research to analyze the questions in the reading exercises of the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" for the eighth grade of Junior High School. This is supported by Febrianti et al. (2021: 44) who convey that HOTS questions can be applied at all educational levels, including elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school, to enhance students' critical thinking skills. Moreover, Fitriyani & Ghani (2024: 70) state that HOTS questions in junior high schools aim to enhance students' understanding of subject matter and encourage them to think more deeply, critically, and creatively. Cahyawati & Sholeh (2020: 101) further add that HOTS can be applied to all subjects with the goal of stimulating students' higher-order thinking skills. Finally, Rosidah & Sabtiawan (2024: 2984) emphasize that providing students with questions focused on HOTS is essential.

The researcher chose this textbook because this textbook allows students to learn four skills in English, namely listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In addition, this book published in 2022 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia refers to the book used for the current curriculum, namely the Merdeka Curriculum. Then, this book is also used by English teachers and students at SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Barat who have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Jannah et al. (2024: 2442) explain that the Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that emphasizes the importance of developing 21st-century skills, which are closely related to HOTS. Therefore, the researcher raised the research title "An Analysis of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in the Reading Exercises of the Textbook "English for Nusantara" for the Eighth Grade of Junior High School Based on Bloom's Taxonomy."

Based on the background of the problem above, there were two formulations of the problems:

What does the distribution of HOTS in the reading exercises of the textbook "English for Nusantara" for the eighth grade of junior high school?

What is the most commonly skill of HOTS used in the reading exercises of the textbook "English for Nusantara for the eighth grade of junior high school?

METHOD

Approach and Type of the Research

Since this research was addressed to analyze the content of the textbook especially reading exercises in the textbook, the researcher used the qualitative research method that applied descriptive research as its framework. Jagat et al. (2024: 277) define qualitative method as an activity that produces discoveries, both discoveries in learning and other things, then the discoveries are described in writing or not using numbers. On the other hand, Atmowardoyo (2018: 198) states that descriptive research is a research method used to describe the existing phenomena as accurately as possible. Furthermore, to identify the distribution of HOTS in the reading exercises of the textbook, the researcher used content analysis. Nasrullah (2022: 88) mentions that content analysis is a research method for the subjective interpretation of text data content through a systematic classification process, coding, and identifying themes or patterns.

Source of Data

The resources data for the research was textbook "*English for Nusantara*" content particularly the reading exercises for the eighth grade of Junior High School. The textbook was composed by Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia in 2022.

Instrument of the Research

A research instrument is a tool used to collect, measure, and analyze data for research. According to Mahohoma & Agbenyegah (2024: 41) research instrument is defined as a specific tool used to collect data, such as a questionnaire, survey, interview guide, or observation checklist. Thus, determining the instrument is very crucial in this research.

To collect the data of this research, the researcher needed to prepare instrument of the research namely a checklist table. The checklist table was used as the instrument to answer the research questions and fulfilled the research objectives. It was used to assess the availability of HOTS from the reading exercises. The detailed form of the checklist table is provided in the following table.

Table 1. Checklist Table of the Distribution of HOTS

Chp	Page	No	Reading Exercises	Bloom's Taxonomy Levels of Thinking					
				LOTS	MOTS		HOTS		
				C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
1	1	1	…						
			Total						
			Percentage						

Adapted from Saputra in Astuti (2023: 52)

Data Collecting Technique

A data collection technique is a method or system used to gather information for research purposes. Data can be in the form of statistics, measurements, opinions, or other factual information. Sukmawati et al. (2023: 119) state that data collection is defined as research activities that aim to collect field data needed to answer research questions in qualitative research or to test hypotheses in quantitative research.

