EVALUATING READING ASSESSMENTS THROUGH THE LENS OF BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

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Abstract

Reading assessments play a central role in measuring students' progress and language proficiency in ESL contexts. However, many assessments focus mainly on lower-order thinking skills, which may not reflect the true range of reading comprehension abilities. This article evaluates the design of reading assessments for B2-level ESL learners using Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework. It examines whether typical reading tasks assess various cognitive skills, from basic understanding to higher-level analysis and creation. The article suggests practical improvements that could make assessments more comprehensive and aligned with real-world reading demands.

Key words: Bloom's Taxonomy, ESL reading, assessment, B2 learners, comprehension, critical thinking.

Reading assessments are a key part of language learning and are often used to determine students' progress or readiness for further study or work. For B2-level learners, reading is not just about understanding the words but also about interpreting, analyzing, and thinking critically about texts. However, many standard reading assessments only test surface-level skills like recognizing facts or locating information. This limits the development and evaluation of learners' full reading potential. Bloom's Taxonomy, which organizes thinking into six levels—remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating—can be a useful tool for designing or reviewing assessments that truly reflect a learner's cognitive development (Abdelrahman & Bsharah, 2020).

Most traditional reading tests, especially standardized ones, concentrate on the first two levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. For example, questions often ask students to identify specific details, match headings to paragraphs, or choose the correct meaning of a word. These types of questions focus on "remembering" and "understanding" but do not go further into higher-order thinking. While these skills are essential, they only give a partial view of what students can do with texts. At the B2 level, learners should be moving toward more complex tasks, such as applying information in new contexts or analyzing different points of view (Council of Europe, 2020).

Despite the recognized importance of higher-order thinking, many existing reading assessments continue to fall short of fully addressing these cognitive skills. Yasin et al. (2023) found that a significant number of reading literacy tests still emphasize lower-order tasks, such as recalling facts or identifying main ideas, with only a small proportion of questions requiring learners to evaluate arguments, synthesize information, or apply insights creatively. This imbalance can hinder learners' ability to engage deeply with texts and limits their preparation for real-world or academic tasks that demand complex reasoning and decision-making. Therefore, there is a pressing need to design assessments that incorporate a more even distribution of Bloom's levels, especially in standardized testing environments.

Higher-level questions are often missing in reading assessments, even though they are important for real-life and academic success. For example, “applying” can involve using an idea from the text in a new situation, such as advising a friend based on a character’s experience. “Analyzing” requires understanding how parts of a text relate, such as comparing two arguments or identifying the author’s purpose. These skills are especially relevant for students preparing for university or working in international environments where critical reading is necessary (Puspitasari et al., 2023).

An example of a more advanced question might be: “Do you agree with the author’s conclusion? Use evidence from the text to support your opinion.” This kind of question, linked to the “evaluating” stage, helps teachers see if students can make judgments based on what they read. Even more advanced are “creating” tasks, like rewriting the end of a story or designing an advertisement based on a text. These tasks combine comprehension with creativity and personal expression, which show how deeply a student understands the content (Ismail et al., 2023).

By evaluating reading assessments through Bloom’s Taxonomy, teachers and test designers can ensure that learners are being challenged at all levels. This also makes tests more engaging and meaningful for students, since they reflect real ways that reading is used in life, such as forming opinions, solving problems, and creating content. It can also help learners see reading not just as a passive activity, but as a tool for thinking and expression.

In conclusion, reading assessments for B2 ESL learners should be more balanced, testing not only memory and basic understanding but also higher-level skills like application, analysis, and evaluation. Bloom’s Taxonomy provides a helpful structure to review and improve assessments. When assessments are designed this way, they not only test what learners know, but also support their growth as critical, independent readers.

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