



EFL Teachers' Problems in HOTS Implementation during Covid Pandemic

Amalul Umam

Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor

amalul.umam@uika-bogor.ac.id

Movi Riana Rahmawanti

Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor

movi.riana@uika-bogor.ac.id

Alan Jaelani

Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor

alan.jaelani@uika-bogor.ac.id

Corresponding email: amalul.umam@uika-bogor.ac.id

Abstract

Even though the implementation of higher-order thinking skills has been mandated by the Curriculum 2013, some English teachers find it complex, especially during the covid-19 outbreak. This study aims at finding out the problems faced by three English teachers in implementing higher-order thinking skills. It is framed under a case study design in which documentation and semi-structured interview were used for data collection. Data gathered from both semi-interviewed and documentation were analyzed using thematic analysis in which the data were coded into some themes. The finding reveals that teachers have some external and internal problems in the implementation of higher-order thinking skills. For the internal factors, the teachers admitted that they lacked training and exposure to the integration of higher-order thinking skills. They acknowledged that they frequently employ instructional strategies they have used successfully in the past. While for the external factors, the teachers asserted that the students lack the motivation to learn English online. The majority of students choose not to participate in learning activities. This study suggests that teachers must engage in continuing professional development (CPD), which can be accomplished in a variety of methods, in order to encourage the integration of higher-order thinking abilities in the classroom. If the government and the schools where the instructors educate support this CPD, it will be successful.

Keywords: EFL classroom, higher order thinking skills, teachers' problems.

Introduction

The implementation of Curriculum 2013 in Indonesia requires the integration of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in learning processes. Teachers are demanded to have pedagogical competencies from which integrating higher-order thinking skills is not a problem. It must be done in all subjects, including English. This is done to help

the kids become competent adults who are successful, creative, and effective as well as having the capacity to participate to social life. In addition, it is also enabling students to know what they do in making decisions and facing the globalization era which appertains to the 21st century that consists of using technology for all activities.

Unfortunately, there were some problems faced by the teachers due to some reasons. First, there are some schools that do not apply HOTS-based learning to teaching and learning materials, worksheets, and learning evaluations (Ichsan et al., 2019). The other reason shows that some teachers have not understood well how to implement the Curriculum 2013 due to their low assessment literacy (Setyarini et al., 2018; Umam & Indah, 2020). As a result, the learning and teaching processes do not integrate higher-order thinking skills as it is supposed to.

Even though some studies on higher-order thinking skills have been conducted (Damaianti et al., 2020; Susanti et al., 2020; Wardani et al., 2020), the focus is on students' development, rather than on teachers' professional development. It means that there is a gap where teachers' professional development is less explored. There are some studies that discussed teachers' perspectives (Gozali et al., 2021; Pusparini & Sarosa, 2020). The first studied the teachers' perception of HOTS and the latter discussed teachers' knowledge of HOTS application. To shed more light on this topic, this study focuses on investigating problems that are faced by English teachers in implementing higher-order thinking skills in their classes during the covid-19 outbreak. In addition, it will also assess the teachers' understanding of HOTS integration. The novelty of this study is rooted in the source of the problems, teachers' competencies, that are very important in education systems to be addressed.

In education field, higher order thinking skills, also known as HOTS is a term every educator must understand because it has a big impact on the teaching and learning process, especially in the implementation of the new curriculum made by the Ministry of Education in Indonesia, the Curriculum 2013. Indonesian students are prepared to face the 21st century demands in which essential skills such as thinking critically, deeply, and in accordance with the factual knowledge are prerequisite. HOTS is the ability to think that not only requires the ability to remember, but also higher capability in understand (Wardani et al., 2020). It is important because thinking is the first step of learning and the level of thinking that emphasizes the application of knowledge that has been received. Moreover, higher order thinking

skills is one of the important components for an individual to be able to solve new problems in the twenty-first-century that is more dynamic and more complex (Hursen, 2021)

Brookhart (2010, cited in Setyarini, 2018) mentions that there are three main characteristics of HOTS; transfer, critical thinking, and problem-solving. These characteristics are depicted in Bloom's Taxonomy that is a framework of educational goals. It was originally published by Bloom and was revised by Anderson and Krathwol in 2001.

