

MAPPING DEEP LEARNING TRAJECTORIES THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN CAMBRIDGE TEXTBOOKS

Lubna Iasya¹, Rahmat Setiawan^{2*}, Eliasanti Agustina³

^{1,2,3}Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya, Indonesia

(rahmatsetiawan@unipasby.ac.id)

Received: April 2026; Revised: May 2026; Accepted: June 2026

ABSTRACT

In many English classrooms, textbook-based instruction prioritizes vocabulary retention and grammatical accuracy, often limiting opportunities for deeper cognitive engagement. Although children's literature is increasingly integrated into English language textbooks, limited research has systematically examined how such materials facilitate the deep learning process, particularly within the framework of deep learning approaches proposed by Ference Marton and Roger Saljo (1976). This qualitative case study investigates how children's literary texts and accompanying instructional tasks in twelve Cambridge English textbooks support deep learning in the Indonesian EFL context. Data were collected through document analysis of seventy literary texts and their instructional sequences, complemented by semi-structured interviews with teachers. The findings reveal a four-stage pedagogical trajectory consisting of contextual meaning-making, interpretative analysis, language application, and creative transfer. Teachers also perceived literature as an effective resource for supporting higher-order thinking and contextualized learning. By conceptualizing deep learning as a structured pedagogy trajectory rather than a static outcome, this study contributes to literature-based pedagogy research and offers implications for textbook design and instructional practice.

Keywords: children's literature, deep learning, literature-based pedagogy

ABSTRAK

Di banyak ruang kelas EFL, pengajaran berbasis buku teks memprioritaskan retensi kosakata dan akurasi tata bahasa, seringkali membatasi peluang untuk keterlibatan kognitif yang lebih dalam. Meskipun sastra anak-anak semakin terintegrasi ke dalam buku teks bahasa Inggris, penelitian terbatas telah secara sistematis meneliti bagaimana materi tersebut memfasilitasi proses pembelajaran mendalam, terutama dalam kerangka pendekatan pembelajaran mendalam yang diusulkan oleh Ference Marton dan Roger Saljo (1976). Studi kasus kualitatif ini menyelidiki bagaimana teks sastra anak-anak dan tugas instruksional yang menyertainya dalam dua belas buku teks Cambridge English mendukung pembelajaran mendalam dalam konteks EFL Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen tujuh puluh teks sastra dan urutan instruksionalnya, dilengkapi dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan guru. Temuan ini mengungkapkan lintasan pedagogis empat tahap yang terdiri dari pembuatan makna kontekstual, analisis interpretatif, penerapan bahasa, dan transfer kreatif. Guru juga menganggap sastra sebagai sumber daya yang efektif untuk mendukung pemikiran tingkat tinggi dan pembelajaran kontekstual. Dengan mengkonseptualisasikan pembelajaran mendalam sebagai lintasan pedagogi terstruktur daripada hasil statis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada penelitian pedagogi berbasis literatur dan menawarkan implikasi untuk desain buku teks dan praktik instruksional.

Kata Kunci: pembelajaran mendalam; karya sastra anak; pembelajaran berbasis sastra

How to Cite:

Iasya, L., Setiawan, R., & Agustina, E. (2026). Mapping Deep Learning Trajectories Through Children's Literature in Cambridge Textbooks. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 13(1), 31–42. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v13i1.50679>

*Corresponding author

IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education), 13 (1), 2026

P-ISSN: 2356-1777, E-ISSN: 2443-0390 | DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v13i1.50679>

This is an open access article under CC-BY-SA license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

INTRODUCTION

In the Indonesian EFL context, English has been introduced from the early levels of schooling, resulting in prolonged exposure to the language. However, extended instructional duration does not necessarily lead to the development of deeper literacy competencies. Many students are able to recognize vocabulary and grammatical structures, but they experience difficulties when they are required to analyze information and use language in a real communication context (Menggo et al., 2025). Despite innovations in Indonesian classroom practices, English learning in Indonesia remains largely emphasizing surface learning. Instructional activities in textbooks tend to focus on vocabulary retention, grammar practice, and reproducing information from texts, causing limited opportunities for analysis, interpretation, and critical thinking (Permatasari et al., 2025). Consequently, students may recognize language structures but struggle to apply them meaningfully and contextually. This indicates that challenges in English literacy development are not solely related to instructional duration or teaching methods, but also are influenced by how learning activities are cognitively structured.

