NOVICE AND EXPERIENCED TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES: MULTIFACTOR CHALLENGES IN HOTS IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract: The integration of High-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in language learning presents numerous opportunities to foster deeper learning. When it comes to integrating HOTS in the classroom, teachers confront a long list of problems. The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential difficulties that may arise during the implementation process. Employing a qualitative method, this study collected data by inviting one novice and one experienced EFL teachers teaching in junior high schools from two different regions in South Sumatra province. Interviews were conducted with participants using a semi-structured style in order to gather information regarding the challenges they encountered when attempting to include higher order thinking processes into learning activities. Following that, records pertaining to lesson plans and classroom observations were utilized as supporting data. The method of narrative inquiry was utilized in order to analyze the data. According to the result of the study, inadequate instructional media, teachers' misconceptions of HOTS, students' low English proficiency, inferior reading literacy level, and appalling learning motivation were the problems that were shown to be associated with the implementation of higher-order thinking.

Keywords: *challenges, experienced teacher, HOTS implementation, novice teacher*

INTRODUCTION

A multidimensional approach to learning is required in the 21st century. A skill-based curriculum for today's students shifts away from content acquisition and rote memorization and focuses on the expertise and skills that will best serve our generation of young minds. Student interaction and hands-on, interdisciplinary learning are prioritised over information transmission. The P21 (Partnership for 21st Century Learning) group has defined four 'Skills for Today': creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. These four themes should not be interpreted as units or even courses, but rather as elements that should be woven throughout all curriculum design and strategy planning. They should be included in every course, just like literacy and numeracy.

According to Stehle and Peters-Burton (2019), a 21st-century education should integrate knowledge construction, real-world problem solving, skilled communication, collaboration, use of information and communication technology (ICT) for learning, and self-regulation. Students must participate in the learning environment successfully and develop 21st century abilities such as critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration to attain the authentic learning that is essential in the twenty-first century. Students will be better prepared with the required information and necessary abilities to succeed in their future career paths (Lombardi & Oblinger, 2007). Thus, curriculum in the twenty-first century should emphasize knowledge production and encourage students to create information that is valuable or meaningful to them to acquire new skills. Preparing curriculum to be relevant to the actual world helps increase student involvement, motivation, and comprehension of academic subjects while further preparing them for adulthood (Lombardi & Oblinger, 2007).

HOTS has been postulated for many years but continuously established until recently. Bloom et al. (1956) introduced the first iterations of HOTS in Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, in which higher order thinking of the cognitive sphere encompasses application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. According to McDavitt (1994), HOTS are analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels that require knowledge of preceding levels, such as employing routine procedures to known or new issues. Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) are described as the ability to employ knowledge, skills, and principals in reasoning, reflection, problem solving, decision making, innovating, and creating novel concepts (Dhewa et al., 2017; Sulaiman et al., 2017).

HOTS relates to the teacher's classroom setting, which includes student organization and teaching methods for successful learning (Mainali, 2012). HOTS are classified into four categories: problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, and innovative thinking (Brookhart & Nitko, 2011). HOTS can also motivate learners to reflect attentively about the subject content and, it is likely to assist students improve their higher order thinking skills (Barnett & Francis, 2012). Higher-order thinking skills are the ability to think at a higher level. Individuals who possess HOTS abilities are more capable of assessing, appraising, and generating innovation to solve challenges in their surroundings (Retnawati et al., 2018). Higher-order thinking skills, in other words, are a subset of critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking skills. One of the learning objectives requires students to be able to employ Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) to evaluate, synthesize, and generate knowledge (Ariyana et al., 2018).

The development of students' HOTS has long been an objective of the national education in Indonesia. According to Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 the year 2003 on the National Education System, one of the goals of national education is to develop students' ability to become knowledgeable, competent, innovative, self-sufficient, and accountable citizens. Furthermore, the Regulation of the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture Number 22 for the Year 2016 on the Process Standard for Elementary and Secondary Education specifies that information is gained through "remembering, comprehending, applying, analysing, evaluating, and inventing" (Kemendikbud, 2016). In accordance with this purpose, attempts have been undertaken in the past few years to encourage students' HOTS, including its implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

