



Cognitive Demand and Curriculum Alignment in a Pakistani Grade 11 English Textbook: An Exploratory Bloom's-Taxonomy Analysis

Azhar Munir Bhatti¹
Dr. Muhammad Iqbal²

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how end-of-unit exercises in the 2025 Grade 11 English textbook prescribed in Punjab reflect the cognitive expectations of the National Curriculum of Pakistan for English (Advanced/Elective), Grades XI–XII. Using revised Bloom's Taxonomy as an interpretive framework, it treats the exercise prompt, or a separable sub-item within a multifunctional prompt, as the unit of analysis. Cognitive demand was determined from the required operation, expected response, and evaluative criteria, while instructional verbs and item formats served as contextual indicators. The study is framed as an exploratory qualitative content analysis because the available analytic record does not permit a fully disambiguated frequency distribution or calculation of inter-rater reliability. A fourteen-unit matrix reveals a recurring pattern: literary and extended non-fiction tasks often require structural analysis, evidence-based judgement, comparison, argument, and original composition, whereas vocabulary and grammar activities support recall, comprehension, and procedural practice. However, this distinction is not absolute, since selected-response items may involve inference and open-ended prompts may remain cognitively limited. Overall, the textbook shows meaningful but uneven alignment with higher-order reading and writing outcomes across genres and skills. Findings concern printed task design only; classroom implementation, learner performance, teacher capacity, examination washback, and equity remain directions for future research.

Key Words: textbook evaluation; revised Bloom's Taxonomy; curriculum alignment; cognitive demand; Grade 11 English; Pakistan

¹ Assistant Prof, Higher Education Department, Punjab

² University of Management and Technology, Lahore





1. INTRODUCTION

In many standards-based systems, textbooks mediate between formal curriculum documents and classroom work. Their influence varies by institution, teacher, and assessment regime; nevertheless, the questions and activities printed in a prescribed textbook constitute an important part of the opportunities students receive to practise curricular outcomes. Alignment is therefore a relational issue: curriculum standards, learning materials, instruction, and assessment need to elicit compatible forms of knowledge and performance (Biggs, 1996; Porter, 2002; Webb, 1997).

The issue is particularly important at the higher-secondary transition in Pakistan. Studies of secondary textbooks and Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education question papers have reported strong concentrations of recall and comprehension tasks (Mahroof & Saeed, 2021; Shaikh & Memon, 2021), while the National Curriculum of Pakistan for Grades XI-XII expects learners to analyse structure, interpret figurative language, compare perspectives, construct complex clauses, and produce argumentative and reflective writing (National Curriculum Council Secretariat, 2022-2023). The transition may therefore require students to move quickly from short, retrieval-oriented responses to extended analysis and composition.

The present study investigates the exercise design of the 2025 Punjab Grade 11 English textbook. It asks not whether a verb appears to be 'higher order' in isolation, but what a student must actually do to complete the task. This distinction is essential because the same verb can demand different forms of thinking. For example, identify may ask a learner to retrieve an explicitly stated fact or to infer the function of a literary device; discuss may require simple explanation or evidence-based judgement; and predict may involve a routine continuation rather than the creation of a coherent new product. Likewise, multiple-choice format does not automatically indicate low cognitive demand, and an extended response is not necessarily complex unless it requires interpretation, justification, synthesis, or transfer.

The study is presented as an exploratory qualitative content analysis. This reframing responds to the evidential limits of the available analytic record: the original manuscript reported approximate keyword hits and exercise blocks without a common denominator and did not document independent coding. The revised analysis consequently removes unsupported frequency claims, makes the coding rules explicit, presents all fourteen textbook units in a comparable matrix, and limits its conclusions to patterns demonstrable in the printed tasks.