To explore this, a small-scale pilot study was conducted in 2025 using a systematic observational design, involving two groups of students (public and international schools at the same grade level with different textbooks). One group used a national curriculum, while the other used a Cambridge-based textbook. Classroom observations explore the nature of instructional tasks and the students' engagement. Semi-structured interviews with six students, selected purposively, capture experiences with the learning task. Although both groups demonstrated equal lexical and grammatical knowledge, the students with literature-based analytical tasks showed a stronger ability to interpret and express ideas coherently in English. These preliminary findings suggest that instructional design, particularly the inclusion of analytical and reflective tasks, plays a crucial role in shaping deeper literacy development.

Within this pedagogical concern, the concept of Deep Learning was initiated by Marton and Saljo (1976) becomes relevant. In their research, they distinguish between Surface and Deep learning. In surface learning, the students only focus on remembering and recalling information; in contrast, deep learning helps students understand the meaning by connecting ideas to critical and reflective thinking. One pedagogical resource that holds considerable potential for fostering such engagement is children's literature. Strategically, literature offers more learning results than linguistic exposure; it creates opportunities for emotional engagement, imagination, and reflective thinking (Abida, 2016; Katili & Malik, 2025; Rashid & Hasan, 2020). According to Medina & Kiefel (2021), literature exposes learners to diverse perspectives, values, and worldviews; it enhances their intercultural competence. Through interaction with characters, settings, and conflicts, they develop empathy, narrative imagination, and problem-solving skills (Meston et al., 2022; Zhigalev & Zhigaleva, 2020). Literary engagement encourages students to learn language proficiency with meaningful cognitive development, and it is what Cambridge English textbooks offer.

As EFL instructional materials, Cambridge English textbooks provide relevant content; literature-based (songs, poems, comic strips, prose, and short stories) learning for deeper cognitive engagement by instructional tasks designed to promote interpretation, personal response, and contextual language use. Numerous studies have explored the integration of literature in EFL materials; most have primarily emphasized improvements in language proficiency or alignment with curriculum standards. Studies by Jia (2024) and Rynanta (2013), for instance, highlight the contribution of literary texts to language competence and textbook quality, yet do not examine how such texts foster deep learning processes. Similarly, research by Nugraha (2022) and Krisdian et al. (2023) focuses on structural consistency in Cambridge textbooks without investigating the extent to which literature-based activities promote higher-order cognitive engagement. Zahra & Arianti (2022) identify content complexity in Cambridge textbooks, but do not connect these findings to deep learning trajectories. However, these studies largely focus on linguistic outcomes

and textbook structures, with limited attention to how literary texts and their instructional tasks are pedagogically designed to foster deep learning, critical interpretation, reflective thinking, and higher-order cognitive engagement in EFL contexts.

Addressing this gap, the present study moves beyond content evaluation by examining the cognitive dimension of learning, specifically how literary texts and their accompanying tasks promote critical, reflective, and creative engagement beyond surface-level comprehension. Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate how the use of children’s literary works in Cambridge English textbooks aligns with and facilitates deep learning processes, as well as how teachers perceive and utilize these literary materials to promote students’ deep learning and critical thinking in the EFL classroom.

METHODS

Research design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to investigate how children’s literary texts and accompanying instructional tasks in Cambridge English textbooks foster deep learning. This approach was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of how literature-based materials function pedagogically within a specific instructional context.

Research site and participants

The main data in this book are the texts of children’s literary works in Cambridge books levels 1- 6 (elementary level) and their instructional tasks. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four elementary English teachers selected through purposive sampling. The participants were chosen based on specific criteria: years of experience, Cambridge English textbook use, and classes. The focus was on obtaining in-depth, context-rich insights rather than generalizable findings. The diversity in teaching experience and grade distribution among the selected teachers further supported a more comprehensive understanding of how literature-based materials are implemented in practice. The data regarding the informants are provided below:

Table 1. List of Informants

Name (initial)	The Used Book	Teaching Experience (Yr)	Classes Taught
T1	Superminds	5	1-3 Elementary
T2	Superminds	6	4-6 Elementary
T3	Cambridge Primary	5	5-6 Elementary
T4	Cambridge Primary	4	1-3 Elementary

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through document analysis and interviews. Literary texts and tasks were systematically categorized using a document analysis to identify their pedagogical characteristics and potential deep learning. The cognitive depth of instructional tasks was examined using a deep learning framework adapted from Marton & Saljo (1976) and extended by Kovač et al. (2023), which classifies learning activities into meaning making, analyzing, transferring, and creating. In addition, the task indicators in this framework are also influenced by the principle of constructivism, which emphasizes that learning occurs through activities that encourage interpretation, reflection, and active use of language (Vygotsky, 1978).

The data in this study was analysed using thematic analysis developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring patterns across textbook content and teacher perspectives. The steps of data collection are: 1) familiarization through repeated reading of textbook materials, 2) interview transcripts, and 3) initial coding to instructional tasks, student engagement, and cognitive processes.