In this study, the researcher employed document review as the primary data collection technique, which involved several stages: (a) reading the *English for Nusantara* textbook, especially the reading exercises, to understand the material and relate it to the research focus; (b) identifying each question in the reading exercises to determine the level of thinking involved, categorizing them into LOTS (Lower Order Thinking Skills), MOTS (Middle Order Thinking Skills), or HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills); (c) classifying the questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy into cognitive levels C1 through C6 using a checklist table; (d) simplifying the data by consolidating questions related to HOTS (C4–C6) and excluding those related to LOTS (C1–C3); and (e) analyzing the frequency and distribution of HOTS in the textbook's reading exercises to determine the extent to which it promotes students' higher-order thinking skills in line with Bloom's Taxonomy.
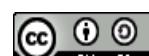
Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in research is the process of examining and organizing the data collected to find patterns, relationships, or answers to research questions. In this research, the researcher used qualitative data analysis that follows the Miles and Huberman's model (1992) in Rijali (2018: 83). The model consists of four key steps, namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

In the data collection stage, the researcher gathered data from the *English for Nusantara* textbook, focusing specifically on reading exercises as the primary data source to identify elements of HOTS. In the data reduction stage, the researcher organized and simplified the data by listing all reading questions in a checklist table and classifying them based on Bloom's Taxonomy cognitive levels (C1 to C6). Since the study focused on HOTS, only questions in the categories of C4 (Analyzing), C5 (Evaluating), and C6 (Creating) were retained, while those in C1 to C3 were excluded. In the data display stage, the researcher presented the HOTS-related questions in a structured format, grouping them under Analyze, Evaluate, and Create categories, and calculated their frequency using a percentage formula proposed by Sudijono in Astuti (2023: 57):

$$P = \frac{f}{N} \; x \; 100\%$$

where P is the percentage, f is the frequency of HOTS questions, and N is the total number of items. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the analyzed data to determine how frequently HOTS appeared in the textbook's reading exercises, evaluated whether these exercises supported the development of HOTS, and used the results to answer the research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Formulation of the Problem 1

Distribution of HOTS in the Reading Exercises

Table 2. The Distribution of HOTS in the Reading Exercises

Chp	Page	No	Reading Exercises	C4	C5	C6
1	50	6	Can you identify the time connectives in the text? Highlight them.	✓		
	51	7	In a costume competition, what are the possible criteria for scoring the contestants? Explain your reason.		✓	
		10	What do you think the elephant felt at the end of the story?		✓	
2	125	1	What is the best possible title for the story? Why?			✓
		4	What kind of man do you think the man is? Tell the reason/s.		✓	
		6	Which moral lesson can you take from the story?	✓		
		7	If you were the man, what would you do?	✓		
3	153	5	In your opinion, what makes some people like the post?	✓		
3	160	6	Which comments are not related to the content?	✓		
		7	Which idea do you recommend to a content sender?	✓		
3	167	6	Do you like the poster?	✓		
		7	Do you think people will be interested in the poster? Why? Why not?		✓	
4	211	1	What is the best title for this story?			✓
4	217	5	Do you think the Don't be a Tosser! posters in Picture 4.10 were effective? Why/Why not?		✓	
		6	What is the best title for this story?			✓
5	258	6	What do you think would happen to Mirza?	✓		
5	259	3	Draw Mirza's plastic soccer ball.			✓
		4	Can you guess why Mirza wished his dad was with him?	✓		
	262	1	Draw a picture of the setting in each part of the story.			✓
5	264	4	Each part of the story has been summarized below. Put the summaries in order by writing 1-7 in the boxes on the left.	✓		
		5	What do you learn from the story?	✓		
		6	What is the best title for the story?			✓
5	269	9	Draw a picture where Radit held his handphone.			✓

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Chp	Page	No	Reading Exercises	HOTS Levels		
				C4	C5	C6
			Total	**11**	**5**	**7**
			Percentage = $\frac{Total}{116}$ x 100%	**9.4%**	**4.3%**	**6.0%**

The cognitive levels C4 (Analyze), C5 (Evaluate), and C6 (Create) From the table above, it was found that the distribution of HOTS, which consist of analyze, evaluate, and create, was only present in 23 reading exercises out of a total of 116 reading exercises in all chapters of the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" for the eighth grade of junior high school. The analyze category included 11 reading exercises, the evaluate category included 5 reading exercises, and the create category included 7 reading exercises. This distribution of HOTS accounted for 23 reading exercises, representing 19.6%. The following figure illustrates the distribution of HOTS in the reading exercises of the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" for the eighth grade of junior high school.