1.1. Research Questions

- What forms of cognitive demand are represented in the exercises of the 2025 Grade 11 English textbook, and how do the patterns vary across its fourteen units?
- How do the textbook's reading, grammar, oral-communication, and writing tasks correspond to selected Grade XI-XII English SLOs in the National Curriculum of Pakistan?
- What does the within-book variation suggest about scaffolding and sequencing, while acknowledging the legitimate role of foundational practice and the limits of textbook-only evidence?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Revised Bloom's Taxonomy and Task-Context Coding

Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revision of Bloom's taxonomy organises cognitive processes as Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create. The categories are useful for





examining learning objectives and assessment tasks because they distinguish retrieval, meaning-making, procedural use, relational analysis, criteria-based judgement, and production. Krathwohl (2002) emphasises that the revised taxonomy is multidimensional and should be interpreted in relation to both the cognitive process and the knowledge being acted upon.

Textbook studies often begin with instructional verbs because verbs provide visible cues to intended performance. However, verb lists are not self-sufficient coding instruments. Crowe, Dirks, and Wenderoth (2008) show that an apparently simple verb can operate at different levels depending on the information supplied and the reasoning needed. Content-analysis methodology similarly requires explicit units, coding rules, coder training, and evidence of reliability or a carefully qualified interpretive design (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017; Stemler, 2001). The present study therefore codes the complete task context rather than automatically mapping isolated words to Bloom levels.

International EFL textbook research also shows that question difficulty depends on the relationship among text, prompt, response conditions, and expected evidence. Freahat and Smadi (2014), for example, found uneven representation of lower- and higher-order reading questions across secondary and university EFL textbooks. Such studies support the use of Bloom's taxonomy as a descriptive lens while also cautioning against treating all questions with the same verb or format as cognitively equivalent.

2.2 Curriculum Alignment

Alignment concerns the degree of correspondence among intended outcomes, instructional opportunities, and assessment tasks. Biggs's (1996) constructive-alignment model emphasises that learners should engage in activities that elicit the performances stated in the objectives. Porter (2002) treats instructional content and cognitive demand as dimensions that can be compared across curriculum, materials, and teaching, while Webb (1997) argues that alignment requires more than topic coverage: depth of knowledge, range, balance, and progression also matter. In the present study, curriculum alignment is examined qualitatively by comparing the operations required in textbook exercises with the wording of the Grade XI-XII English SLOs.

2.3 Pakistani Textbook Research and the Present Gap

Pakistani research has repeatedly identified imbalances between curricular intentions and textbook or examination practice. Shaikh and Memon (2021) reported a strong lower-order concentration in Grade 10 reading-comprehension questions. Baig et al. (2021) found that a Punjab Grade 8 English textbook privileged reading comprehension while giving less attention to writing, oral, and lexical outcomes. Mahroof and Saeed (2021) documented weak alignment among curriculum, textbooks, and secondary examination papers. At the HSSC level, Tajamal and Shakur (2022) reported gaps between intended higher-order outcomes and textbook provision in an earlier PCTB configuration.

Studies of the related Intermediate English Textbook 1 series provide useful contextual evidence but are not direct measures of cognitive demand. Bhatti and Bashir (2025a) examined exercise design and expected learning outcomes; their other studies addressed cultural representation, lexical bundles, narrative structure, and syntactic complexity (Bhatti & Bashir, 2025b, 2025d, 2025e, 2025f). These adjacent analyses help describe the textbook ecosystem but cannot substitute for prompt-level Bloom coding. The present review therefore distinguishes directly comparable Bloom/alignment studies from CEFR, cultural, lexical, and syntactic studies.

A targeted search conducted for this revision used combinations of the terms Bloom taxonomy, cognitive demand, curriculum alignment, HSSC English, Grade 11 textbook, PCTB, and Pakistan





across ERIC, journal websites, and bibliographic search services. The literature located up to 27 July 2026 did not identify a published prompt-context analysis of all fourteen units of this 2025 Grade 11 volume. The contribution claimed here is therefore modest: a transparent, exploratory account of within-book variation, not a definitive quantitative census or a claim of uniqueness beyond the documented search.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design and Scope

The study uses exploratory qualitative content analysis. The design is appropriate because the questions concern the cognitive operations invited by printed exercises rather than learner achievement or classroom enactment. The analysis does not estimate causal effects, measure student performance, or infer how teachers use the materials. It also does not report percentages by Bloom level because the source analytic record did not preserve every item in a form that could be manually re-counted with a single denominator.

