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## An Analysis of the Competency ‘Reading and Thinking Skills’ in Grade VIII English Textbook

**Abstract** *This research aimed at analysing the Grade VIII English textbook of Punjab Textbook Board against one of the five competencies, the Reading and Thinking skills and identifying the satisfaction level of Grade 8 students with their textbook for the fulfilment of this competency. The main parameters of the content analysis were Competency (C), Standards (S), Benchmarks (B) and SLOs. The data was collected through content analysis (of the textbook) and survey questionnaire. The student satisfaction level was measured with the help of an instrument comprising 10 statements on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire respondents were 1440 students of Grade VIII studying in public schools of Lahore. The results of content analysis and students’ survey showed that the textbook partly meets the requirements related to the selected competency. It is therefore recommended that the English textbook of grade VIII should be updated in congruence with the SLOs of the selected competency.*

**Key Words:** Reading and Thinking Skills, Competency (C), Standards (S), Benchmarks (B), Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), English Textbook, Grade VIII.

### Introduction

Reading is a part of our daily lives. We do read both for information and pleasure (Kaya, 2015). Reading is among one of the four basic language skills that are pinnacles of any language and play a vital role in language learning (Sadiku, 2015). Reading is usually perceived as a passive process, but this is not so. Rather it is a self-discovery process, in which readers interact with written materials, invest both cognitive and metacognitive efforts, decompose new knowledge, and make or infer meaning (Kaya, 2015). Reading skills involve the use of cognitive abilities for interaction with written material (Bojovic, 2010). These skills are important to be successful readers and to foster reading comprehension (Kaya, 2015). Language proficiency, conceptual understanding and reading strategies are the three pillars of reading comprehension (Gagné et al. 1993).

Reading may be with a surface or deep approach. Most of the students read with a surface approach. Surface reading involves acceptance and considering information as isolated and unlinked facts. It does not involve understanding and leads to superficial retention of material. Deep reading on, the other hand, involves use of higher-order cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, making connections and meta-cognitive thinking to negotiate authors’ meaning and reconstruct new meaning from the text (Hermida, 2009). Hence, deep reading involves the application of thinking skills for reading.

The role of a textbook in teaching and learning cannot be ignored. The textbook provides a structure and syllabus for a study program (Richards, 2001). Textbooks are beneficial both for students and teachers in English language learning and teaching and are the visible heart of teaching English language (Sheldon, 1987). Textbooks are the primary source for imparting knowledge to learners and provide a framework to teachers for knowledge building and carry out organized instruction (Garinger, 2002; Tok, 2010). Good English textbooks serve as resource material for students to learn and practice

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language learning and a guide for teachers by providing them supporting material for teaching vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation ([Cunningsworth \(1995\)](#)).

Reading and Thinking Skills are identified as first competency (C1) among the five key competencies or learning areas by the National Curriculum for English for Grade 1-12 ([Government of Pakistan, 2006](#)). According to the curriculum document, a Competency (C) comprises Standards (S) that describe the attainment and performance of students in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes from Grade 1-12. These Standards are broken down into Benchmarks (BM), which are given at five developmental levels or stages of schooling (Grades 1-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12). Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are given grade wise to be achieved at the end of each year of schooling.

There are two Standards (S1 & S2) in C1, Reading and Thinking Skills. These standards describe the skills and micro-skills related to this competency. S1 has four Benchmarks: BM1 (6 SLOs), BM 2 (7 SLOs), BM3 (5 SLOs), and BM4 (6 SLOs) for the stage 6-8. Standard 2 has only one Benchmark: BM1 (12 SLOs) (Government of Pakistan, 2006).

### Aim of the Study

The study is aimed at analyzing the grade VIII textbook against the SLOs of the competency Reading and Thinking Skills and at identifying the satisfaction level of grade 8 students about their English textbook for developing the selected competency among them.

### Research Question

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent English textbook of Grade VIII incorporates the SLOs of the competency of Reading and Thinking Skills
2. To what extent students of grade VIII are satisfied with their textbook for developing the selected competency amongst them?

### Research Methodology

The present study uses mixed-method approach. Content analysis and descriptive survey questionnaires were used for data collection. The content of the textbook was analyzed in the light of the National Curriculum (Government of Pakistan, 2006). The main parameters of the content analysis were Competency (C), Standards (S), Benchmarks (B) and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).