In the case of ELT, several studies on the difficulties associated with implementing HOTS in the ELT educational setting have been conducted. Mursyid and Kurniawati (2019) investigated the employment of HOTS by English teachers in the EFL classroom in Indonesia. The study focused on instructors' thoughts on HOTS, its use, HOTS assessment, and restrictions in the EFL classroom. The findings demonstrated that teachers from all three generations were aware of HOTS and used it in their classroom lessons. However, the teachers found an assortment of obstacles while incorporating HOTS into their classes. In a similar vein, Fakhomah and Utami (2019) examined pre-service teachers' opinions and obstacles in using HOTS in English language teaching. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, data were obtained from 5 pre-service English instructors in the Professional Teacher Program from various higher education institutions. The study's findings revealed that, while participants showed positive perceptions of HOTS implementation in the classroom, they encountered various implementation challenges, particularly those connected to time management and students' aptitude. Setiawan and Bharati (2018) discovered that most teachers need to enhance their HOTS expertise and understanding, particularly when developing activities that encourage learners' creativity and critical thinking. It was discovered that teachers had difficulties in developing learning activities when facilitating HOTS, indicating that their capacity to implement HOTS in the learning and teaching process is still poor (Ganapathy et al., 2017).

As the demands for using HOTS in the learning process increase in the twenty-first century, teachers must be able to integrate HOTS into the instructional designs they create. Both novice and experienced teachers will face difficulties in implementing it. Considering the background explanation provided, one question that prompted this study is: what are the challenges in implementing HOTS in ELT from the perspectives of novice and experienced teachers? This question is the key issue and the goal of this paper's inquiry as the challenges faced by both teachers through this investigation are expected to be anticipated for more applicable and successful teaching and learning process.

METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this study was to conduct a narrative inquiry in which the writer gathered narrative information regarding the issues in implementing HOTS pedagogy. A narrative inquiry technique proved to be the ideal option for this study since it gave importance to human experience and provided a full description of human experience, which was in line with its goal. The narrative inquiry, also known as narrative design, is a broad phrase that encompasses the personal and human qualities of experience throughout time, as well as the interaction between individual experience and cultural environment (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). The triangulation was utilized to build the trustworthiness from the interview result, document check or documentation and the class observation.

Subject

The purposive sampling method was employed to choose the participants of this study. There are some characteristics that the researchers set to achieve the purpose of the study. The first participant is an experienced teacher who holds a 32 year of teaching experience. She was once selected as Prabumulih city representative for

national instructor in promoting 2013 curriculum implementation, but HOTS implementation was not her specialty. Furthermore, the experienced teacher was also selected as one out of two EFL core teachers for Junior High School level in Prabumulih city, South Sumatra in 2017. The second participant has a different setting of teaching experience. As a novice teacher, she had approximately 5-year experience of teaching English in some private-owned teaching institutions. The novice teacher had officially completed the Teacher Professional Program (translated into Program Profesi Guru) before she was accepted as a civil servant and was assigned to teach in one of riverside villages in Banyuasin regency, South Sumatera. To keep the study confidential, the experienced teacher's pseudo name is *Sue* while the novice teacher is *Ink.*

Design and Procedure

Interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were used to collect data. Prior to conducting the first interview, the interview process was created. After the initial interview, the data was transcribed. The second interview was started, and the participant was given a copy of the response to double-check its correctness. The interviews lasted around 45 minutes and 20 minutes, respectively; because the interviews were semi-structured, the researchers must have included some follow-up questions. The class observation and 6 basic competences document review were then conducted. As non-participant observers, the researchers matched the result of classroom implementation with the lesson plan as one of primary documents used in this study.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Once the data was collected through interview, class observation and documentation, the researcher started to analyze the data. Creswell and Creswell (2017) were used to guide the data analysis process. The interview results were transcribed and shared to the participants to validate the information that had been shared and follow- up interviews were carried out as needed. The coding began to start as the completed transcription divided into several emerging themes. The constant-comparative approach was used to arrange the data analysis. It entailed reading and rereading transcripts focusing on communication meaning. The procedure entails simultaneously coding raw data and categorizing data (Merriam, 1998). Consequently, the researchers started to narratively tell the occurrences and events in this study.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are classified into several emerging themes related to syllabus based lesson plan, students competency and motivation, and HOTS misconception in conducting teaching and learning process and some other less influencing factors such as: the dominance of mother tongue, inadequacy of teaching and learning media and so forth. Both novice and experienced teachers' perspectives on HOTS implementation challenges are deliberately discussed as follows.

One notable issue encountered with the implementation of HOTS pedagogy is the syllabus-based lesson plan. The teacher noted that while the teacher should occasionally follow the precise procedures indicated on the syllabus which may not be appropriate for the students' level of competence.