The coding process is based on themes: meaning making, interpreting, language transfer, and creative expression. The credibility of findings was enhanced through triangulation by comparing patterns across textbook analysis and interview data, while member checking was carried out by sharing summarized interpretations with participants to confirm the accuracy of the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Meaning Making Through Contextualized Literary Engagement

This study finds that Cambridge textbooks leverage literature to shift the learning paradigm from static rote memorization toward deep, meaningful engagement. By providing a narrative framework, these texts present language not as isolated symbols but as dynamic tools for expression. Two pedagogical patterns drive this transformation: contextualized vocabulary building and meaningful language structuring. In a narrative text like the song *Find Out Our Toys!* (Book 1, Chapter 2, p. 24), students learn about vocabulary related to toys around them. Moreover, students also learn to use this vocabulary in simple conversations taught through song lyrics containing short sentences such as, “Hey, Emma! What’s your favorite toy? ... My favorite toy isn’t a plane. It isn’t a kite or a computer game.” Rather than presenting vocabulary and grammar as isolated items to memorize, the song contextualizes language within meaningful interaction and communicative situations. Through this approach, students not only recognize linguistic forms but also learn to understand language within its context and use it actively in communication.

Furthermore, *The Secret of the Egyptian Cat* (Book 4, Chapter 1, pp. 16–17) demonstrates the use of the past tense through the sentences “Mr. Benson locked all the windows and doors” and “The statue of the gold cat was no longer in the glass case. Instead of asking students to memorize past-tense rules and past verb forms, the Cambridge textbook presents engaging stories in prose. Rather than merely memorizing verb forms, learners engage with grammar as part of a meaningful narrative structure that conveys sequence and causality.

Finally, meaning-making is maximized through instructional activities that demand higher-order cognitive processing. In the song *My Dad Used to Be* (Book 4, Chapter. 5, p. 60), students are asked to draw based on the provided descriptions. This task compels students to synthesize linguistic descriptions with mental imagery. By translating verbal information into visual representations or new inquiries, students engage in conceptual transformation, a hallmark of deep learning that moves them beyond mere translation toward the active construction of meaning.

Critical Thinking through Analysis and Interpretation

The children’s literature in Cambridge English textbooks fosters critical thinking by presenting narratives that balance concrete situational descriptions with inherent uncertainty, compelling students to move beyond passive observation into active interpretation. This pedagogical approach utilizes a problem-solving cycle that requires learners to bridge cognitive gaps through reasoning.

In *Getting Help* (Book 3, Chapter 1, pp. 14–15), critical analysis is triggered when the characters confront an encoded book: “We can’t read this book. It is in code.” Rather than presenting a flat and purely descriptive narrative, the story introduces a problem that encourages learners to think alongside the characters and consider possible solutions. A similar pattern of knowledge integration appears in *The Day When the Sea Went Out* (Book 4, Chapter 3, pp. 40–41), where Tilly must synthesize environmental observations with prior academic learning to reach an urgent, life-saving decision. In both instances, understanding is stimulated through active reasoning rather than mere descriptive recall.

In addition, the novel *The Egyptian Cat* (Book 6, Chapter 4, pp. 16–17) requires inference-based analysis. Since the factors causing the conflict in the story are not explicitly stated, students are guided to think about possibilities through speculation based on evidence, as seen in Cleo's deduction: "Dad won't forget to close the window again." The story's open-ended conclusion provides space for students to imagine and speculate on other possibilities. Instead of presenting *closed* texts, the literary texts in this book provide space where students can imagine, consider possibilities, and explore other variables that can stimulate critical thinking and cognitive skills.

This trajectory of analysis is reinforced by instructions that directly require students to interpret emotional relationships, cause-and-effect, and possible events. In the "Think! Read and find the pictures in the story" activity, students are asked to explain "What makes them excited?" "What makes them scared?" "What makes them angry?" and "What makes them happy?", so they must trace the sequence of actions and visual context before explaining emotional reactions. Prediction tasks such as "Look at the pictures and guess what the story is about!" or "Think! Work in pairs, what do you think the cat did?" also encourage students to integrate narrative cues with prior knowledge.

Additionally, the evaluative activity "Read Amy's stories about the same accident... Which text is better? Why?" guides students to compare details and assess the effectiveness of meaning conveyance. Through task designs like these, understanding does not stop at recognizing facts but develops through reasoning, inference, and evaluation, so that interpretive analysis serves as a crucial stage in the trajectory of deep learning before students are able to transfer and create meaning more independently.

