



THE 15th JETA



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LITERACY IN INDONESIAN SCHOOLS:
THEORIES AND PRACTICES**

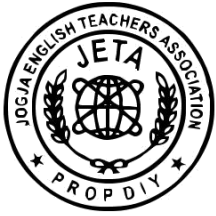


University of PGRI Yogyakarta

**The 15th JETA International Conference
Jogja English Teachers Association (JETA)
in collaboration with the University of PGRI Yogyakarta**

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July 2nd & 3rd, 2018 University of PGRI Yogyakarta

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“IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LITERACY IN INDONESIAN SCHOOLS: THEORIES AND PRACTICES”

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PREFACE

These proceedings contain a collection of papers presented at the 15th JETA International Conference conducted by Jogja English Teachers Association (JETA), in collaboration with University of PGRI Yogyakarta on Monday and Tuesday, on the 2nd and 3rd of July 2018. This conference took place at the Auditorium of University of PGRI Yogyakarta.

The conference whose theme was “Improving English Language Literacy in Indonesian Schools: Theories and Practices” was special because the activities disseminate creative ideas through seminars, workshops, and teaching demonstrations. We hope that participants would get relevant information, knowledge and experience in teaching from fellow teachers, lecturers, and practitioners as well as perspectives concerning English Language Literacy.

Finally, it is expected that the proceedings could give many benefits to readers, especially English teachers, to be creative in improving English language literacy in their schools, and particularly to those who could not join the conference.

Have a nice reading and, together let us improve our professionalism.

Yogyakarta, July 13th, 2018

Chairperson of JETA Publisher

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COVER	i
PREFACE	iii
COMMITTEE OF THE 15 TH JETA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2018	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi

<u>Content</u>	<u>Page</u>
<u>READING and EXTENSIVE READING</u>	
1. EXPLORING AN ENGLISH TEACHER'S LIVED EXPERIENCE IN TEACHING READING TO VISUALLY-IMPAIRED JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS Ana Humardhiana (Sanata Dharma University)	01
2. THE USE OF EXTENSIVE READING TO TEACHING ENGLISH FOR HOSPITALITY STUDENTS Desi Ratnasari, Yuyun Yulia (Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa)	13
3. FACTORS INHIBITING STUDENTS TO READ AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF AN ISLAMIC PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN YOGYAKARTA Zahrotul Farichah & Eko Purwanti (Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta)	17
4. AN EFFORT TO INCREASE ACQUISITION LEVEL OF ENGLISH LEARNING TO STUDENTS OF SMK N 1 KOKAP KULONPROGO THROUGH EXTENSIVE READING Joko Triyatno (SMK N 1 Kokap)	23
5. EXTENSIVE READING IN IMPROVING EFL LEARNERS' LANGUAGE SKILLS AND LEARNING MOTIVATION Novita Mulyana (Udayana University)	30
6. STRATEGIES FOR EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAM IN EFL CONTEXT Yulia Nuzulul Hidayah (Yogyakarta State University)	36
<u>VOCABULARY</u>	
7. DEVELOPING A SET OF ENGLISH GAMES FOR DEVELOPING VOCABULARY LEARNING OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS Asrikah Puji Lestari (Ahmad Dahlan University)	41
8. QUIZLET AS A MALL PLATFORM IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: ENHANCING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY Eka Wahjuningsih (University of Jember)	45

