

Constructing Arabic Grammar Test Items Involving Higher-Order Thinking Skills; The Obstacles Against the Teachers

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Students of language classes need assessments of their higher-order thinking abilities to prepare them to face the challenges of globalization and the future. Teachers' abilities and supporting external variables become crucial to achieve this goal. This current study intended to identify and describe obstacles experienced by teachers when constructing test items that reflect students' higher-order thinking skills. As qualitative descriptive research, this study would comprehensively reveal hidden phenomena and natural conditions using various data analysis tools, such as interviews, observation, and documentation. An Arabic grammar teacher at a private junior high school in Batu City was taken as the research sample. The study discovered that the quality of Arabic grammar test items to reflect higher-order thinking skills is affected by at least two factors: internal and external; the former includes the teacher's educational and professional qualifications, while the latter comprises stakeholder support and the curriculum.

Keywords: Arabic grammar, HOTS, competencies, Nahwu, Policymakers, obstacles against teachers

INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization, in which technology advances and the fields of work are diversified (Bezanilla, Galindo-Domínguez, & Poblete, 2021), provokes education to develop (Castaño, Arnal-Pastor, Pagán-Castaño, & Guijarro-Garcia, 2022). Teachers who teach science should stimulate their students' critical and creative thinking skills, not merely encourage them to memorize, understand, or apply (Ghanizadeh, 2017). Critical thinking works based on logical and precise reasoning when a person makes judgments and addresses problems (DiYanni, 2016). Meanwhile, creative thinking works when a student considers how to combine items in novel ways (both theoretically and technically), notices detail that others would miss, creates something new, uses uncommon or atypical pictures that nonetheless make a point fascinating, and so on (Brookhart, 2010).

Critical and creative thinking is one of the highest levels of thinking abilities connected to cognitive capacity in education. It involves analyzing, evaluating, and being creative, as opposed to lower or

intermediate levels: remembering, comprehending, and applying (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). A learner must pass the lower or medium levels of the fundamental levels (Nair, Yan, & Wider, 2019). However, it is also essential to focus on the upper levels without ignoring the supporting aspects (Prakash & Litoriya, 2022).

Language teaching also urgently needs to use higher-order thinking skills to help the students acquire a language (El Soufi & See, 2019) and think creatively by demonstrating techniques for tying ideas to each other, adapting concepts, and coming up with original solutions to problems that provide new obstacles (Purnomo et al., 2021). The capacity for critically analyzing and evaluating information is asserted as able to equip learners with advanced competence to actively participate in the learning process, be more specific in their tasks, and engage in learning strategies more effectively and efficiently (Subanji, Nusantara, Rahmatina, & Purnomo, 2021). All of this needs the teacher's expertise and the support of the decision-makers (Ghasemi, 2018).

Summative or formative assessments of higher-order thinking skills in the classroom are essential, but preparing students for them through class activities or interactions is more critical (Moyo, Combrinck, & Van Staden, 2022). The target knowledge and skills are conveyed through instructional content (Isnaeni, Rudyatmi, Ridlo, Ingesti, & Adiani, 2021). Therefore, the development of higher-order thinking abilities depends on the teaching process or the strategies (Bezanilla, Fernández-Nogueira, Poblete, & Galindo-Domínguez, 2019) used by the teacher in the classroom and is supported by relevant in-depth content (Fishovitz, Crawford, & Kloepper, 2020).

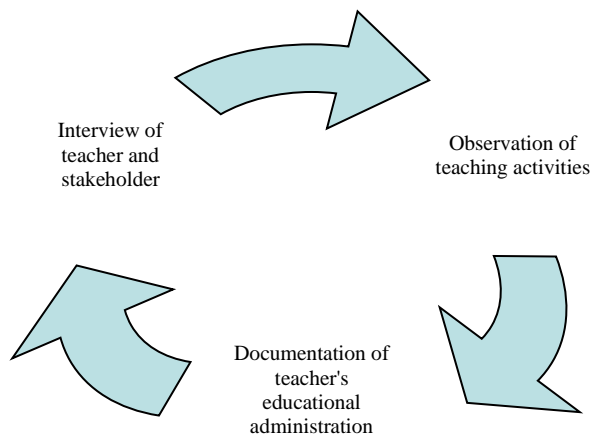
Some studies, using various methodologies and backgrounds, indicated that teachers might encounter difficulties or obstacles when developing test items requiring higher-order thinking skills. The teachers needed more knowledge and experience in the field they were engaged in (Cruz, Nascimento, & Dominguez, 2019; Janssen et al., 2019) because the skills and mindsets required to teach higher-order thinking skills did not instantly improve (Dahlan, Permana, & Oktariani, 2020). They needed training, more support from policymakers in their institutions, and other internal or external aspects (Tabassi, Ghanizadeh, & Beigi, 2020). This recent study preferred to expose and discuss the challenges or obstacles facing teachers that impact the quality of constructing Arabic grammar test items involving higher-order thinking skills.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach, using interviews as the primary method of analysis to illustrate the challenges faced by Arabic grammar teachers while creating tests to assess their students' higher-order thinking skills. The subject was a teacher of Arabic grammar in a private junior high school in Batu City that applied the 2013 curriculum. The researchers interviewed the teacher to learn more about how well the teacher taught the students higher-order thinking skills in the classroom. The school principal and the head of curriculum department were also interviewed to discover more about the institution's curriculum concept.