Figure 1. Distribution of HOTS in the Reading Exercises

From the figure above, it can be seen that among the HOTS found in the reading
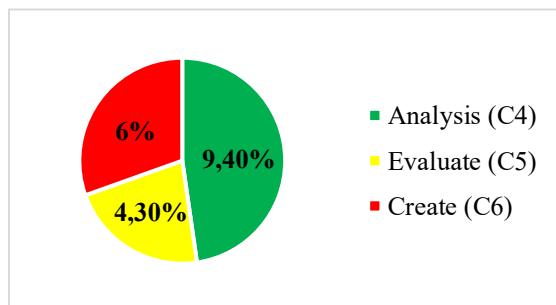
exercises of the textbook "*English for Nusantara*," the most frequently appearing cognitive level was Analyze (C4), which accounted for 9.4% of the total exercises. This was followed by Create (C6) with 6%, and Evaluate (C5) with 4.3%. Although these HOTS elements are present, their overall proportion remains limited when compared to the total number of reading exercises. The following table presents the detailed distribution of each HOTS level across the chapters of the textbook.

Table 3. Distribution of HOTS in Each Chapter of the Reading Exercises

Chapter	Title	HOTS in Reading Exercises			Total Score
		C4	C5	C6	
1	Celebrating Independence Day	1	1	0	$\frac{2}{116}$ x 100% = 1.7%
2	Kindness Begins with Me	2	2	1	$\frac{5}{116}$ x 100% = 4.3%
3	Love Our World	4	1	0	$\frac{5}{116}$ x 100% = 4.3%
4	No Littering	0	1	2	$\frac{3}{116}$ x 100% = 2.5%
5	Embrace Yourself	4	0	4	$\frac{8}{116}$ x 100% = 6.8%
	Total Score	**11** **3.4%**	**5** **9.4%**	**7** **6.8%**	$\frac{23}{116}$ **x 100% = 19.6%**

From the table above, it could be seen that out of a total of 116 reading exercises in the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" for the eighth grade of junior high school, the distribution of HOTS in chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 was found in 23 reading exercises, with a total percentage of 19.6%. The analyze category included 11 reading exercises, representing 9.4%, the evaluate category included 5 reading exercises, representing 4.3%, and the create category included 7 reading exercises, representing 6.0%. The following figure will illustrate more clearly the distribution of HOTS in each chapter of the reading exercises in the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" for the eighth grade of junior high school.

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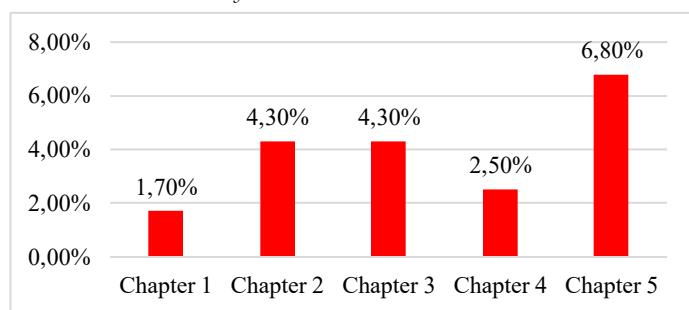

Figure 2. Distribution of HOTS in Each Chapter

From the figure above, it could be seen that the highest distribution of HOTS was found in Chapter 5, with a percentage of 6.8%, followed by Chapters 2 and 3, each with a percentage of 4.3%. Next was Chapter 4, with a percentage of 2.5%, and lastly, Chapter 1 had the lowest distribution of HOTS, with a percentage of 1.7%.

Formulation of the Problem 2:

The Mostly Used Skill of HOTS in the Reading Exercises

From the explanation above, it could be seen that the distribution of HOTS in the reading exercises of the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" for the eighth grade of junior high school consisted of 23 reading exercises, representing 19.6%. The analyze category included 11 exercises, accounting for 9.4%, the evaluate category included 5 reading exercises, accounting for 4.3%, and the create category included 7 reading exercises, accounting for 6.0%. For further clarification, the following three tables present the list of reading exercises categorized according to HOTS.

Discussions

Formulation of the Problem 1

Distribution of HOTS in the Reading Exercises

Based on the findings regarding the distribution of HOTS in the reading exercises of the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" for the eighth grade of junior high school, it was found that Higher Oder Thinking Skills (HOTS), which includes analyze (C4), evaluate (C5), and create (C6), appeared in only 23 out of the total 116 reading exercises in the textbook. The analyze (C4) category contained 11 reading exercises, accounting for 9.4%, the evaluate (C5) category contained 5 reading exercises, accounting for 4.3%, and the create (C6) category contained 7 reading exercises, accounting for 6.0%. Based on these data, the total percentage of HOTS distribution in the reading exercises was 19.6%.