3.2 Textbook and Curriculum Sources

The primary source is the 2025 edition of English 11, a fourteen-unit model textbook prescribed for HSSC-I in Punjab and published under the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board framework (Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2025). The units are: (1) Khatam-un-Nabiyeen Hazrat Muhammad; (2) Responsibility of the Youth in Nation-Building; (3) 'A Bird Came Down the Walk'; (4) Team Moon; (5) Impact of Global Warming on Pakistan; (6) 'The Echoing Green'; (7) What You Do Is What You Are; (8) Clean Water; (9) 'Freedom'; (10) 'The Punishment of Shahpesh, the Persian, on Khopil, the Builder'; (11) 'Those Winter Sundays'; (12) The Impact of AI on Society, Human Relationships, and Ethics; (13) 'Ruba'iyat'; and (14) 'The End of the Beginning'. The corpus comprised the end-of-unit materials documented in the manuscript's analytic record: reading and critical-thinking questions, vocabulary and grammar exercises, oral-communication activities, and writing tasks.

The curriculum benchmark is the National Curriculum of Pakistan: English (Advanced / Elective), Grades XI-XII (National Curriculum Council Secretariat, 2022-2023). The comparison focuses on SLOs involving central ideas, structural and rhetorical analysis, figurative-language interpretation, complex grammatical structures, argument writing, reflective writing, summaries, and precis.

3.3 Unit of Analysis and Coding Procedure

The unit of analysis was the complete exercise prompt. When a prompt contained clearly separable sub-items requiring different operations, each sub-item was treated as a distinct analytic unit. When an exercise block was preserved without its individual items, it was used only to describe task format and was not counted. Paired literary and prose selections were treated as separate textbook units according to the published fourteen-unit sequence.

Each prompt was read for four features: (a) the object of the task, such as a stated fact, textual relationship, grammatical structure, argument, or original composition; (b) the response product expected; (c) the evidence or criteria required; and (d) the amount of transfer beyond the source text. The instructional verb and format were recorded as cues but did not determine the code. For multifunctional prompts, the code reflects the most demanding operation necessary for a successful response, with lower-level enabling operations noted in the interpretation.



Table 1

Condensed Coding Protocol for Revised Bloom's Taxonomy

Level	Operational definition	Task-context indicator	Boundary rule
Remember	Retrieve explicitly presented information or a memorised form.	Recall a detail; supply a memorised word form; name a stated feature.	Selected-response format is not sufficient by itself; code Remember only when retrieval is enough.
Understand	Explain, paraphrase, classify, exemplify, or summarise meaning without substantial transfer.	Explain a line; paraphrase a stanza; state a central idea; produce a conventional summary.	Discuss and summarise remain Understand unless criteria, synthesis, or transformation increase the demand.
Apply	Use a known rule, procedure, or language pattern in a specified context.	Construct sentences with a target form; complete conditionals; rewrite using a stated rule.	Routine production from a model is Apply, not automatically Create.
Analyze	Differentiate parts, identify relationships, infer structure, or compare features.	Trace argument development; examine pacing; compare perspectives; relate imagery to tone.	Identify is Analyze only when the feature must be inferred or structurally located.
Evaluate	Make and justify a judgement using evidence or explicit/implicit criteria.	Assess effectiveness; critique an interpretation; judge feasibility; defend agreement or disagreement.	A personal opinion without evidence is not coded Evaluate.
Create	Produce a coherent original text, solution, or reconfiguration that integrates elements.	Compose an argument, dialogue, narrative, letter, or extended response for a purpose and audience.	Predict is Create only when it requires a developed, coherent extrapolation rather than a brief guess.

3.4 Trustworthiness and Limitations of the Coding Record

The original analysis used keyword searching to locate candidate verbs, but it acknowledged false positives and did not retain a fully disambiguated task-level frequency sheet. The revised manuscript therefore treats keyword searching as a retrieval aid, not as quantitative evidence. All numerical verb frequencies and claims based on a 'substantial share' have been removed. The unit matrix below reports only qualitative patterns supported by the documented prompts and task descriptions.

