



English Teacher Agency in Implementing of HOTS-Based Learning: A Case Study at a State Islamic High School in Mataram

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v11i2.5530>

Abstract

Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) are crucial for students when dealing with intense global competition. In the Indonesian education context, the recent high school national curriculum requires that students develop HOTS an important component of Pancasila student character. The curriculum implies the importance of the agentive role of teachers in implementing HOTS-based learning. However, studies on teacher agency in HOTS-based English language learning, especially in the Indonesian context, have remained under-examined. This study aims to explore teacher agency in responding to a policy mandate to implement HOTS-based learning in local English language classrooms in Indonesia. This study uses a sociocultural theoretical lens to examine teacher agency in responding to HOTS-related policy. Using a case study approach this study was conducted at a state Islamic high school in Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara. Two English teachers were purposively selected to be the participants of this study. This qualitative study employed observations and interviews as the techniques of data collection. The result found that the teachers exercise their agency by partially implementing HOTS-based learning as influenced by their knowledge of HOTS, experiences and pedagogical skills, and sociocultural condition of the students and The implication of this study is that support from policymakers, school leaders, and colleague teachers is needed for teachers to play their role actively in the HOTS policy reform.

Keywords: *Teacher Agency; HOTS-based Learning; Ecological Model of Teacher Agency*

Introduction

As stated as the 21st skills, High Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) are crucial for students to be acquired in order to survive in intense global competitions. In response to this global need, Indonesian government has carried out an education reform by integrating HOTS into the national curriculum (K13).

The significance of implementing HOTS was re-emphasized with the enactment of the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 20 of 2018 concerning the Pancasila Student Profile (PPP) as a character strengthening program. PPP as an endeavour to realize ideal educational outcomes and the formation of national character consists of six dimensions: 1. Critical; 2. Independence; 3. Creative; 4.

Cooperation; 5. Global diversity; and 6. Glorious. From these dimensions, it is obvious that PPP is dominated by the four HOTS competencies: critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration. In this case, the teacher has an important role to implementing HOTS-oriented learning to invite students to think creatively and critically. As HOTS are integrated into the curriculum, they should be reflected in the learning content, process, and assessment. This implies the critical need for teacher agency in the implementation of HOTS-related policy. This is because with a strong of agency, teachers have the professional capacity to act and make decisions to facilitate students' learning and situate education policy in their working environment (Molla & Nolan, 2020).

However, most teachers found it difficult to develop or appropriate macro education policy to the local school context (Leite et al, 2018). In relation to HOTS, some studies in Indonesia have shown teachers difficulties in implementing HOTS-related education policy due to their lack of conceptual understanding of HOTS (Kurniawan, 2020) and low ability in designing HOTS-based assessments (Ginting & Kuswandono, 2020). Despite the lack of the knowledge and pedagogical ability, teachers could still help students as agency is determined not only by individual factor but also by environmental and behavioral contextual factors (Jenkins, 2020). Yusra et al (2022) have shown how teachers created learning opportunities using whatever available resources around them despite their lack of professional competency. From this, teacher agency is seen as dynamic, which shapes and is reshaped by individual and contextual factors (Ali & Hamid, 2018); (Lestari et. al, 2022).

A sociocultural approach is used to examining agency of individual and social factors mediating teachers to influence education reform (Jenkins, 2020). A sociocultural theoretical lens is useful to investigate how teachers exercise their agency in making adaptation of macro-level policy in accordance with local school context. Little is understood about how individual and contextual factors influencing teachers, particularly in Indonesian context, in accommodating HOTS-related policy. The goal of this paper is to use a sociocultural to analyse the interplay between teachers' professional competency and sociocultural conditions of the students and the school in influencing teachers in integrating HOTS- based learning in EFL classrooms in a local Islamic school in Indonesia.

Methods

The research question of this study is how teacher's respond to the educational policy mandate on the implementation of HOTS-based learning in the classroom environment. Accordingly, a qualitative method is used in this study. This study investigated two English teachers (T1 and T2). The participant was selected by using purposive sampling. It is the technique to select the participant considering certain characteristic and goals. Since this study use a qualitative approach, the data were collected through observations, document study, and interviews. Observation is conducted in the classroom and focused on the teaching and learning activities that integrating HOTS-based learning. learning material, the instructional media, and the lesson plan are reviewed in this study to analyze the use of HOTS-based materials and activities in the process of teaching and learning. Further, semi-structured interviews was used to find out the teachers' readiness in implementing HOTS-based teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Result and discussion

1.1 Teachers' Conceptual Knowledge of HOTS

An education policy on the integration of HOTS into school curricula in Indonesia has been formally mandated by the national government through the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 20 of 2018. Under the Ministerial regulation, teaching and learning process should be aimed at

achieving HOT competencies as part of Pancasila Student Profile (PPP). As a macro-level policy, this ministerial regulation expects teachers to have a good understanding of HOT concepts so that they can implement them in various domains including in the learning content, learning process and learning assessment. Based on the results of interviews with the participant teachers, it was found that teachers had good knowledge of HOTS.