The population of the study was students of Grade VIII of public schools of Lahore, learning the recommended Punjab Textbook Board English Textbook VIII. According to the [Government of the Punjab \(2018\)](#), a total number of Government middle schools in Lahore district is 230 (87 for Boys and 143 for Girls). Stratified sampling technique was used to select the schools and 10 % of schools were proportionately selected each from the schools for boys and girls. From each school, 60 students were selected conveniently thus yielding a total of 1440 students in the sample. Details of the population and sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Number of Schools and Students in, Population and Sample*

Govt. Middle Schools	Schools		Students	
	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
Boys	87	10	59001	600
Girls	143	14	63656	840
Total	230	24	122657	1440

The age range of the respondents was from 10-14 years old, the majority (73.5 %) being in the age group of 13-14 years, followed by 23.1% belonging to the age group of 12-13 years, 2.8 % belonging to the age group of 11-12 years and 0.5 % belonging to age group of 10-11 years old.

An instrument consisting of 10 statements was developed by the researchers. The statements identified the satisfaction level of grade VIII students about their English textbook for developing the Reading and Thinking Skills among them. The students were required to respond to the items on a 5-point Likert scale. The researchers got the instrument validated by experts in the field prior to data collection. Alpha reliability of the instrument was 0.816.

The instrument was pilot tested as well. For the pilot study, the questionnaire was filled by 50 students. The respondents were selected from five schools, one school from each of the five Tehsils: Model town, Raiwand, Cantt, City, and Shalimar. The students found it difficult to understand the statements in English during the pilot study. Hence, the statements were translated into Urdu, the first language of the respondents and validated by the experts of the Urdu language. The final instrument comprised statements in both English and Urdu languages.

## Results

The first Standard (S1) of the competency requires the students to understand and discover new concepts through different types of texts and learn how to use multiple strategies of reading and thinking for comprehension, enjoyment, and fluency. BM1 requires students to analyze a paragraph to explore organization patterns of text, and the function of different devices. Table 2 shows the pieces of evidence of SLOs of BM1 from the textbook.

**Table 2.** BM1 (S1): Text Organization Patterns, and Function of Different Devices

SLOs	Evidences
1. Identify topic sentence and sentences carrying supporting details	LO (Learning Outcome): Ch. 3, p. 14. Activity: Ch. 3, p. 18, G; ch. 4, p. 26, H: Keeping in view the topic sentence and supporting details, write a 50-60 words paragraph on the given topic.
2. Recognize text as a set of paragraphs that develop a single idea or theme.	LO: Ch 3, p. 14.
3. Analyse features of an effective topic sentence	Not explicitly found
4. Identify sentences supporting the main idea by analysing the paragraphs.	Activity: Ch.3, p. 16, A (1): Main idea of the poem
5. Recognize the transitional devices, anaphoric and cataphoric references, and functions of pronoun.	Not explicitly found
6. Analyse the order of arranging paragraphs	Activity: Ch. 7, p. 45, G: Read and complete the timeline of the story from beginning through middle to end. Activity: Ch.13, p. 79, H: Instruct your friend step by step to make a telephone.

Table 2 shows that the textbook introduces the students about the organization of text into paragraphs, the order of arranging paragraphs, and topic sentences and sentences supporting the main idea in a paragraph. However, the characteristics of effective topic sentence and function of devices were not found to be provided explicitly.

BM2 requires the application of thinking strategies and reading comprehension for conceptual understanding of the procedures, processes, issues, and events. Table 3 shows the evidences of SLOs of BM2 from the textbook.