In addition to gathering data from such interviews, the researchers performed secondary or auxiliary analyses, such as observation and documentation. The former was to show how the teacher developed the students' higher-order thinking abilities during the classroom activities, while the latter was to gather information on the educational administration of teaching used by the teacher while creating instruments to assess higher-order thinking skills.

**FIGURE 1
DATA TRIANGULATION**



RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research revealed that the teacher had difficulties coming up with Arabic grammar test items involving higher-order thinking skills. Both internal and external factors contributed to the difficulties. In this case, the internal ones included the teacher’s educational and professional qualifications, while the external ones included everything beyond the teacher’s control, such as the decision-makers in the institution. Table 1 below describes the obstacles against teachers in constructing test items involving students’ higher-order thinking skills.

**TABLE 1
THE OBSTACLES AGAINST TEACHERS WHO CONSTRUCT TEST ITEMS
INVOLVING HOTS**

No.	Internal Factors	External Factors
1.	Lack of formulating test items according to Brookhart Principles	Lack of evaluation system based on higher-order thinking skills
2.	Renewing the question items in each test	Excessive teaching workload
3.	Lack of comprehensive knowledge of Bloom’s Taxonomy	Inadequate textbook for higher-order thinking skills
4.	Lack of teaching educational administrations	Lack of teacher participation in training and seminars for professional development
5.	Inadequate training in familiarizing higher-order thinking skills in teaching activities	
6.	Incompatibility of academic qualifications with the field of education	

Based on the internal factors found, the study concluded that the Arabic grammar teacher only prepared students for sentence-form questions and did not provide them with introductory materials for some topics. Introductory information or a text should come before highly thought-provoking test questions. High-thinking exam questions include Bloom’s revised levels of cognition, especially the higher levels of knowledge. High-level inquiries in texts need not only comprehending but also analyzing and tying the concepts. The introductory information in the test, essay, and project (Brookhart, 2010) may use a measurement tool. In this study, the Arabic grammar teacher had updated the questions in each test. This

act particularly was good for assessing higher-order thinking skills but needed more effort and time. Salman & Talafaha (2018) mentioned that renewing questions needs reviewing the previous questions to detect errors and defects, preventing them from being repeated in formulating the next questions. Questions having been used in the teaching process, if re-used in a summative assessment, cannot be higher-order questions. Meanwhile, new correct questions have high objectivity in evaluating higher-order thinking skills.

Furthermore, lacking comprehensive knowledge of Bloom's Taxonomy and even basic knowledge of it can lead to failure in or neglect of good teaching and preparation of good test questions. Even undergraduate teachers might miss the importance of knowing and applying it (Bayram & Canaran, 2020). The need for more focus on developing higher-order thinking skills stems from the weakness of employing and diversifying advanced teaching methods (Hadi, Retnawati, Munadi, Apino, & Wulandari, 2018).

The teacher who did not perform the complete teaching preparation administration made the teaching process unsystematic because the teaching administration includes the preparation, process, and evaluation of teaching. Such failure is the so-called educational competence that the teacher must control. An assessment is necessary for teachers, learners, and curricula (Ghoneim, 2004). The assessment mechanism is even at the core of education, as it assesses the curriculum and the completeness of its components (Akhmetshin et al., 2019; Filler et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the teacher did not have an academic qualification in education or teaching. He only had passed the study of the Arabic language and Sharia and obtained a bachelor's degree in Sharia. This condition might challenge him to make more outstanding efforts to sharpen his professional competencies. A teacher's professional development strongly correlates with his/her student's academic achievement because it provides him/her with helpful knowledge to learn about student learning, pedagogy, and educational content (Heller, Daehler, Wong, Shinohara, & Miratrix, 2012; Uerz, Volman, & Kral, 2018).