9. THE INFLUENCE OF PICTURES TOWARDS STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY AT THE FOURTH GRADE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OF MUHAMMADIYAH METRO IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2016/2017	56
Eva Faliyanti ¹ and Evi Triyanti (Muhammadiyah University of Metro)	
10. BOARD RACE TOWARDS THE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY	59
Fitri Palupi Kusumawati (Muhammadiyah University of Metro)	
11. HOW TO DEVELOP VOCABULARY MASTERY IN SUPPORT TO LITERACY INVOLVING LEARNING AUTONOMY	64
Nanik Supriani, Hanandyo Darjito (University of Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa)	
<u>READING and WRITING</u>	
12. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING ANIMATION MOVIE IN TEACHING WRITING	71
Baiti Shofa, Fenny Thresia (Muhammadiyah University of Metro)	
13. IMPROVING WRITING SKILL THROUGH CLUSTERING TECHNIQUE OF THE SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS AT SD NEGERI 5 PERING ACADEMIC YEAR 2016/2017	78
Ni Luh Made Dwi Ari Septiani & Putu Prinda D'Amour Nisa (Udayana University)	
14. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PARAPHRASING STRATEGY TO PROMOTE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION	84
Syaifudin Latif D (Muhammadiyah University of Metro)	
<u>ENGLISH LITERACY</u>	
15. WHEN TELEVISION IS NOT ALWAYS BAD: HOW "JALAN SESAMA" PROMOTES ENJOYMENT OF LITERACY	90
Desak Gede Chandra Widyanthi (Universitas Udayana)	
16. DIGITAL LITERACY : THE NEW ERA OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN INDONESIA	95
I Wayan Restu Indra Darmawan, S.S (Udayana University)	
17. LITERACY AND INTERPRETATION IN FORREST CARTER'S THE EDUCATION OF LITTLE TREE	101
Suryo Sudiro (Universitas Teknologi Yogyakarta)	
18. TEACHING PROCEDURE TEXT THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' ENGLISH SKILLS AND LITERACY FOR GRADE IX OF JUNIOR HIGHSCHOOL	106
Susana Endang Cahyani (SMP Negeri 5 Yogyakarta)	

TESTs and TEXTs

19. THE MANIFESTATION OF THINKING SKILLS IN THE ENGLISH TEST ITEMS.

Fransiskus Jemadi (STKIP ST. Paulus Ruteng), Katarina Retno Triwidayati
(UNIKA Musi Charitas) 113

20. TEACHER'S PERCEPTION ON THE WASHBACK EFFECT OF CAT TOWARD STUDENTS' LEARNING STRATEGIES IN EFL CLASSROOM

Ida Dwi Safitri*; Sumardi; Slamet Supriyadi (Sebelas Maret University) 118

21. THE READABILITY OF EFL TEXTS: TEACHER'S AND STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Kusumarasdyati (Universitas Negeri Surabaya) 122

ENGLISH and CULTURE

22. CULTURAL BARRIERS ON TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE IN SMP N 2 NGLIPAR, GUNUNGKIDUL

Cindera Asmarawati (SMPN 2 Nglipar) 128

23. EXPLORING LOCAL CULTURE IN SEVENTH GRADE ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS

Moh Syahrul Zaky Romadhoni (SMP Terpadu Riyadlul Ulum Wadda'wah Kota Tasikmalaya) 132

CLASS DYNAMICS

24. ENGLISH TEACHER COLLABORATION IN THE EFL CONTEXT: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

Ahmad Faozan, Intan Pradita (Universitas Islam Indonesia) 143

25. FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE STUDENTS: HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS IN THE CLASSROOM

Aulia Nisa Khusnia (Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto) 154

26. COMMUNICATIVE GRAMMAR TEACHING IN EFL CONTEXT

Bambang Suroso (Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto) 160

27. EXPLORING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' ENGAGEMENT WITH ORAI IN PRESENTATION PRACTICE

Wury Anggun Kusumawati (Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta),
Desy Indriana (Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta) 166

CALL and MALL

28. STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH MOBILE PHONE

Agus Triyogo (STKIP PGRI Lubuklinggau) 174

29. ENGLISH TEACHER'S BELIEFS AND THEIR SOURCES OF COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CALL) IN INDONESIAN EFL CONTEXT