**Table 3.** BM2 (S1): Application of Thinking Strategies for Reading Comprehension

SLOs	Evidence in the textbook
1. Use pre-reading strategies	Pre-reading: There are 1-3 pre-reading questions at the beginning of each of the 14 chapters. Instruction for teacher: Instruction are given for the teacher in all chapters except chapter 9, 11 and 13 to engage the students in pre-reading activity to assess their previous knowledge and to enhance their interest and comprehension.
2. Skim text	Explicit guidelines are not given.
3. Use while-reading/ intensive reading strategies/ application of critical thinking to interact with text	While-reading questions/ activities are given in all the 14 chapters. Instruction for teacher: Instruction are given for teacher in chapter 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, and 14 to engage the students in while reading activity.
4. Use summary skills	LO: Ch. 3, p. 14, ch. 12, p. 70: Analyse a poem for main idea and summary. Activity: Ch. 3, p. 18, F; ch. 6, p.37, G: Summary of the poem; ch. 13, p. 79, I: Introduction of summary, summary of given paragraph.
5. Use post-reading strategies/ critical thinking to respond to the text	Post reading questions are asked at the end of each chapter except chapter 12.
6. Apply strategies to comprehend questions	No explicit guidelines.
7. Respond orally or in writing	Pre, while, and post reading/ exercise questions are in each chapter that require students to give oral or written responses.

Table 3 shows that the Grade 8 textbook provides ample opportunities for the application of thinking strategies for reading comprehension through pre, while, and post-reading questions given in each chapter. These questions provide the students an opportunity to respond orally or in writing. Students are required to summarize the poems and the given paragraph to enhance their summary skills. However, explicit strategies are not given for skimming the text and comprehending the questions. BM3 requires students to interpret information from a graphic organizer or visual cue to describe positions, simple cause and effect relationships, procedures, and processes and give directions. Table 4 shows the shreds of evidences of the SLOs of BM3 from the textbook.

**Table 4.** BM3: Interpreting Information from Visual Cue

SLOs	Evidence in the textbook
1. Interpret mind map	Activity: Two mind maps are found: Sketch of Mirchu (ch. 7, p. 45, E) and mind map for accident (ch.14, p. 85, C).
2. Analyse diagram or flow chart	Activity: Ch. 5, p. 31, F: Show sequence of events in the lesson through flow chart.
3. Use of organizational patterns for organizing information	Activity: Students are required to organize information using classification (ch. 7, p.45, E: Mind map for character sketch of Mirchu; ch. 14, p. 85, C: Mind map for accident), and sequence (ch. 7, p.45, G: Timeline of story).
4. Recognition and use of transitional words for cohesion and coherence.	Used in the text but not explicitly described.
5. Recognition and use of conventions for report writing.	Not found

Table 4 reveals that textbook requires the students to use patterns for organizing information such as mind map and timeline. Students are asked to show the sequence of events in the lesson through the flow chart. Transitional words are used in the text but not described explicitly. Guidelines for conventions for report writing were also not found.

BM4 requires students to use study skills, and various aids for gathering, analyzing, and using information for different purposes. Table 5 shows the pieces of evidences of the SLOs of BM4 from the textbook.

**Table 5.** BM4: Gathering, Analyzing, and Using Information

SLOs	Evidence in the textbook
1. Use dictionary	Glossary is given at the end of each chapter. Instruction for teacher: Ch. 14, p. 86: Help students identify syllable division in dictionary
2. Obtain information from children's encyclopaedias.	Not explicitly found
3. Choose appropriate antonyms and synonyms from thesaurus.	Activities: Ch. 5, p.31, E: Choose synonyms and antonyms with the help of word bank provided; Ch 10, p. 64, H; Cp 14, p.87, I; review 3, ch 9-14, p. 89, E: Find synonyms and antonyms from thesaurus. Instruction for teacher: Ch. 5, p. 31: Help students understand the concept and use of thesaurus. Show them a thesaurus in the class. Ch. 14, p. 87: Help students use thesaurus to find out synonyms and antonyms.
4. Use library skills	Not explicitly found
5. Identify and use study skills	Mind-mapping (ch. 7, E, p.45; ch. 14, C, p.85) is found in the textbook
6. Use textual aids for comprehension of the text and selecting relevant information.	Textual aids like title page, table of content, pictures, pre, while, and post reading questions, and glossary are used in the textbook.

Table 5 shows that the textbook contains textual aids like the title page, table of contents, pictures, glossary, and pre, while, and post-reading questions to help students in comprehending the text. Glossary is given at the end of each chapter. It requires students to use a thesaurus. The textbook also contains teacher guidelines for helping students learn how to use a dictionary and thesaurus. It introduces the students about study skills like mind mapping. However, it does not guide about obtaining information from children's encyclopaedia, and other library skills.