The original taxonomy of Bloom are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation while the revised one are remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The updated taxonomy emphasizes this dynamism by labeling its categories and subcategories with verbs and gerunds (rather than the nouns of the original taxonomy). The cognitive processes through which intellectuals come into contact and interact with knowledge are described by these "action words."

Higher order thinking skills integration is obliged by the Ministry of Education as the solution of the curriculum 2013 that has become the needs of students' preparation to face the globalization which is more dynamic and complex. In the level of higher thinking, there are some aspects of HOTS such as cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains which help students in having capability in producing new ideas to solve the problems in every situation. Also, students are expected to have ability to think critically, creatively, innovatively, and productively. As a result, higher order thinking skills is important in the implementation of curriculum 2013.

Research Methodology

This study was framed under qualitative approach in which qualitative case study (Tamarinde & Grootel, 2019) was used. The study was conducted in West Java, Indonesia. There were three teachers as the participants in this study. They are high schools' English teachers who voluntarily participated in the study.

The data were collected through documentation and semi structured interview. At first, the researcher requested respondents to collect some data like

lesson plan, materials, assessment results and journal writing. An inductive approach was used to conduct the theme analysis, allowing the data to guide the researchers, who had no preconceived ideas before the coding and thematization processes. (Dikilitaş & Bostancıoğlu, 2019). First a line-by-line coding was carried out to document the thought flow of each participant. Initial codes formed the themes. The codes and themes were later refined collaboratively by the researchers, and they were later organized under two major categories lower order thinking and higher order thinking skills activity. Those data were then stored in the researchers' database. To complete the data collected, semi structured interview was done and then it was recorded. It was done to clarify the actions that the respondents did during their teaching. The main intention of the interview was to find respondents' problems in integrating higher order thinking skills in their teaching. The recording was transcribed and computerized based on code the researcher has. The theme for the code were internal and external factors.

To get conclusion from the study, the researcher compared and analyzed both data from documentation and semi structured interview. Then, the conclusion were synchronized with the literature existed about higher order thinking skills integration in English language teaching.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The study is aimed at finding out the problems faced by English teachers in integrating higher order thinking skills during their teaching. In addition, the study also assesses the teachers' understanding about higher order thinking skills.

Teachers' understanding of higher order thinking skills

Overall, English teachers have good understanding about higher order thinking skills. They said that higher order thinking skills is part of the Curriculum 2013 that every teacher must integrate in their teaching. It is depicted in the interview results as in the following excerpt

"The government want to have students with critical thinking by inserting higher order thinking skills in the learning processes." (Excerpt 1)

From the excerpt above, it can be inferred that teachers have understood that it is the government that requires all teachers to integrate higher order thinking skills in

learning process. It means that government has successfully socialize the standard of education in Indonesia that every school must achieve.

In addition, a respondent describes his understanding of higher order thinking skills as something that are graded as the following excerpt.

"The definition I knew about HOTS is not only memorizing the facts or repeating what people say. The characteristic of HOTS is focused on an analysis and based on the Bloom's taxonomy, there are C1 until C6 and HOTS starts from C4 to C6." (Excerpt 2)

The excerpt above informs us that theoretically the respondent has some understandings about higher order thinking skills that are classified into some levels and can be used as a tool to measure or assess students during learning processes.

In further interview, some respondents explained that the concept of higher order thinking skills is not just understanding materials given in the class. Students must be able to apply higher level of thinking as it is illustrated in the excerpt below.

"HOTS is the ability of thinking in higher level. Students should analyze why something happens and how to solve the problems." (Excerpt 3)

From the excerpt we can derive that the respondents understood that in higher order thinking skills application, students must be given some tasks that make them analyze and solve some problems.

Teachers' problems in integrating higher order thinking skills

Even though the respondents of this study have decent understanding about higher order thinking skills, they have some problems in integrating it in their classes. Generally, the problems can be classified into two types, internal and external problem.

For internal problem faced by teachers is basically because of their lack of practices and exposure towards higher order thinking skills integration. They admitted that they usually use teaching practices they are used to use on their past. When the situation changes due to the covid-19 outbreak, they are forced to adjust the learning process through online platforms. Most of them are not familiar with the use of technology that cause them some problems in delivering the materials. It is even more complicated when they have to integrate higher order thinking skills.