Language Transfer through Contextual Application

In the third stage of deep learning, instruction no longer positions students merely as interpreters of meaning, but as active language users who must transfer expressions, sentence patterns, and communicative functions to new situations that remain connected to the literary context.

Comprehension and analysis are not treated as end goals, but rather as a foundation for linguistic action within a familiar narrative or thematic framework. In *Who's That Man Over There* (Book 6, Chapter 2, p. 34), students are asked: "Draw a picture of someone in your family and write about them. That boy is my brother. He's friendly, and he's fun ...", which requires them to apply descriptive patterns from the text to depict a new figure in their own lives. A similar pattern appears in *Let's Do Our Hobby* (Book 3, Chapter 4, p. 45) through the instruction "Choose words and make your new verse. Playing music is great fun. It's fun for everyone ...", where students maintain the song's sentence structure while substituting vocabulary according to their chosen activity. In dialogue-based activities, such as *Tidy Up* (Book 5, Chapter 2, p. 36), students are asked, "Imagine you are Whisper and Flash. Act out the phone call at the end of the story". Thus, they must transform narrative language into spoken interaction.

These activities demonstrate that literature-based instruction encourages students to transfer linguistic knowledge into new communicative and personal contexts rather than merely reproducing language mechanically. Instead of completing isolated grammar exercises, students are required to adapt sentence patterns, reconstruct dialogues, and create new expressions while maintaining the communicative purpose of original texts. This process shifts learners from passive imitation toward creative language production, where language is used to express personal experiences, perform social interaction, and respond to imaginative solutions.

Creative Expression through Literary Response

During the creative production stage, students are guided to use language to generate new texts, perspectives, and performances based on literary input. These creative activities begin to

emerge from Grade 3 through Grade 6, with higher frequency in Grades 4–6 and generally occurring after the language transfer stage. It indicates a gradual progression from guided language use toward independent expression.

In *The Bear's Dream* (Book 4, Chapter 7, pp. 88–89), students are presented with a story about a bear whose dream is dismissed by other animals in the forest, who insist that his ambition is impossible. The narrative reflects emotional realities that are closely related to children's experiences, particularly the feeling of having aspirations that are underestimated by others. Instead of ending with a fixed resolution, the story remains open-ended and is followed by the instruction: "Imagine you are the bear. How do you feel when the wolf talks to you after the concert? Write using the prompt I feel.... I would like to...." Through this task, students are encouraged to position themselves with the character's emotional experience and express their responses through language.

In the poetry section, *A Lot of Kids* (Book 7, Chapter 5, pp. 34–35), students are asked: "Write a letter to an unknown friend. Tell the friend your name, where you live, and what you like to do. Look at the letter from Silvia on page 34. You can begin and end your letter the way she does." This activity uses the poem and the letter model as references, but the content is drawn from the students' personal experiences, resulting in new texts that adapt literary input to real-world communication contexts.

In the unit *The Elves and the Shoemaker* (Book 8, Chapter 4, p. 60), semi-guided tasks toward open-ended performance are presented in the instruction: "Write a thank-you note. Imagine you are one of the elves. Write a thank-you letter to the shoemaker," which is then followed by a multimodal task: "Puppets: Working in pairs, make some puppets. Act out the story." These serial activities encourage them to transform literary works as a tool for constructing original meaning within a narrative framework that remains familiar.

The progression of tasks demonstrates a gradual shift from guided expression toward more independent and creative language production. Rather than limiting students to comprehension-based responses, the tasks encourage them to reinterpret stories, express emotions, adopt different perspectives, and transform literary texts into new written and performative forms. This indicates that creativity in literature-based learning is not treated as a separate artistic activity, but as a cognitive process that integrates comprehension, interpretation, personal reflection, and communication simultaneously.

Teacher's Perspectives on Literature-Based Deep Learning

The findings derived from teacher interviews indicate that the implementation of literature-based materials in Cambridge English textbooks contributes to multiple interconnected dimensions of learning.

Enhancing Comprehension and Cognitive Engagement

The interview findings indicate that teachers perceive literary texts in the Cambridge textbooks as an effective medium for helping students understand vocabulary and grammar contextually. One teacher explained that "if the story is told, they know the vocabulary from the context. So, it is not just a single word standing alone" (T2). While others stated that "if students only learn word by word memorization, they forget quickly. But through the story, they remember the situation, remember the characters" (T4). These responses suggest that literary texts help students connect language with meaningful situations and experiences rather than memorizing isolated vocabulary items.