Standard 2 requires students to analyze literary text to relate the experiences of humanity as portrayed in the literary text with their own, and to seek enjoyment, ideas, and information. BM1 of S1 requires students to analyze poems and short stories and identify actions, motives, and emotional responses of the characters. Table 6 shows the shreds of evidence of the SLOs of BM1 (S2) from the textbook.

**Table 6.** BM1 (S2): Analyzing Poems and Short Stories (Literary text)

SLOs	Evidence in the textbook
1. Predict about characters, story, and content using prior knowledge and contextual clues.	Pre reading activities and contextual clues in each chapter may help the student to make predictions about content, story, and characters.
2. Analyse elements of story including plot, setting, characters, tone, theme, and events.	Activity: Ch. 7, p. 45, F; ch. 11, p. 69, G: Identify the elements of the story: Theme, plot, setting, and characters.

3. Read a story to retell it sequentially and summarize.  
Instruction for teacher: Ch. 7, p. 45; ch. 11, p. 69: Help students identify elements of the story.  
Activity: Ch. 5, p. 31, F: Show sequence of events in the lesson through flow chart; ch. 7, p. 45, G: Complete the timeline of the story from beginning through middle to end.  
Instruction for teacher: Ch. 7, p. 45: Help the student find the answer in activity G by introducing them that every story has a beginning, middle and an end.
  4. Recognize the purpose of author.
  5. Identify the narrator or speaker in a selection.  
Not explicitly found.  
Punctuations are used to show the speaker or narrator: Ch. 1; ch 2: ch. 4.  
Activity: While reading ch. 4, p. 20-21 and post reading questions are also asked to assess if students identify the speaker or narrator e.g., ch. 1, A (4, 6, 7) and ch. 4, A (2, 3, 4, 5).
  6. Analyse characters, their emotional responses, actions, and motives.  
Activity: Ch. 7, p. 45, E: Character sketch of Mirchu with the help of mind map with five aspects.  
Instruction for teacher: Help students in writing the character sketch of Mirchu.
  7. Present a character sketch orally and in writing.  
Ch. 7, p. 45, E: Character sketch of Mirchu with the help of mind map.  
Instruction for teacher: Ch. 7, p. 45: Help students in writing the character sketch.  
Only the character of Mirchu (Ch 7, E, p. 45).
  8. Give a personal response about the characters along with reasons to support the response.
  9. Recognize genres of literature  
Textbook contains simple genres of literature: Poems and short stories.
  10. Read a poem and give main idea, summary, paraphrase, theme, and personal response orally or in writing.  
Activity: Ch.3, p. 16, A (1): Write main idea; Ch. 3, p. 18, F; ch. 6, p.37, G: Write summary of the poem  
LO: Ch. 3, p. 14; Ch. 9, p. 55; Ch. 12, p. 70:  
Analyse a poem for main idea and write summary of a poem; Ch. 6, p. 32; Write summary of the poem; learn to write simple sentences from the stanzas.
  11. Recognize alliteration and personification (literary techniques)
  12. Analysis of figurative language including similes and metaphors for appealing the senses and synonyms with different connotations affecting the meaning  
Not explicitly described. However, alliteration is used like: Ch. 3, p. 14: Day after day, day after day.  
LO: Ch. 3, p. 14: Use of language by a poet to appeal to the senses through similes  
Activity: Ch. 3, p. 14, D: Introduction of similes, make similes with given words; ch 12, D: Introduction of metaphors, make sentences using metaphors.  
Ch. 12, p. 70, LO: Understand metaphor; Instruction for teacher: Ch. 3, p. 15; ch. 6, p. 34: Help student understand the meaning of the words in context; Ch. 5, p. 31, understand difference between synonyms and antonyms; Ch 12, p. 73, help students understand the concepts of metaphors and similes with more examples
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Table 6 shows that the textbook contains simple genres of literature: Poems and short stories. It requires the students to analyse a poem for summary and main idea and write simple sentences from the stanzas. It introduces similes and metaphors and use of figurative language by a poet to appeal to the senses of the readers. It provides contextual clues and pre and while reading questions to help students make predictions about characters, stories and content. The textbook introduces the students to and requires them to identify the elements of the story including theme, plot, setting, and characters. It requires them to show the sequence of events in the lesson through a flow chart and timeline. It also requires students to read a text to analyse character and present it with the help of a mind map. Alliteration is used in the text. However, alliteration and personification (literary techniques) were not found in the textbook.