Badi'atul Azmina, S.Pd.I. (Universitas Sebelas Maret)	180
30. USING AUGMENTED REALITY AS THE MEDIA FOR FLIPPED TEACHING	
Riandi	185
<u>DESIGN and DEVELOPMENT</u>	
31. DESIGNING SUPPLEMENTARY SPEAKING MATERIALS USING TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR SMA STELLA DUCE BANTUL	
Maria Kristiyani (University of Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa)	192
32. FUNLISH: DESIGNING MOBILE APPS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING	
Natalisa Krisnawati and Anisya Ayu Devinta Firdausia (Sanata Dharma University)	199
33. ESP INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIA: DEVELOPING VIDEO DEMONSTRATION FOR JOB INTERVIEW	
Paulus Widiatmoko, Arida Susyetina (Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana)	206
<u>WORKSHOP</u>	
34. WORKSHOP ON DEVELOPING ICT-BASED TAILORED ENGLISH AUDIO LISTENING MATERIALS	
Fitria Rahmawati dan Mariska Intan Sari (Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Pendidikan Bahasa, UMY)	212

THE MANIFESTATION OF THINKING SKILLS IN THE ENGLISH TEST ITEMS.

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Abstract

The major objective of this present descriptive analytical approach was to investigate the extent to which the thinking skills were manifested in the English test items composed by English teachers. Henceforth, the researchers explored the test items in order to determine the quantity and quality of questions by using Barrett taxonomy. The data gathered for this study were the package of national-based school examination in the academic year of 2017-2018. As far as the findings of this present study are concerned, there is still much room for higher order thinking skills to be included in the test items in order to contribute to the enhancement of students' critical thinking skills and meet their needs when studying at the higher level of education. Finally, this present study is summarized with a set of pedagogical recommendations for English teachers and academics.

Introduction

In the new global world, thinking skills have been emphasized as paramount aspect in education. Harizaj & Hajrulla (2017) states that fostering students' thinking skills has been one of the concerns of foreign English language teachers. They argued that fostering thinking skills of students can stimulate their self-confidence, aid them to become independent and creative thinkers, and learn to use language for different purposes in different contexts. In the same token, (Brookhart, 2010; Li, 2016; Larsson, 2017) suggested to the teachers worldwide to incorporate thinking skills as they teach their students. It is precisely due to the fact that through integrating thinking skills in the language classroom the students will become more motivated in learning, have positive effect on their achievements such as their language proficiency get improved and become actively engaged in thinking. Furthermore, Živković (2016) said that thinking skills are essential for obtaining knowledge, good work performance, critical and dynamic thinkers and competent for problem solving in real life situations.

Having taken into account the importance of thinking skills, there must be some implications for classroom teachers to foster students thinking skills. Lewis & Smith (1993) states that everyone is in need of enhancing his/her thinking skills, teaching thinking skills should be integrated during the teaching and learning process in the classroom, and helping students with learning difficulties to develop their thinking skills is indispensable since being unable to foster these thinking skills could cause huge learning difficulties. Furthermore, Pacific Policy Research Center (2010) states that in order the students to be successful in their career and life there must be some kind of transformation that the schools need to make so that the students will possess the abilities required such as creative thinking, being flexible, being able to work together or collaborate in solving problems. The importance of thinking skills is in line with the idea of Cottrell (2011) who stated explicitly that thinking skills determine the success in professions and study. However, lack of fostering students' thinking skills in teaching seems to be prominent in Indonesia for many years. As a matter of fact, the experience of the writers when studying in junior high school and senior high school would say that the teachers rarely encouraged and developed students' thinking skills and they heavily emphasized on asking the students to memorize the teaching materials. It is in line with the observation of Masduqi (2011) who stated that Indonesian universities students had limited use of high order thinking skills. Consequently,

he further said that the students were prone to simply accepting opinion just as it is without truly evaluating it as they exchange their ideas either in their spoken or written language.