For external problem, the sources come from students and facilities from the school itself. The teachers claimed that the students are not motivated in learning

English through online platform. Most of the students prefer to be inactive during learning activities. The unstable connection and limited time also support the students to be more passive. To solve this problem, teachers should introduce different materials and interesting techniques in their teaching.

Discussion

The internal problem in implementing HOTS faced by teachers happens because the teachers have not met all of the competencies they should have as teachers. A study from Umam & Indah (2020) proved that some teachers have low level of assessment literacy that affect their performance in their teaching practices. It also happens in higher education where students have not gained what they needed when the class is conducted online (Shabir & Umam, 2020). To get more exposure toward higher order thinking skills integration, teachers must conduct some trials and errors from them they will pick up some valuable practices. This can be done by applying different kind of methods/approaches in teaching English. One of the approaches that is applicable is task-based language teaching in which teachers can modify the tasks based on the classroom needs (Farhatunnisa & Umam, 2020). Task-based language learning is believed as one of approaches that is still applicable in today's era. Ganieva (2022) found that activities and tasks can either have a pedagogical goal particular to the classroom or ones that learners may need to complete in real life. It means that this task-based language teaching approach can be adapted to the needs that are suitable for the students. Teachers can first assess the students' level of English from which then they can arrange the tasks that are appropriate. This can be done if the teachers keep updating themselves by performing continuing professional development (CPD).

Teachers can perform continuing professional development (CPD) actions such as, joining English language seminars, reading articles, and getting help from more able partners. By joining language seminars, teachers will have some new insights on how to make their classes better. The insights then can be implemented in their own classrooms by performing action research. By conducting classroom action research, the teachers have the opportunity to actively participate in CPD from program conception to evaluation, enhancing their knowledge, English language ability, and teaching techniques to meet the situation and the teachers' context. The goal of CPD itself is to improve the caliber of teaching strategies in order to raise student achievement. It also provides teachers with opportunity to put

the ideas and strategies they have learned in the curriculum into practice while also receiving feedback.

In term of external problem, teachers can use authentic materials that are close enough to the students' lives. The use of authentic materials has been proven as an effective technique in learning English (Jaelani & Umam, 2021). Teachers can take materials from *Instagram* or *Youtube* that are related to students' daily routines. This will increase students' motivation to some extent. In ELT, motivation is important and necessary since it increases the level of confidence and interaction when learning the English language. It cultivates respect in students and points them in the proper route. This eventually will lead to the classroom interaction that is safe and sound for the students to interact and participate. As a result, the students will not feel threaten by the situation.

For the past two years, government has released a new curriculum to make the education system in Indonesia better. It is called *IKM (Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka)*. In this curriculum, the first step must be taken by schools is strengthening the competencies of the teachers through some activities, such as seminars, training, assistance, and community practices. In the new curriculum, there is one approach of learning that is proposed, differentiated instruction. Teachers should purposefully differentiate instruction activities rather than utilize a one-size-fits-all approach to ensure that students receive instruction that is matched to their needs (Ginja & Chen, 2020). To be able to do this, teachers must recognize the characteristics of the students from which differentiation can be started (Katharina & Schwab, 2020; Marieke, 2019) and teachers can give suitable and beneficial feedback to the students (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). This study is an eye opening for ELT practitioners, especially for those who deal with learners in school level in Indonesia. The findings can be used as a reference for schools in Indonesia to promote CPD for their teachers.

Conclusion and Suggestion

This study is limited only on the teachers' problems and it has been found that English teachers have sufficient knowledge about higher order thinking skills integration. Unfortunately, the knowledge has not been well implemented in their teaching. This is because they are not accustomed to integrating higher order thinking skills in their classes. To promote higher order thinking skills integration in

teaching, teachers must conduct continuing professional development (CPD) that can be done through many ways. This CPD will work well if it is supported by schools where the teachers teach and the government. For further study, it is suggested to study about the efforts of teachers in continuing their professional development. It is also suggested to study the government's rules and policy in facilitating teachers for their continuing professional development. Chances and opportunity between public and private school teachers can also be studied to see the effectiveness of the government's program.

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