The results of the survey part of the study are presented in Table 7 and 8. The mean scores and standard deviations of the statements are presented in the Table 7.

**Table 7.** Descriptive Statistics for Questions Related to Competency

Sr. no	Statements	National curriculum	M	SD
1.	My English language textbook presents A variety of text types (reflective, expressive, and narrative) for entertainment, exploration, imagination, and getting involved in the character and story	S 1; S2, BM 1	3.58	1.36
2.	Persuasive (to persuade and advice about something) text	S1	3.27	1.26
3.	Argumentative (learning how to argue about something) text	S 1	3.47	1.29
4.	Expository (informative/ factual) text	S1	3.48	1.3
5.	Analytical text (requiring review, comment, and analysis on issues and ideas)	BM2 (SLO 1, 4, & 6), SLO 2 of BM3 & BM4 of S1; BM 1 (SLO2, 6, & 12) of S2.	3.25	1.42
6.	Communicative text (a content for sharing information and communicating feelings)	SLO 7 of BM2, S1; SLO 7 & 10 of BM1, S2.	3.08	1.54
	<u>BM2 (S1): Application of thinking strategies for reading comprehension</u>			
7.	My textbook enabled me to Guess about a story from picture, topic, key words, and headings before reading a story	SLO 1	3.4	1.31
8.	Skim and scan the text.	SLOs 2 & 3	3.53	1.33
	<u>BM4 (S1): Study skills</u>			
9.	Use a dictionary	SLO 1	3.47	1.52
10.	Learn library skills	SLO 4	3.19	1.32
	M		3.37	0.16

The data presented in Table 7 reveals that the students have shown agreement ( $M = 3.5$  and above) that their English textbook presents a variety of text types ( $M = 3.58$ ). The students are partially satisfied with the presence of expository text ( $M = 3.48$ ), argumentative text ( $M = 3.47$ ), persuasive text ( $M = 3.27$ ), analytical text ( $M = 3.25$ ), and communicative text ( $M = 3.08$ ). Further data shows that the students agree that their textbook taught them how to skim and scan the text ( $M = 3.53$ ). The respondents opined that their textbook taught them to some extent how to use a dictionary ( $M = 3.47$ ),

pre-reading strategies ( $M = 3.4$ ), and library skills ( $M = 3.19$ ). The mean value of the competency ( $M = 3.37$ ) shows that the respondents are partially satisfied with their textbook for the development of the selected competency.

Table 8 presents the opinion of male and female students regarding their satisfaction with the textbook for developing the reading and thinking skills amongst them.

**Table 8.** Opinion of Male and Female Students Regarding the Incorporation of Reading and Thinking Skills into the Grade 8 English Textbook

Gender	N	M	SD	M1- M2	df	t
Male	600	35.19	8.89	2.53	1138.33	5.706***
Female	840	32.65	7.39			

Table 8 shows that male students ( $M = 35.18$ ) showed significantly more satisfaction with the incorporation of the Competency in their English textbook than the female respondents ( $M = 32.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The mean item values show that the male students are satisfied ( $M = 35.18$ ) and female students are somewhat satisfied ( $M = 32.65$ ) with their textbook for the development of the Competency. The response of different age groups, however, were not significantly different ( $p = 0.969$ ) with each other. Hence, students of different age groups perceive their textbook in the same way to reading and thinking skills.