According to Bloom (1956) the levels of reasoning skills required in classroom situations comprises of six thinking skills or levels such as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. While the first three levels of this taxonomy are categorized lower order thinking, the last three levels are considered as higher order thinking skills which involve analysis, evaluation and synthesis. In addition, he argued that to assist the students to be creative thinkers the higher order thinking skills must be incorporated in the lesson plans and tests. Moreover, according to Wilson (2000) lower order thinking is the basic skills required before moving into higher order thinking. These are basic skills are well integrated in teaching process in schools such as reading and writing. On the contrary, higher order thinking skills are the ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate (McDavitt, 1993).

Aside from the taxonomy of comprehension proposed by Bloom, Barrett (1968) introduced different levels of comprehension. They are literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluation and appreciation. Literal comprehension refers to literal recognition, recall or verification of details, main ideas, and sequence of events, comparison, cause-effect relationship, character traits, precise meaning of familiar words and make use of the contextual clues to guess the meaning of the words. Reorganization comprehension refers to the ability of students to synthesize, analyze, and/or organize information stated in a selection. Inferential comprehension is demonstrated when students use the ideas and information explicitly stated in a viewing material, students intuition and personal experiences as bases in making intelligent guesses and hypothesis. Students may infer supporting details, sequence, comparisons, cause and effect relationships, character traits, figurative language and predicting outcomes. Evaluation comprehension deals with judgments and focuses with reality or fantasy, fact or opinion, adequacy or validity, appropriateness, worth, desirability and acceptability. It also refers to judging the language and effect of the material in the light of appropriate criteria. It requires responses which indicate that an evaluative judgment has been made by comparing ideas. Appreciation comprehension deals with psychological and aesthetic responses. It refers to emotional responses to content, plot or theme, sensitivity to various literary genres, identification with characters and incidents, reaction to author's use of language, and response to generate images. In other words, it can be inferred that the first two level of Barrett taxonomy are lower order thinking skills because they require the students to recall the information of the given text. Whereas, the last three levels are categorized as higher order thinking since they demand the students to have the knowledge of the issue.

Since the taxonomy of comprehension has been introduced by different experts such as Bloom (1956) and Barrett (1968) and applied in education, much of the current literatures on thinking skills pay particular attention to fostering thinking skills of students through some teaching techniques. Studies conducted by Heng & Ziguang (2015), Živković (2016), Gelerstein, et al (2016) and Coughlin & Featherstone (2017) provide model to illustrate a feasible procedure of test construction and measuring students thinking skills. While other studies conducted on integrating thinking skills in teaching English as a foreign language class such as Li, 2016; and Larsson, 2017. In addition, studies conducted by Widiati, (2012) and Wulandari (2017) revealed that low order thinking skills were more predominant than high order thinking skills in the reading comprehension questions found in English textbooks. As the aforementioned studies have dealt with, most studies on thinking skills have been carried out in investigating the thinking skills in textbooks. However, far too little attention has been paid in investigating thinking skills manifested in the questions of standardized test. Henceforth, the central thesis of this present

study is to seek the extent to which the thinking skills were manifested in the English test items of national-based school examination. In other words, the researchers explored the test items in order to determine the quantity and quality of questions by using Barrett taxonomy.

Research Method

The design of this present study was descriptive analytical in nature. This descriptive study sought to answer the aforementioned research question which was to what extent to which the thinking skills were manifested in the English test items of national-based school examination. In order to seek the manifestation of the thinking skills covered in the test items, the researchers gathered the data from the test items of national-based school examination in the academic year of 2017-2018 in East Nusa Tenggara Province. The data were in the form of questions stated in each number of 45 questions of national-based school examination.

Furthermore, before the researchers classified all of the English test items into the level of thinking skills, first and foremost they read thoroughly those 45 English test items. Having classified all of those English test items, the researchers categorized them into different levels of Barrett taxonomy such as literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluation and appreciation. After categorizing those test items into the level of thinking, the researchers tabulate them in order to calculate the percentage of each level and made conclusion.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study displayed some interesting points with respect to the manifestation of thinking skills in the test items of senior high school national-based school examination in the academic year 2017/2018 as it is shown in the following chart.