When asked a question to know the HOT concept, both teachers could explain it quite well.

Teacher 1

“...HOTS is not a new concept for me. I was introduced to the concepts when I did my Master’s degree in education 5 years ago. And I relearned the concept through quite many teacher workshops and seminars conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affair (MORA) at the local level. The concept is popularly known as the ability to think critically and creatively. These skills are necessarily needed especially in a classroom where problem-based and project based methods are used. In English language classrooms, HOTS can be encouraged for students to achieve by requiring them to apply few thinking skills to solve the problem. Using of concept checking questions to present new learning material would then be advisable than directly explaining it to them”.

Teacher 2

“... HOTS is a high level of thinking skill that requires students to solve a problem either individually or in groups by employing varied sources and method. HOTS is also easily recognized as 4Cs, that is Critical thinking, creative thinking, communication and collaboration. To enhance students HOTS we need to prepare well with HOTS questions before enter the class while relating questions to students’ real life. The learning materials, activities and assessments also have to reflect the 4Cs indicated by some keywords like analyzing, comparing, synthesizing, and evaluating showing high cognitive level of knowledge.

From the data it was clear that teachers gained conceptual knowledge of HOTS and were cognitively prepared to provide learning materials, activities, as well as assessment based on HOTS for the students. This study therefore shows different results from the studies by Kurniawan (2020) and by Ginting & Kuswando (2020). The data also showed that the teachers gained teaching professional development through their master’s study and many training programs, thus teacher agency is potentially exercised (Lestari, Yusra, Hanafi & Nawawi, 2022). Having sound conceptual and pedagogical knowledge of HOTS would not necessarily guarantee successful implementation of HOTS-based learning due to influencing sociocultural factors.

1.2 Teachers Agency and Implementation of HOTS-based Learning

During the interviews, the teachers confidently showed that they have a good understanding of HOTS-based learning. However, they acknowledge that found difficulties in teaching their students using HOTS-based learning due to several factors such as students’ varied cognitive and English proficiency levels as well as their favoring more on teacher-centeredness, which is part of Asian culture.

Both teachers felt that the low cognitive level of the students is the main problem that they faced when integrating HOTS- based activities. Teacher 1 stated:

“...Although the school has been categorized as one of the most favorite schools, the students’ cognitive and English proficiency levels are varied, let alone the students’ different learning styles. Some students are really good and willing to ask and be given critical questions, while some other students are very poor, very shy, and do not enjoy discussions, asking and giving opinions to problem set. But some students are really poor.

Similarly, Teacher 2 stated that:

“.....how can I teach them HOTS when they can't even remember the basic concept.

With around 30 students in each class and with only two meeting hours in a week, I can only teach them the basic concepts.....not enough time for me to teach them using HOTS-based learning.

So I have to guide them one by one and I couldn't complete the activity by end of the period”. Respondent B stated that There are 42 students in year 1 and I used most of the time to teach the basic skills only. I also have to pay attention to weak students to ensure that they are able to understand the basic numeracy skills. So, I don't have enough time to emphasis HOTS among the students. Rather than using problem based or project based teaching method, my classroom is more teacher-centered. But the most students oftentimes are happy with this.

The data from the classroom observations confirmed the information given by the teachers in the interviews. Both teachers used very high TTT (Teacher Talking Time) with a lot of explanations when presenting a new topic, language features, generic structures and the social function of a text. Conceptual checking questions were almost absent during the teaching and learning process. Questions and answers activities were only conducted based on the questions and answers activities found in the textbook used in the classroom for the whole semester. Seen from this, it appears that HOTS-based learning was not implemented by the teachers, meaning that the teachers resisted to the macro-level policy (Ali & Hamid, 2018). Although the teacher resisted to implement HOTS as they used more teacher-centered method than problem and project-based teaching method, they showed their dedication to students learning, and this is when agency is exercised. The teachers' use of teacher-centeredness was not due to their lack pedagogical knowledge and skills to apply HOT-based leaning, but because of their adherence to students' condition and local culture. To sum up, teacher agency is exercised by teachers as a response to educational policy which can be in the forms of dedication, adjustment or opposition to the policy depending on individual and sociocultural factors.

Conclusions

This study mainly explores how teachers in EFL classrooms of an Indonesian local school respond to HOTS-related national education policy. Using sociocultural approach to examining teacher agency, the study shows the teachers' conceptual and pedagogical knowledge, experience, and students' conditions and culture were interrelated factors contributing to the achievement of teacher agency. The result of the study also revealed that the teachers exercised their agency by resisting the HOTS-based policy, but dedicating to the students' condition, needs and culture. As this study was conducted in only one school, which is limited and small context, due conducted in a wider context to provide richer data.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Yuni Budi Lestary, M.A., Ph. D for the remarkable support as my co-author from the beginning to the final revision of this paper.

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