The teacher also emphasized that grammar is understood more naturally when embedded within stories and songs. (T1) noted that, "the grammar can also be understood easily, they (the students) can grasp the essence of what is referred to as grammar and the story in the book",

and (T4) added that, “Usually, I do not explain the grammar directly through memorization, but I assist the students to analyse and understand the grammar from examples in the story”. Through repeated exposure to contextualized language patterns, students gradually recognize how grammar functions in communication rather than treating it as a set of abstract rules.

In addition, literature-based learning was perceived as more engaging and enjoyable for young learners. (T2) observed that “the children love songs. Without realizing it, they learn vocabulary, they are not forced to do drill, they learn meaningfully and happily”. These findings indicate that literary texts foster meaningful language learning by integrating contextual understanding, implicit grammar acquisition, and emotional engagement within enjoyable classroom experiences.

Scaffolding Critical Thinking

The teacher consistently used literary texts in the Cambridge textbooks to facilitate discussion, interpretation, and critical thinking activities. One teacher explained that, “after reading a story together, I encourage students to discuss why the characters in the story act the way they do? What do you think about that? Because I believe that learning English is not just about grammar or vocabulary, it is about understanding and how they think” (T1). Through evaluative questions such as, ‘Do you think the bear is good or bad? Why?’ students are encouraged to justify their opinions, consider different perspectives, and use language to express their personal opinions. This indicates that literary texts are positioned not merely as reading materials, but as prompts for reflective and analytical engagement.

Teachers also highlighted that collaborative and predictive tasks help students develop active thinking and communication skills. (T3) noted that, “each group must create questions related to the story, and they exchange questions with another group. They ask each other questions and figure out the answers together. From this activity, students learn to understand the text as a whole, think critically, ask questions, and express their opinions. I use questions to start the discussion: ‘If you were him, what would you become? What would you do?’. These activities encourage students to negotiate ideas, respond to others’ perspectives, and engage with the story beyond critical comprehension.

In addition, teachers observed that the instructional tasks gradually guide students from comprehension toward analysis and creativity. As stated by (T1), “many activities can enhance their critical thinking and creativity, they do not just receive information, but they can also create, express ideas, and critique”. Similarly, (T4) emphasized that, “students are asked to guess, conclude, or give opinions. They have to think, not just read”. These findings suggest that Cambridge literary instruction function as a medium for active thinking, creative expression, and critical language use rather than passive reading practice.

Adapting Literary Activities to Students’ Interests and Experiences

Findings also indicate that teachers actively connect literary texts to students’ real-life experiences to increase emotional relevance and reflective engagement. One teacher explained that they “connect the story to reality... ‘could you live a day without your gadgets?’ they can start sharing their opinions because they are facing something that relates to them” (T1). This suggests that literary texts function as a medium through which students relate language learning to personal experiences, enabling them to express opinions and construct language skills rather than merely answer comprehension questions.

Literature is also used to facilitate empathy and personal reflection through socially contextualized discussion. As explained by (T3), “there are stories that talk about the athlete who broke his leg because of an accident, and I started the question, ‘What would you do if you were him. Would you give up? Would you keep moving for your dreams?’ Such questions encourage students to relate the story to their own experiences, emotions, and personal struggles rather than

responding to the text superficially. By imagining themselves in the character's position, students are invited to reflect on perseverance, motivation, and personal values through language. This indicates that literary texts are not only used to teach linguistic skills, but also to foster empathy and emotional engagement, allowing students to become more active and personally involved in the learning process.

Discussion

Deep learning in Cambridge English textbooks is constructed through the integration of literary texts and sequenced instructional tasks. Based on the results, this process is realized through four progressive learning trajectories: meaning making, critical thinking, language transfer, and creative production. Based on the findings from this research, literary texts in Cambridge English textbooks position learners as active meaning-makers rather than passive recipients of vocabulary. The results show that vocabulary and language features are consistently presented in contextualized forms through stories, songs, and visual texts, allowing learners to understand language within meaningful situations. This is further supported by teachers' perspectives, who emphasized that through literature, students do not merely look up meanings, but understand how, when, and why it is used in specific contexts.

Meaning-making as the first trajectory of the deep learning process can be explained through several major learning theories. Based on the constructivist perspective, learning occurs when learners actively construct knowledge through interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), which aligns with how literary texts provide contextualized language that learners must interpret rather than receive passively. This is further supported by schema theory, which posits that comprehension occurs when learners connect new information with their existing knowledge structures (Anderson & Pearson, 2016). Rather than requiring learners to memorize fixed definitions, this process allows them to build their own understanding of vocabulary by relating it to prior experiences and familiar contexts presented in the literature texts. In this way, meaning is not transmitted as a ready-made concept, but actively constructed by learners as they integrate new linguistic input with what they already know. Building on this process, the depth of processing theory explains why such learning becomes more durable: when learners process language semantically, through interpretation and contextual understanding rather than through surface memorization, the information is more likely to be stored in long-term memory (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Thus, meaning making is not only a way of understanding language, but also a mechanism that strengthens retention and deeper cognitive processing.