## Discussion

Grade VIII textbook introduces the students to the patterns of text organization (BM1). It introduces the students to the organization of text into paragraphs, the order of arranging paragraphs, topic sentences and sentences supporting the main idea in a paragraph. However, the characteristics of effective topic sentence and the function of devices are not explicitly found. The textbook provides the students with ample opportunities for the application of thinking strategies for reading comprehension (BM2). Pre, while, and post-reading questions given in each chapter provide the students an opportunity to respond orally or in writing. The students are required to summarize the poems and paragraphs to enhance their summary skills. Although, explicit guidelines are not provided for skimming the text and comprehending the questions. However, pictures and pre and while reading questions given in each chapter may help learn how to skim. The results of the survey confirm this assumption that students agree that their textbook teaches them how to skim and scan the text. Although, explicit guidelines are not provided for comprehending the questions. However, pre, while, and post-reading questions in each chapter may provide an opportunity for application of strategies to comprehend questions and students may learn to analyze the questions under the guidance of their teacher. The textbook requires the students to interpret information from a graphic organizer or visual cue (BM3). The students are required to use the skill of organizing patterns for information such as mind maps, timelines and flow charts. Transitional words are used in the text but not discussed explicitly. Guidelines for conventions of report writing are also not found.

Students are required to gather, analyze, and use information using various aids and study skills (BM4). The textbook uses textual aids like the title page, table of content, pictures, glossary, and pre, while, and post-reading questions to help students in comprehending the text. There is a glossary at the end of each chapter. It requires students to choose synonyms and antonyms from the word bank provided and from a thesaurus. The textbook also contains teacher guidelines for helping students how to use a dictionary and thesaurus. It introduces the students to study skills like mind mapping. However, it does not guide them about obtaining information from children's encyclopaedia, and other library skills. The textbook contains simple genres of literature including poems and short stories and requires students to analyze these literary texts (BM 1 of S2). The textbook requires the students to analyze a poem for summary and main idea and write simple sentences from the stanzas. It introduces about similes and metaphors and the use of figurative language by a poet to appeal to the senses. It provides



pre and while reading questions and other contextual clues to help students make predictions about characters, stories, and content. The textbook introduces the students to and requires them to identify elements of the story including theme, plot, setting, and characters; to show the sequence of events in the lesson through flow chart and timeline; and to read a text to analyze character and present them with the help of mind map. Alliteration is used but alliteration and personification (literary techniques) were not explicitly discussed and the authors' purpose is not explicitly found. However, while and post-reading questions may help students recognize the purpose of the author.

The results of the study have unfolded Grade VIII students' satisfaction level about their English textbook for improving the competency. The overall findings revealed that the students are satisfied that their English textbook provides them a variety of texts for the opportunity of imagination, exploration, and getting involved in the character and story; and teaches them how to skim and scan the text. The students were partially satisfied with the rest of the aspects including the presence of expository text, argumentative text, persuasive text, analytical texts, and communicative text in their textbook; and guidance provided by the textbook about how to use a dictionary, pre-reading strategies, and library skills.

## **Conclusion**

The present study analyzed the content of Grade VIII English textbook against the competency and presented the satisfaction level of students about their textbook regarding the incorporation of the competency. The findings showed that the textbook requires the students to analyze simple genres of literary texts including poems and short stories. It requires the students to analyze a poem for summary and main idea and paraphrase its stanzas. It introduces about similes and metaphors and the use of figurative language by a poet to appeal to the senses. It requires students to identify elements of the story including theme, plot, setting, and characters; and to read a text to analyse character. Textual aids and contextual clues are there to help students make predictions about characters, story, and content. The textbook requires students to identify topic sentence and sentences supporting the main idea; to use study skills and patterns for organizing information such as mind map, timeline, and flow charts; and to choose synonyms and antonyms from the word bank and thesaurus. Glossary, and pre, while, and post reading questions are given in each chapter.

However, explicit guidelines are not provided for skimming the text and for analyzing the questions. Characteristics of an effective topic sentence, obtaining information from children's encyclopaedia, and other library skills, conventions for report writing, and functions of devices are also not found. Alliteration and transitional words are used but literary techniques (alliteration and personification) and transitional words are not explicitly described.

The results of the survey showed that students agree that their textbook provides them a variety of texts and enable them to skim and scan the text. Students were partially satisfied with the rest of aspects i.e. the presence of expository, argumentative, persuasive, analytical, and communicative text in the textbook; and the facilitation of textbook in learning to use a dictionary, pre-reading strategies, and library skills. Male students rated their textbook significantly better than female students for the incorporation of the selected competency. However, different age group students perceived their textbook in the same way. It is suggested in the light of the study findings that the Grade VIII textbook should be further improved so as to fully incorporate the reading and thinking skills in it.

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