> *"After we have prepared a perfect lesson plan, we have to be consistent in implementing the stages of teaching and learning that we made in our lesson plan, so the success percentage could reach 75 % or even more. For the evaluation, it will work if we base it on the teaching and learning objectives that we stated in our lesson plan. Thus, those are inseparably connected. The learning objectives must be stated or determined in the beginning before we come up with the teaching strategies or techniques. The stages must be implemented each by each consistently and what we have to reach must be in line with the teaching and learning objectives. Another challenge is that the reality is often different from what we have planned. In that kind of situation, we have to be creative to find ways to have our plans reach the objectives even when the reality goes wrong. We are only allowed to add or to replace the questions or stimulus to encourage students to think. Sometimes I use the "reality" approach, to meet the students' condition. For example, I found that students could not understand if I insist on still implementing what I have planned, I change the way to explain or to encourage them by relating it to their surroundings or to things that are familiar to them". [Sue]*

Novice teacher shared a similar experience as follows.

> *"I learned how to design the curriculum during my pre-service training. I kind of adapted it for my students once I started teaching at my school. I was perplexed since what was mentioned in the syllabus differed from reality to some extent. To meet my students' levels and keep the lesson going, I frequently have to adjust the learning procedures. I believe it happens for a variety of reasons, including students' low ability and students' lack of motivation." [Ink]*

Both teachers explained that they have been facing many situations in which the teaching learning process is not as what was expected on the lesson plan. It is a common circumstance that a teacher might experience in conducting the teaching and learning process. It is in line with Dembele and Lefoka (2007) who believed that even well-planned teaching and learning strategies are not always as successful as expected, and research reveals that a significant gap exists between the projected goals of curricular changes and actual progress realized in classrooms, schools and by number of teachers. Although the lesson plan is essential for optimizing the teaching and learning quality, in practice, lesson plans are seldom fully implemented in the classroom (Iqbal et al., 2021).

To note, there are some contributing factors to this occurrence and one of the most pivotal points is due to students' low ability in English. As is in line with Dima et al. (2021) who opined that the biggest obstacle faced in implementing HOTS is the low competence of the students in English lessons. In the same vein, a study conducted by Yuliati and Lestari (2018) depicts that students who have high learning abilities are better at responding to HOTS-oriented questions and activities compared to those categorized as the medium and low-level students.

> *"If we refer back to what HOTS means based on Bloom Taxonomy, the students are expected to achieve a certain level in which they produce or create the language for their daily life. However, most of my students do not*

> *even understand some common words in English. I often tried to encourage them to guess the realia or things surrounding them to make them think and figure out what to learn, yet they face difficulties to guess. It sometimes requires me to spoon-feed the whole class about what to learn" [Ink]*

The experienced teacher shared a similar experience, but a different approach was employed to this condition.

> *Another concern in HOTS is that some students are still in LOTS level, they moreover are too demotivated to read a long and difficult text, to think and to ask. That is the biggest challenge that I always face. Therefore, I need to change my teaching strategy, for those students especially to get them more engaged. I admit that it is really demanding. Regarding this fact, I apply some techniques, besides providing a dictionary for students, I have a program named "little teacher". I appoint some students who are eligible and considered to be able to think critically as little teachers to help me teach the other students. I give them a reward to appreciate their effort. I found it is easier for the other students to understand, maybe because of the way they discuss, and the other students feel more comfortable to learn from their friends.*

Experienced and novice teachers both agreed that the low competence of the students in English lessons was significantly influenced by the lack of English exposure. The participants take the government policy, Ministry of Education and Culture Number 67-year 2013, to eliminate English subjects in state-owned elementary schools as the leading factor of this issue. It is in accordance with Lesia et al. (2022) who believed students need to be taught English in elementary school otherwise they would struggle to acquire the language in junior high school, be less confident, and have poor competitiveness in this global era. Similarly, Maili (2018) asserts that students should be exposed to English in primary school so that they are not confused while learning English in middle school as that the materials provided at both levels are different and sequential.

Another leading point to students' low ability in English which contributes to HOTS implementation is the dominance of the mother language. Both participants teach in a region in which the students come from different villages or districts. The "translation" thing, as can be seen in several teaching observations as the example when students asked about several vocabulary, the teacher tried her best to illustrate, to exemplify the word into a certain situation instead of directly translating it into Indonesian language. However, there were some situations in which the teacher should have certain words translated to students' mother tongue language.

> *Another problem is that the students in my school come from different villages, so their languages are really varied. Their mother tongues are dominant, so we are really challenged. Even to understand other subjects taught in Indonesian language is still difficult for them. Due to the dominance of their mother tongues, I sometimes need to translate certain terms to Indonesian language or even their languages.*

Even though the dominance of the mother tongue as an interfering factor, there was one belief stated by Davies and Pearse (2000). "If you simply speak English all

the time you will quickly drive beginners, and even more advanced learners, to despair". This statement ensures that mother tongue can be considered as a problem in learning a language, yet it is still necessary to translate certain words to make students understand.