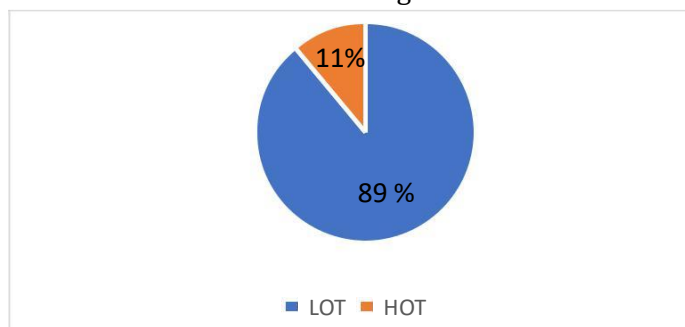


Chart 1.1. The manifestation of Lower Order Thinking (LOT) and High Order Thinking (HOT)

First, the test item of senior high school national-based school examination showed that the lower order thinking questions dominated over the high order thinking questions. There was 89 % of lower order thinking questions existing in the national-based senior high school examination. Whereas, the high order thinking questions covered only 11 % of the total number of questions. Furthermore, the most frequent questions of lower order thinking skills appeared in the national-based school examination was literal questions. The other two levels of higher order thinking skills of Barrett taxonomy which are evaluation and appreciation were not present in the national-based school examination of senior high school and only inferential questions were found. In other words, it can be concluded that the national-based school examination did not provide much room for the development of higher order thinking skills since it was dominated by the literal questions or lower order thinking skills.

Aside from the percentage of lower order thinking questions was higher than the higher order thinking questions, this study revealed another interesting finding in which the higher

order thinking questions were not present in the reading section of the national-based senior high school of East Nusa Tenggara province and were only present in the listening section. For instance, the lower order thinking questions found in the national-based senior high school test items were seen through some questions such as "According to the text, one advantage of using the debit card is that...., What does the article say about the smokers?, "As this moist air travels over the land, it rises to pass over the mountain ranges." (paragraph two). What does the underlined word refer to?" While the higher order thinking questions were seen through questions such as "What does the man most likely to reply? What is the girl's most probable answer?"

The findings of this study are not really surprising because it is in line with the findings of other studies conducted by other researchers who investigated under similar topic. For instance, studies conducted by Widiati (2012), Wulandari (2017) revealed that low order thinking skills were more predominant than high order thinking skills in the reading comprehension questions found in English textbooks. Furthermore, while English textbooks do not provide much opportunity for the students to foster their higher order thinking skills, a study conducted by Saefurrohman and Balinas (2016) has discovered that Indonesian junior high school English teachers used items from published textbooks as their primary sources for constructing assessment items. Consequently, there might be a relation between the high percentage of lower order thinking test items and the practice of English teachers who heavily relied much on the published textbook as they constructed test items for their students.

Conclusion and Suggestions

As far as the data of this study are concerned, the English national-based school examination of senior high school in the academic year 2017/2018 in East Nusa Tenggara province has revealed that the lower order thinking skills was more dominant than the higher order thinking skills. In other words, the questions raised in the exam simply require the students to recall facts and information and did not aid the students to think critically.

On account of small number of data gathered for this study, the researchers would like to recommend other researchers to investigate this particular topic by taking into account the large size of samples in order to have more comprehensive understanding and clear picture of how test items would serve as a means to foster students' thinking skills especially the higher order ones. Moreover, in order to have more comprehensive and thorough understanding of this topic, conducting a study on discovering the reasons behind as to why English teachers preferred lower order thinking questions more than higher order thinking questions is worth-searching in future. Since both textbooks and test items for senior high school students, as far as the results of previous studies are concerned, have not prepared or given much room for the senior high school students to enhance their higher order thinking skills, it would be advisable for the English teachers to incorporate higher order thinking skills in their teaching learning process.

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