No second-coder dataset or peer-audit record was supplied for the present manuscript. In accordance with content-analysis standards (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017), the absence of independent agreement prevents the study from claiming reproducible quantitative classification. Future work should apply the coding guide in Table 1 to a complete prompt-level spreadsheet, conduct coder training and calibration, report agreement and consensus procedures, and publish the matrix as supplementary material.



4. FINDINGS

4.1 Cross-Section Pattern

Across the textbook, the clearest higher-order demands occur in tasks that ask learners to connect textual form with effect, compare perspectives or texts, judge claims against evidence, or produce extended writing for a defined purpose. Poetry and narrative units frequently combine device identification with explanation of effect and, in several cases, evidence-based critique. Non-fiction units vary: Team Moon and Clean Water include structural and evaluative work, whereas portions of the climate and AI units rely more heavily on comprehension or selected-response activity before moving to higher-order writing or discussion.

Grammar and vocabulary sections predominantly provide foundational practice. This is not inherently a defect. Recall of forms and procedural application can reduce linguistic load and support later analysis and writing. The alignment concern arises when the relationship between foundational exercises and extended tasks is implicit rather than scaffolded. The textbook often places Apply-level grammar practice beside Analyze-, Evaluate-, or Create-level reading and writing, but it does not consistently show learners how the practised structures should be transferred into the extended response.

Task format and cognitive demand do not correspond one-to-one. Some multiple-choice items appear to ask only for recall, but a well-constructed selected-response item could require inference or comparison. Conversely, an open question such as 'discuss' can remain at Understand if it merely asks for restatement. The unit-level profile below therefore describes the dominant operations documented in complete prompts rather than assigning levels automatically by format.

Table 2

Fourteen-Unit Qualitative Matrix of Cognitive Demand

Unit and text	Representative task evidence	Qualitative Bloom profile and interpretation
Khatam-un-Nabiyeen Hazrat Muhammad	Comprehension questions and summary work require students to recover central content and condense it; the unit also provides discussion-oriented learning outcomes.	Predominantly Remember/Understand in the documented exercise pattern, with possible Analyze/Evaluate demand where discussion requires arguments. The available record does not support a stronger unit-wide claim.
Responsibility of the Youth in Nation-Building	Students track the development of the speaker's argument, complete selected-response questions, research a historical figure, and write an argumentative essay on education and nation-building.	A mixed sequence: Remember/Understand in content checks, Analyze in tracing argument, and Create in research-based argumentative writing. This unit provides a clearer progression than a simple comprehension block.
'A Bird Came Down the Walk'	Students identify personification and simile, explain how imagery affects tone, and critique a thematic interpretation using textual evidence.	Analyze and Evaluate are explicit. Device identification is coded Analyze when the device must be inferred and related to effect; the critique requires criteria and evidence.



Unit and text	Representative task evidence	Qualitative Bloom profile and interpretation
Team Moon	Tasks move from locating plot stages to analysing Mission Control as setting, evaluating pacing, contrasting astronaut and engineer perspectives, and predicting how a changed focus would alter the message.	A sustained Analyze-Evaluate-Create sequence. The prediction is treated as Create only because it requires developed re-framing of the narrative message, not a brief guess.
5. Impact of Global Warming on Pakistan	Comprehension and selected-response work is followed by a persuasive essay that must be reviewed for clarity, coherence, and evidentiary support.	Lower-level comprehension coexists with Create-level writing and self-evaluation. The unit has a high endpoint but limited visible bridging between the two.
6. 'The Echoing Green'	Students paraphrase a stanza, complete reference-to-context work, and explain how imagery contributes to mood.	Mostly Understand with a focused Analyze component. Paraphrase is not coded Create because it transforms wording without generating a new communicative product.
7. What You Do Is What You Are	Collaborative discussion examines the social value attached to occupations and labels such as 'just' a housewife or student; vocabulary and word-form exercises remain procedural.	Evaluate in the evidence-based social discussion; Remember/Apply in vocabulary and grammar. The unit illustrates within-unit variation by skill.
8. Clean Water	Students identify problem-solution organisation, judge whether a proposed solution is realistic in Pakistan, and distinguish fact from opinion by justifying language cues.	Analyze and Evaluate are clearly represented. Vocabulary-in-context items may remain Understand unless the options require inference beyond local meaning.
9. 'Freedom'	Students identify repetition, enjambment, and metaphor and explain their contribution; they also defend agreement with an interpretation using two pieces of textual evidence.	Analyze and Evaluate, supported by lower-level selected-response and cloze practice. The evidence requirement distinguishes evaluation from unsupported opinion.
10. 'The Punishment of Shahpesh, the Persian, on Khipil, the Builder'	Students trace Khipil's character development and interpret the unfinished palace symbolically; grammar work includes complex sentences, conditionals, modals, participles, and gerunds.	Analyze in literary interpretation and Apply in grammar. The unit does not consistently require students to reuse the grammar forms in the analytical response.
11. 'Those Winter Sundays'	Students infer the father's circumstances, interpret the meaning of 'love's austere and lonely offices,' and compare the poem with Seamus Heaney's 'Follower' in theme, imagery, tone, and relationship.	Analyze and Evaluate. The comparison requires organising multiple dimensions and supporting an interpretive judgement.
12. The Impact of AI on Society, Human	Some questions recall sectors, named tools, or risks; open prompts ask, 'Can AI replicate true human creativity?' and 'Can AI truly understand emotions?'	A pronounced split: Remember/Understand in factual checks and Evaluate, with potential Create, in extended discussion.