Furthermore, the distribution of HOTS across different chapters in the textbook varied significantly. Chapter 5 (Embrace Yourself) had the highest number of reading exercises incorporating HOTS, with a percentage of 6.8%, while Chapter 1 (Celebrating Independence Day) had the lowest, with only 1.7%. This suggests that certain chapters encouraged students to engage in critical and creative thinking, whereas others still emphasized memorization and comprehension.

The relatively high number of reading exercises categorized under Analyze (C4), totaling 11 items, indicated that the textbook provided students with several opportunities to break down information, recognize patterns, and examine relationships between ideas, thereby fostering deeper understanding of the text. In contrast, the Evaluate (C5) category appeared less frequently, with only 5 exercises, showing that students were less frequently required to assess, judge, or form reasoned opinions about the content. Meanwhile, the Create (C6) category, with 7 exercises, ranked second in the HOTS distribution. This suggests that while the textbook made some efforts to encourage students to develop original ideas or creative outputs based on the reading materials, such opportunities remained somewhat limited.

From this explanation, it can be concluded that the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" for the eighth grade of junior high school has not yet fully accommodated HOTS optimally in its reading exercises. To support more challenging and relevant learning in today's context, an increase in both the quantity and variety of exercises oriented toward HOTS is necessary.

Formulation of the Problem 2

The Mostly Used Skill of HOTS in the Reading Exercises

Based on the findings on the distribution of HOTS in the reading exercises, the most frequently used HOTS skill was analyze (C4), which appeared in 11 reading exercises, accounting for 9.4% of the total reading exercises in the textbook "*English for Nusantara*" for the eighth grade of junior high school. The analyze (C4) skill reflects students' ability to break down information into its components, identify relationships among ideas, and understand textual structures more thoroughly. In reading exercises, this often involves recognizing patterns, distinguishing cause and effect, or identifying organizational frameworks within the text.

The Create (C6) skill ranked second, appearing in 7 reading exercises, representing 6% of the total. Exercises in this category often encouraged students to develop original ideas, suggest new titles for stories, or illustrate key parts of the reading based on their understanding and imagination. Although not dominant, the presence of create skill (C6) exercises indicates a moderate effort to foster students' creativity and synthesis abilities.

Meanwhile, the Evaluate (C5) skill was the least frequently used among the three HOTS categories, appearing in only 5 reading exercises, or 4.3% of the total. Evaluate-type questions typically asked students to form judgments, express reasoned opinions, assess characters' actions, or weigh different viewpoints within the text. The limited use of evaluate (C5) suggests that students were given fewer opportunities to engage in reflective, critical thinking during reading activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings on the distribution of HOTS in the reading exercises of the textbook English for Nusantara for eighth-grade students, it was concluded that HOTS had not been fully accommodated in this textbook. Out of the 116 reading exercises analyzed, only 23 exercises (19.6%) fell into the HOTS category, with the following distribution: analyze (C4) appeared in 11 reading exercises (9.4%), evaluate (C5) appeared in 5 reading exercises (4.3%), and create (C6) appeared in 7 exercises (6.0%). Additionally, analyze (C4) was the most frequently used HOTS skill, followed by create (C6), and evaluate (C5) had the fewest occurrences. The low number of exercises in the evaluate category suggested that students had limited opportunities to develop critical thinking skills related to assessing information, forming judgments, and justifying their opinions based on the content of the text. The findings of this research imply that English language teachers must take a proactive role in bridging the gap between curriculum goals and the limited presence of HOTS-based questions in the English for Nusantara textbook by utilizing supplementary materials or generating their own questions to promote students' analytical, evaluative, and creative thinking skills. It is also recommended that textbook authors pay more attention to balancing the inclusion of HOTS questions across all chapters. Lastly, future researchers interested in this field are encouraged to conduct similar studies on other textbooks, whether for different grade levels or those published by different publishers. Additionally, Bloom's Taxonomy can continue to be used as an analytical framework to assess the distribution of HOTS in reading exercises.

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