Empirical studies further support these findings. Research shows that when vocabulary is learned through contextualized texts, learners are able to construct meaning based on how words are used within the situations, rather than relying on isolated definitions (Pan, 2024). This process naturally strengthens comprehension because learners are not just decoding words, but understanding how ideas are connected. When comprehension improves, it also impacts vocabulary acquisition, as learners are more likely to retain and reuse words that they have understood meaningfully (Vu & Peters, 2022). As learners begin to understand texts more deeply, the process does not cease at comprehension; it precisely extends into higher-order thinking, where learners start connecting ideas, analyzing relationships, and reflecting on meaning (Ningrum & Murti, 2023). This is why literature plays a crucial role, as it provides rich contexts that naturally invite interpretation and personal engagement. Through stories, learners are exposed not only to language forms but also to social and emotional situations that require them to think beyond the surface level. As a result, literature functions not merely as reading material, but as a medium through which learners develop vocabulary, deepen comprehension, and enhance critical thinking simultaneously (Julia & Jeyanthi, 2024).

The literary works in the Cambridge textbook not only promote comprehension of meaning but also consistently stimulate students' critical thinking skills. The literary texts provide clear

descriptions to help students visualize the situations. Yet they do not always offer complete explanations, so students must interpret, connect, and evaluate the events in the stories. This is reinforced by learning instructions that do not stop at factual questions but guide students to answer questions such as “why did the character do that,” “what would you do if you were in that situation,” or predict what will happen next. Teachers also emphasize that through this approach, students do not merely read but learn to think, express opinions, and construct reasons for their answers. Thus, language no longer functions as an object to be deciphered for answers but as a tool for understanding, questioning, and evaluating situations.

This process aligns with learning theories that view thinking as a core component of understanding. From a constructivist perspective, Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through interaction and reflection, including when they interpret characters’ actions or evaluate events in a text. This is also related to Benjamin Bloom’s cognitive taxonomy, particularly at the analysis and evaluation levels, where students not only understand information but are able to analyze cause-and-effect relationships, compare perspectives, and provide reasoned judgments. Furthermore, within the framework of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), activities such as inferring, predicting, and evaluating serve as indicators that learning has moved beyond literal comprehension toward more complex cognitive processing. In other words, when students are asked to explain “why” and “how,” they are being trained to use language as a tool for thinking, not merely as a tool for answering.

This finding is further supported by recent studies that show how students’ thinking develops when they are actively engaged with the texts. When learners are involved in text-based discussions and respond to open-ended questions, they are not only recalling information, but they are pushed to explain ideas, consider possibilities, and build their own understanding, which gradually strengthens both their comprehension and critical thinking (O’Reilly et al., 2022). As this engagement deepens, learners begin to move beyond understanding what is explicitly stated. Tasks that require inference and evaluation encourage them to connect clues, interpret meanings, and examine relationships within the text, which leads to stronger analytical skills and more complete understanding of the story (Huijun & Rafizah, 2024; McCarthy & Goldman, 2015; Pulles et al., 2022). At this point, reading is no longer a process of finishing the text, but becomes an activity of thinking through the text.

Next, in terms of language transfer through contextual application, at this stage, language learning no longer stops at understanding or analyzing the text, but moves on to how the language is used in new situations. Based on the research findings, the instruction in the Cambridge book consistently encourages students to reuse language structures through activities such as role plays, creating conversations, or writing based on the context of the story. This process shows that language is not positioned as something to be memorized, but as a tool to be used. When students are asked to play the role of a character, continue a dialogue, or speak based on a situation in the text, they actively transfer language knowledge into communication practice. Therefore, they not only know the meaning of a word or structure, but also know when, how, and for what purpose the language is used.

This process reflects constructivist perspectives, which view language learning as an active process of meaning construction through interaction and contextual experience (Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, role play and dialogue activities allow students to use language purposefully rather than only complete the worksheet with the answers. This also aligns with Task-based language teaching, which emphasizes meaningful communicative tasks that facilitate more effective language learning because students engage with language as it is used in real-life situations (Wang, 2023). In addition, the theory of communicative competence explains that language skills include not only structural knowledge, but also the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts, which can only be developed through the practice of use, not through memorization (Canale & Swain,

1981). Thus, activities such as dialogue and role play become a bridge that connects language understanding with real use.