The literacy of using media in the teaching and learning process, particularly in promoting HOTS, is critical for the teacher, as the availability of instructional media facilitates the process of promoting HOTS in teaching and learning. It is consistent with Tyas et al. (2019) believing that the availability of teaching and learning media sources would greatly assist teachers in improving their capacity to promote HOTS. This statement has been shown accurately to what a novice teacher faces in the classroom.

> *In my previous job settings, I used to integrate all types of media to support the teaching learning process, I found it helpful to ease students in understanding the lesson. However, the reality that I must face now is the other way around. In my school now, we had no projector and speaker. Thus, the HOTS implementation becomes so challenging. [ink]*

Conversely, technology integration supported the experienced teacher. It reflected on six observed meetings in which the experienced teacher employed PowerPoints, projector, speaker, interactive videos, and digital pictures. The experienced teacher also emphasized in the interview section that technology integration is inseparable to HOTS implementation.

Apart from some challenges that both participants faced, participants responded to some other issues differently.

In interview section, the novice teacher did not consider HOTS assessment and teachers' understanding is an issue in HOTS implementation, whereas, as a core teacher who has experienced in training and assisting other teachers about curriculum 2013, the experienced teacher found that there is a possibility of teacher misconception in HOTS assessment as one the challenges in its implementation.

> *Some teachers think that HOTS questions must be in the form of an essay, but if we look at the final national examination, HOTS actually could be implemented in multiple choice form. HOTS questions have some criteria. So, it is important to have some stimulants in the form of text, pictures, or graphs. The type of questions are more likely to ask "why", "what do you think about?", "what is your opinion about?", "what should you do if …. ?" (Certain situations given). Another important criterion is that we cannot ask something familiar or general. It is better to ask about something unique and related to what is happening in today's world and the question must be frequently renewed. In the past, the questions were always repeated, thus in the meantime we have to create or at least renew the questions to trigger students to think and to make them easily understand supported by appropriate stimulus. "*

This perspective is consistent with some previous studies. One of which showed that one major setback of a successful HOTS implementation in the classroom is teacher's misconception of HOTS (Hidayat & Lestari, 2022). Furthermore, Ganapathy et al. (2017) revealed that present and future English teachers have been

exposed to the concept of HOTS however there is still a need of more improvement and improvisation for other similar degree programs to implement higher order thinking skills through the effective use of ICT tools to promote better learning the use of ICT is an effective strategy to implement higher order thinking.

Another unavoidable challenge is the students' reading ability and motivation. The reading literacy level needs to be promoted along with the implementation of HOTS, as the experienced teacher illustrated below.

> *…….. HOTS is strongly connected to literacy, so the task should encourage students to read the passage. From reading the passage, the students automatically have integrated literacy, and it must be supported by teacher instruction to make it HOTS, for example, "OK everybody I give you one text about……. now you discuss with your friends in group." After that we as teachers should guide them into HOTS, for instance, from the passage, we assign students to complete the table by finding information which cannot be directly found in the text. Furthermore, another important thing is the question. The HOTS question is not always difficult, and the difficult question is not always HOTS. The HOTS question should stimulate students to think. So, it is a lot better if the question is appropriate, because the students unconsciously think in HOTS.*

The students' low literacy level and students' motivation to fully embrace HOTS implementation are intertwined. It is easier to implement HOTS in a learning environment with intelligent students. However, teachers frequently deal with slow learners and their issues with HOTS, requiring more time, effort, and commitment to reach the goals (Kusumastuti et al., 2019). The teacher must work attentively and creatively to ensure that the learning stages, teaching materials, and procedures are appropriate for promoting HOTS to each student.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings and discussions, there are several challenges faced by participating teachers in implementing HOTS. First, teachers often experience various kinds of obstacles in implementing HOTS-based lesson plans caused by students' low English skills. The low English skills of students are caused by students being given subjects at elementary school and the dominant use of their mother tongue during the learning process in class. Furthermore, the second factor in the presence of obstacles to implementing HOTS is the lack of media support and facilities for teachers to carry out the learning process. This study found that novice teachers did not get qualified teaching media support, thus the implementation of HOTS experienced impediments. Experienced teachers have better experience because of the support from adequate teaching media. Furthermore, understanding and knowledge of HOTS reading skills and student motivation are also substantial components in the success or failure of HOTS implementation in the classroom.

This research is not without limitations. For example, there were only two participants, one novice teacher and one experienced teacher in the junior high school setting in South Sumatra. In regard to the scale of participants, the data collected is unlikely to reflect a general picture of obstacles or challenges in

implementing HOTS in the classroom. Future research can explore challenges in HOTS implementation with different settings and greater and more diverse number of participants. Based on the results of the study, teachers must have as many opportunities as possible to develop their competencies, especially those related to HOTS, and schools must be able to provide media support and supporting facilities for learning activities.

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