Unit and text	Representative task evidence	Qualitative Bloom profile and interpretation
Relationships, and Ethics		The topic itself does not determine the level; the required response does.
13. 'Ruba'iyat'	Students explain 'God-drunk,' infer metaphors of spiritual decline, and match lines to literary devices with explanations; context questions include selected-response items.	Analyze in metaphor and device interpretation; Understand in context-based meaning questions. Matching is higher than recall only when explanation of function is required.
14. 'The End of the Beginning'	Students critique gender roles in domestic work, judge whether farce effectively treats serious themes, identify sentence types, and compose character-based dialogue for role-play.	Evaluate and Create in literary critique and dialogue; Remember/Understand in sentence-type classification. The unit combines a high cognitive ceiling with foundational language practice.

4.2 Alignment with Selected Curriculum Outcomes

Table 3

Qualitative Alignment by Curricular Domain

Domain	Evidence of alignment	Qualification
Reading and literary analysis	Structural analysis, perspective comparison, figurative-language interpretation, inference, and evidence-based critique appear across Team Moon and several poetry and narrative units.	Coverage is meaningful but uneven; some informational passages rely more heavily on factual comprehension.
Grammar	Learners construct complex and compound-complex sentences, complete conditionals and modals, and identify non-finite forms and sentence types.	Most tasks are routine application. Explicit transfer from grammar practice to analytical and argumentative writing is limited.
Writing and oral communication	The textbook includes persuasive and argumentative essays, summaries, dialogue, role-play, research activity, and collaborative discussion.	The most demanding tasks often lack rubrics, annotated exemplars, or staged criteria that would make expectations transparent.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 RQ1: Distribution of Cognitive Demand

The fourteen-unit matrix supports a qualitative conclusion rather than a numerical distribution: higher-order cognitive demand is clearly present, but it is concentrated in particular task types and sections. Literary interpretation, comparative reading, argument evaluation, and extended composition frequently reach Analyze, Evaluate, or Create. Vocabulary consolidation, factual comprehension, and grammar exercises more often involve Remember, Understand, or Apply. This produces a high cognitive ceiling without a uniformly visible route toward it.



The finding should not be interpreted as a requirement that every unit or exercise contain equal proportions of all Bloom levels. Cognitive demand may legitimately vary by purpose, genre, and stage of learning. Grammar automatization and vocabulary retrieval can be pedagogically necessary, especially for second-language learners managing complex content. The issue is progression and integration: whether lower-order practice is deliberately connected to the higher-order performance that follows.

5.2 RQ2: Curriculum Alignment

The textbook provides substantial qualitative evidence of alignment with the curriculum's higher-order reading and writing expectations. Students are asked to analyse structural choices, interpret figurative language, compare perspectives, justify judgements with evidence, and write arguments and dialogues. These operations correspond closely to the verbs and products specified in the Grade XI-XII SLOs.