The students needed to develop their capacity for extraordinary thinking because the teacher did not teach them higher-order thinking skills in the classroom during the teaching process. If students are not taught and trained in higher-order thinking skills during teaching activities, the formative and summative assessments of those skills will not be practical (Huang, Silitonga, & Wu, 2022). Therefore, the teaching activities should contain instructional materials related to those skills. For students, the learning process and the different methods of teaching applied by the teacher (Abulibdeh, Libdeh, Trayek, & Murshidi, 2019) in the classroom can determine their success in learning higher-order thinking skills (Troussas, Krouska, Virvou, & Sougela, 2019).

Also, lacking formal decisions or systems in a school can lead to a lack of interest in applying the revised Bloom's cognitive levels to the teachers. Through the Education Assessment Center, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology published a guidebook for preparing questions involving higher-order thinking skills (Tim Pusat Penilaian Pendidikan, 2019). The specifications, principles, and steps for their preparation were detailed so that institutions could review them to develop their teaching evaluation in the future and distribute such information to all teachers they had. Institutions should invest in professional development to hone the professional competence of teachers (Akinyemi & Nkonki, 2020; Nawab, 2020; Nese, Meng, Breiner, Chaparro, & Algozzine, 2020). Tavassoli & Farhady (2018) emphasized that teachers have an essential role in the education system and professional and knowledgeable teachers are required; however, the policymakers' role is ignorable.

Based on the decision of the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia No. 890 in 2019 on the teaching assignment guide for school teachers, a subject teacher is assigned to teach at least 24 lesson hours and no more than 40 lesson hours per week, while being a school head is equal to performing a 24-lesson-hour teaching (Saifuddin, 2019). However, the teacher took the role of the school head, meaning that he performed a work equal to a 24-lesson-hour teaching per week, and, at the same time, he also must teach other subjects for 21 lesson hours. As a result, his total teaching hours increased to 45 lesson hours per week, exceeding the maximum hours set by the regulation. This situation made him find it difficult to grasp one subject and develop his professional.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHING LOAD

No	Subject	Number of Course	Number of Lesson
1.	Arabic Grammar (<i>Nahwu</i>)	8	16
2.	Tahfizh (Memorizing the Quran)	2	2
3.	Arabic Dictation	3	3
Total		13	21

In addition, the head of the institution has a great responsibility and many functions, both internally, such as supervising teachers and others, and externally, such as building a relationship with the Department of Religious Affairs in Batu City to develop the institution.

The textbook of “Annahwu Alwadiah” used in teaching Arabic grammar provides the students with examples of complete sentences and then explains the extraction of rules from them. It does not contain introductory materials in the form of texts that motivate students to think higher. The exercises in it also do not represent or measure the students’ higher-order thinking skills. Being a tool for the teacher and students to study, it contains educational content. It may contain educational activities supporting educational goals and assessments (Mosa, 2002). Pratama & Retnawati (2018) mentioned that a textbook is one of the teaching aids that can be used to train students’ higher-order thinking skills. It is an important teaching tool for teachers and students to reach educational goals. The use of textbooks influences teachers’ decision about teaching contents and strategies. There is a strong relationship between textbook use and student achievement (Supriyatin, Rahayu, Ristanto, & Ichsan, 2019). The more the number of contents about higher-order thinking skills in course books, the more the chance the students have to be trained and taught higher-order thinking skills (Ichsan et al., 2020).

A scientific qualification or an academic certificate cannot guarantee that one can control the scope of education. A teacher also needs to follow the development of educational technology by participating in training courses or discussion forums or reading printed and electronic resources. The evaluation of education continues to progress and develop as well. The points of view differ today between the modern and the traditional assessments. A teacher needs to provide himself/herself with the participation in training courses in preparing and interpreting achievement tests (Purnomo et al., 2022), preparing their specifications, analyzing their contents, and interacting or communicating with others well (Jennings et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

The research concluded that the obstacles that affect the quality of preparing Arabic Grammar test items according to Bloom’s revised levels of cognition come from at least two factors: internal and external. The former includes educational and professional qualifications, while the latter includes the policymakers and the curriculum set by the institution.

Additionally, teachers should empower themselves with comprehensive knowledge in evaluating test items by learning scientific sources and adapting to the globalization in education and technology. Such effort can help them face challenges that may prevent them from preparing good test items involving higher-order thinking skills. Policymakers also play a crucial role in the success of education; they must regularly review the curriculum, offer opportunities for teachers to advance their education and careers, and meet their needs by enabling them to participate in workshops or forums related to their profession.

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