These findings are also supported by various empirical studies that show that the use of language in communicative contexts improves student retention and fluency. When students engage in communication-based tasks, they are better able to internalize the structure of language as it is used to convey meaning, rather than simply remember (Baillo et al., 2025; Bhandari, 2024). In addition, activities such as role play and collaborative dialogue have been shown to help students develop confidence and ability to interact in the target language (Li & Zhang, 2020). Furthermore, recent research shows that language transfer through contextual assignments allows students to adapt the expressions they have learned to new situations, thereby strengthening their language flexibility and communication abilities (Ismail et al., 2023). In conclusion, this process suggests that language learning becomes more meaningful when students not only understand the text, but also use it as a basis for communicating in relevant contexts.

The last is creative expression through literary response; at this stage, learning is no longer just about using language, but develops into the process of creating new works through language. Based on the research findings, the instruction in the Cambridge book consistently encourages students to generate new texts, points of view, or responses through activities such as writing from the perspective of the character, creating their own stories, or re-enacting the story in the form of performances. This process suggests that students no longer rely on texts as a source of answers, but begin to use language to express their own ideas, feelings, and interpretations. When students are asked to imagine themselves as characters or create new storylines, they not only understand the text but also process and transform the meaning based on their thoughts.

The importance of the creating stage in language learning can be explained through several key theories that emphasize that language develops optimally when it is used to produce meaning, not just to understand or reuse it. From the perspective of constructivism, learning is an active process of building knowledge, so that when students are asked to create new texts or perspectives, they are actually constructing meaning based on their own experiences and understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). This is reinforced by the *Output Hypothesis*, which explains that language production encourages students to process language more deeply because they have to organize ideas, choose the right form of language, and be aware of the limitations of their abilities (Swain, 2005). These theories emphasize that language skills are not only measured by comprehension and reproduction, but also by the ability to generate new expressions that are flexible and contextual.

Furthermore, various empirical studies show that production activities such as creative writing, storytelling, and role-based performance increase students' fluency, language complexity, and confidence in communication (Ky Nhan, 2024). Recent research has also shown that creative tasks encourage students to think more reflectively and personally about language, thereby increasing emotional engagement and long-term retention (Piscayanti & Yuliasri, 2021). In addition, creative tasks allow students to develop divergent thinking and problem-solving skills in the target language, which strengthens the relationship between language skills and high-level cognitive abilities (Onoda, 2022). This creating stage shows that language learning reaches its deepest level when students not only understand and use language, but are able to create new meanings independently.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This research shows that the literary works in the Cambridge book are not only positioned as something to be *read*, but as a medium that encourages students to develop beyond the text. Through literary texts and accompanying instructional tasks, students not only understand language, but also construct meaning contextually, interpret, transfer the use of language to new

situations, and actively create their ideas and opinions, both verbally and non-verbally. This happens because the assignments and inquiries given do not just ask students to find answers from the text, but encourage them to think, analyze, and express ideas independently. Thus, learning no longer positions students as *memorization machines* that are forced to find the correct answers, but as individuals who have the space to have a voice, opinion, and use language as a tool for self-development.

However, this study still has limitations, including that the number of books analyzed is limited to a specific series, does not involve direct observation of learning practices in the classroom, and has not explored in depth the long-term impact on the development of students' language skills. Therefore, further research is expected to involve more data sources, including different types of textbooks and different learning contexts, as well as to examine more broadly how assignment and inquiry design in textbooks can continue to be improved. The researcher is also optimistic that these findings can be a consideration for policymakers and teaching material developers to pay more attention to the quality of content and activities in textbooks, so that English language learning can truly support the development of students' thinking skills, creativity, and expression in a more meaningful way.