Alignment is weaker at the level of balance and support. Grammar outcomes are represented, but mainly through isolated procedure. Writing outcomes are represented by ambitious products, yet rubrics and annotated models are not consistently available in the documented exercise apparatus. Under Webb's (1997) framework, this suggests reasonable correspondence in content and depth for selected tasks, but less consistent range, balance, and progression across the full book.

5.3 RQ3: Scaffolding, Sequencing, and Alternative Interpretations

One interpretation is that the textbook assumes teachers will supply the missing bridge between foundational language exercises and analytical writing. Oral discussion, role-play, and collaborative work can function as rehearsal before individual composition, particularly in Team Moon, 'A Bird Came Down the Walk,' and the social-value discussion in What You Do Is What You Are. This integrated-skills design is a strength.

An alternative interpretation is that the unevenness is partly intentional. Selected-response and fill-in tasks may consolidate knowledge before students attempt open-ended work, and poetry units may appropriately carry more interpretive demand than grammar sections. The analysis therefore does not treat lower-order practice as misalignment in itself. Concern arises where an advanced task appears without explicit criteria, modelling, or a staged sequence that makes the target performance learnable and assessable.

The textbook analysis cannot establish how students experience this sequence. Claims about student preparedness, teacher workload, class size, assessment washback, or unequal access require classroom observation, teacher and learner data, and examination-paper analysis. Existing Pakistani studies make these issues plausible, but they remain contextual implications rather than findings of the present study.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEXTBOOK AND ASSESSMENT DESIGN

The findings support four textbook-level implications. First, demanding prompts should be accompanied by short analytic criteria or annotated models, especially for critique, comparative interpretation, and argumentative writing. Second, grammar exercises can be linked explicitly to the writing task in the same unit—for example, by requiring target conditional, modal, or complex-clause structures in a reasoned paragraph. Third, informational units with factual comprehension



blocks can include a small number of context-rich items that require inference, source evaluation, or application. Fourth, unit sequencing can make the progression visible by labelling steps such as identify, explain, analyse, judge, and compose, while ensuring that each label corresponds to the actual response required.

Broader proposals concerning BISE examinations, teacher development, bridge courses, and system-wide coordination should be treated as policy implications for subsequent empirical work. Examination alignment can only be evaluated through a separate comparison of textbook tasks, SLOs, marking schemes, and recent papers. Teacher-support needs likewise require evidence from classroom implementation rather than inference from the textbook alone.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has five principal limitations. First, it analyses one textbook and cannot represent all provincial or institutional materials. Second, the available analytic record did not preserve a fully disambiguated prompt-level census; consequently, the revised study does not report frequencies or percentages. Third, no independent coder or peer audit was available, so the classifications are interpretive rather than reliability-tested. Fourth, the study evaluates intended task demand, not actual learner cognition: students may answer a complex prompt superficially, and teachers may enrich a simple prompt. Fifth, the analysis contains no classroom, learner-performance, teacher, or examination data.

Future research should publish a complete coding matrix containing every prompt and sub-item, textbook page, task format, assigned Bloom level, secondary operation, matched SLO, and coding rationale. Two trained coders should calibrate on a sample, document disagreements, and report an appropriate agreement statistic followed by consensus coding. A second phase should compare the textbook with BISE papers and marking schemes, while classroom studies should examine how teachers scaffold the open-ended tasks and how students perform across linguistic-proficiency levels.

8. CONCLUSION

The 2025 Grade 11 English textbook includes clear opportunities for analysis, evidence-based evaluation, comparison, argument, and original composition. These opportunities align meaningfully with several higher-order reading and writing outcomes in the National Curriculum of Pakistan. The pattern is nevertheless uneven: foundational comprehension and language practice are common, while explicit bridges to advanced literary and written performance are not consistently visible.

The appropriate conclusion is therefore qualified. The textbook has a comparatively high cognitive ceiling in several units, but this exploratory analysis cannot quantify the distribution or establish effects on learners, teaching, or examinations. A fully verified prompt-level dataset and independent coding are needed before stronger claims can be made. At the level of task design, the most defensible priority is not the removal of lower-order practice, but clearer sequencing, transfer, criteria, and support for the higher-order tasks already present.





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