REFERENCES

- Abida, F. I. N. (2016). Critical Thinking Skills to Literary Works. *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)*, 11-18. <https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v1i1.148>
- Baillo, M., Pradia, M., Encarnacion, F. A., & Fernandez, E. J. (2025). Using Task-based Language Teaching to Enhance the Oral Communication Skills of Grade 11 Students. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 51(6). <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2025/v51i62040>
- Bhandari, B. (2024). Teachers' Perspectives on Task-Based Language Teaching: Practices, Strengths, and Weaknesses. *SNPRC Journal*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.3126/snprcj.v5i1.83465>
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1>
- Ellis, R., Skehan, P., Li, S., Shintani, N., & Lambert, C. (2019). Task-based language teaching: Theory and practice. In *Task-Based Language Teaching: Theory and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108643689>
- Huijun, N., & Rafizah, R. (2024). The effectiveness of English literature reading in improving reading skills and reading comprehension. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.55493/5019.v13i2.5004>
- Ismail, S. M., Wang, C., & Jamalyar, R. (2023). The impact of task-based instruction on learners' reading comprehension, L2 grit, anxiety, and motivation for L2 reading. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-023-00216-2>
- Julia, P., & Jeyanthi, B. (2024). Exploring the Role of English Literature in Developing Cultural Competence among ESL Students. *World Journal of English Language*, 14(6). <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n6p432>
- Katili, Y. A., & Malik, H. S. (2025). A literature review on local literature as a medium for critical and multicultural literacy through the deep learning approach. *Tamaddun*, 24(2). <https://doi.org/10.33096/tamaddun.v24i2.1025>
- Kovač, V. B., Nome, D., Jensen, A. R., & Skreland, L. L. (2023). The why, what and how of deep learning: critical analysis and additional concerns. *Education Inquiry*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2023.2194502>
- Ky Nhan, L. (2024). Exploring Students' Perceptions of Role-Playing Activities in Boosting English Speaking Confidence. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology (IJISRT)*. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/ijisrt24oct708>
- Li, J., & Zhang, Y. (2020). A grounded theoretical study on the influence mechanism of verbal abuse by teachers. *Education and New Development*, 39-43. <https://doi.org/10.36315/2020end009>
- Marton, F., & Säljö, R. (1976). On qualitative differences in learning: i—outcome and process. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 46(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.1976.tb02980.x>
- McCarthy, K. S., & Goldman, S. R. (2015). Comprehension of Short Stories: Effects of Task Instructions on Literary Interpretation. *Discourse Processes*, 52(7). <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163853X.2014.967610>
- Medina, A., & Kiefel, K. (2021). Global Literature in Tandem with Study Abroad: Cultivating Intercultural Competence for Preservice Teachers. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 33(2). <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v33i2.498>

- Menggo, S., Jama, K. B., Adnyani, N. L. P. S., & Krismayani, N. W. (2025). Indonesian English as a foreign language learners' interpersonal communication: profiles and challenges. *LLT Journal: Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 28(1). <https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v28i1.8670>
- Meston, H. M., Phillips Galloway, E., & Barrack, K. A. (2022). Co-constructing agency: Weaving academic discussion. *Reading Teacher*, 76(1). <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2111>
- Ningrum, A. W., & Murti, R. C. (2023). Contextual learning models in improving elementary school critical thinking skills. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA*, 9(5). <https://doi.org/10.29303/jppipa.v9i5.2360>
- O'Reilly, C., Devitt, A., & Hayes, N. (2022). Critical thinking in the preschool classroom: A systematic literature review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101110>
- Onoda, S. (2022). Enhancing creative thinking, critical thinking, and interactional skills through problem-solving group projects among undergraduate English majors in Japan. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 28(2). <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2022-2802-01>
- Pan, J. (2024). The Study on Vocabulary Learning and Application Strategies Based on Construct Theory. *World Journal of Education and Humanities*, 6(6). <https://doi.org/10.22158/wjeh.v6n6p38>
- Permatasari, A., Muhaji, U., & Purnawati, M. (2025). The integration of higher order thinking skills in an Indonesian EFL secondary school English textbook. *Language Circle: Journal of Language and Literature*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v20i1.33935>
- Piscayanti, K. S., & Yuliasri, I. (2021). Inventing voice of identity through L2 poetry writing: A construct of mindfulness-based strategy in remote learning. *Language Circle: Journal of Language and Literature*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v16i1.32613>
- Pulles, M., Berenst, J., de Glopper, K., & Koole, T. (2022). Children's discussions about texts: Integrating and evaluating practices. *Linguistics and Education*, 69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2022.101051>
- Rabbani, L. M., & Husain, S. H. (2024). Fostering student engagement with criticism feedback: importance, contrasting perspectives and key provisions. *Frontiers in Education*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2024.1344997>
- Rashid, B. T., & Hasan, M. N. (2020). The significance of literary texts in the pedagogy of English language in EFL and ESL classrooms. *UKH Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.25079/ukhjss.v4n2y2020.pp22-27>
- Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: Theory and research BT-handbook of research in second language teaching and learning. In *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*. Routledge, 495-508. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410612700-38>
- Vu, D. Van, & Peters, E. (2022). Learning vocabulary from reading-only, reading-while-listening, and reading with textual input enhancement: Insights from Vietnamese EFL learners. *RELC Journal*, 53(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220911485>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4>
- Zhigalev, B. A., & Zhigaleva, K. B. (2020). Methodology of Developing a Foreign-Language Linguistic Competence of Pre-school Children. *Yazyk i Kul'tura*, 51. <https://doi.org/10.17223/19996195/51/7>