HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS ANALYSIS OF READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS IN A FORM ONE ARABIC KSSM TEXTBOOK

BY

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to explore the cognitive level that is emphasised in the questions embedded in the reading comprehension questions in the Form One Arabic textbook in the Standard Curriculum for Secondary School (KSSM) and to ascertain the prevalence of higher order thinking skills (HOTS) based on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy which has been widely used in classifying learning objectives, standards, and questions for assessments. To achieve the objectives mentioned, the study employs the quantitative research design using the content analysis method. The subject of this study is the Form One Arabic KSSM textbook which used in Malaysia National secondary schools. This book contains eight chapters with the focus to master the four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Two analysis sheets were used as the instrument for data collection. The analysis sheets were developed based on the levels of cognitive domains in the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (2001). The instrument was applied in 97 reading comprehension questions embedded in the Form One Arabic KSSM textbook. Data from the reading comprehension questions were analysed manually. Frequency and percentages were used to show the occurrences of HOTS questions in the reading comprehension questions. Results from the textbook analysis revealed that HOTS were not covered adequately as 57% of the reading comprehension questions were in LOTS (remembering and understanding), and 43% were in HOTS. On the prevalence of HOTS, three sub-skills were found in applying level which are classifying, choosing, and demonstrating while in analysing, comparing was the only sub-skill revealed. The study also found the neglecting of two levels of Revised Bloom's Taxonomy in reading comprehension questions which are evaluating and creating. In the light of these results, the researcher recommended that the teachers must be encouraged to cultivate HOTS in the reading lessons. The curriculum developers, as well as textbook writers, should work closely to review the national textbook and not put off the development of strategies to overcome this issue. This study also proposed more quantitative content analysis studies should be conducted on the other Arabic Language textbooks.

ملخص البحث

هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى تحليل المستويات المعرفية للأسئلة الموجودة في مهارة القراءة من الكتاب المدرسي لمادة اللغة العربية للسنة الأولى في المنهج القياسي للمدرسة الثانوية. بالإضافة، هذه الدراسة تكشف عن إيجاد مهارات التفكير العليا وفقا لتصنيف بلوم المعدل عام (2001) كما أنه قد تستخدم على نطاق واسع في تصنيف أهداف التعلم ومعاييره وأسئلته في التقويم. لتحقيق الهدفين المذكورين ، تمت الدراسة بأسلوب تحليل المحتوى لجمع البيانات ويستخدم الباحث ورقة التحليل التي نشأت طبقا لمستويات تصنيف بلوم الستة المعدلة. موضوع هذه الدراسة هو الكتاب المدرسي لمادة اللغة العربية للسنة الأولى الذي يستخدمه الطلاب في المدرسة الثانوية الوطنية. يشتمل هذا الكتاب على ثماني الوحدات الدراسية مع تركيز إلى رفع المهارات اللغوية الأربع. تمت هذه عملية في تحليل سبعة وتسعون أسئلة في الكتاب المدرسي. تم تحليل البيانات من الأسئلة في مهارة القراءة يدويا مع استخدام التردد والنسب المئوية لتأكيد إظهار المستويات التفكير العليا في الأسئلة. كشفت نتائج تحليل الكتاب المدرسي أن مهارات التفكير العليا لم تتم تغطيتها بشكل كاف مع أن 57% من الأسئلة من مستويات التفكير الأدنى (التذكر والفهم) أما 43% من مستويات مهارات التفكير العليا. النظر إلى انتشار التفكير العليا في الأسئلة، ظهرت ثلاث مهارات فرعية في مستوى التطبيق أما في مستوى التحليل هناك مهارة التمييز فقط. كشفت هذه الدراسة إهمال مستويين ألا وهما مستوى التقويم والإبتكار. في ضوء هذه النتائج، اقترح الباحث على تشجيع معلمي اللغة العربية في تطبيق مهارة التفكير العليا أثناء التدريس. واقترحت أيضا التعاون الوثيق بين مصممي المناهج والكتاب إلى مراجعة المواد التدريسية وتخطيط استراتيجيات لتغلب هذه القضية. وأخيرا، هناك حاجة إلى دراسات بحثية لتحليل أسئلة التقييم في الكتاب المدرسي لهذه المادة للمراحل الدراسية الأخرى.

APPROVAL PAGE

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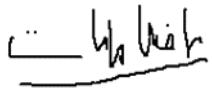

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, teacher, families, friends without whom it was almost impossible to complete my dissertation work. Thanks for the great support and care.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education is a critical factor for the development of a nation (Al-Hidabi, 2020). The role of education has been greatly emphasized in Islam. Tareque (2012), for instance, mentioned that education in Islam is a comprehensive matter, which brings about harmonious development of mind, body, and soul because the focus of education in Islam is both on morals as well as on knowledge and wisdom. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in one of the Hadiths emphasized the value of knowledge. It is as narrated by Abu Hurairah:

> *When a man dies, his acts come to an end, but three, recurring charity, or knowledge (by which people) benefit, or a pious son who prays for him (the deceased).* (Sahih Muslim)

The international community emphasises education as a human right and recognises it as a necessity for comprehensive, sustainable development and as an instrumental for economic and social development (Abuarqub, 2009). Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever”. While, South Africa’s first black president, anti-Apartheid and Nobel Laureate, Nelson Mandela stated that education is the most powerful weapon which we can use to change the world (Whiting, 2019).

As we are moving into the 21st century, education has transformed from a traditional educational system to a more modern and dynamic system that is in line with the social, cultural, economic, educational, and technological needs of the present time. The focus of education is to highlight globalization and internationalization by designing new curricula that promote a collaborative learner-centred environment to

which students will relate and respond. According to Hashim (2014), education in the 21st century emphasizes deep understanding rather than shallow understanding that will enhance problem-solving, critical thinking, and other 21st century skills. He further stated that this new transformation of education develops teacher's ability to use various strategies to teach diverse students and identify their particular learning styles, intelligence, strength, and weaknesses.

As the fundamental objective of the new education system is to ensure that students are being equipped with the knowledge, skills and values, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has introduced a new education system beginning in 2013. This revised set of curriculums aimed to produce future Malaysians who are competitive, highly intelligent, and independent to compete with other countries worldwide and to face future challenges (MEB, 2013).

In line with this new educational transformation, learning must be designed in a way to challenge students' thinking, emotion, and decision (Al-Hidabi, 2020). According to Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the revised curriculum, namely Standard-Based Curriculum for Secondary School (*Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah* - KSSM) and Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary School (*Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* - KSSR), are designed to improve the current education system by strengthening some existing elements and bringing new features to be embedded. More attention from educators on developing the 21st Century skills such as creative and critical thinking, problem-solving, citizenship, character development, communication and collaboration, will improve higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in acquiring research skills such as collecting data, analysing, criticizing, and making inferences (Al-Hidabi, 2020).

Pertaining to the above matters, Arabic language education in Malaysia has integrated HOTS as a part of its assessment and evaluation system which aims to enhance students' cognitive skills and abilities in learning. It is important to mention that this scenario is in line with the need for curriculum improvement to meet the demands of education in the 21st century. According to Zakaria and Hussin (2020), the achievement and interest of secondary school students in Arabic subjects are increased when teachers applied the skills of 21st century education. The capability to employ HOTS among students will fulfil the growing demand for highly intelligent and professional workers in the future. As a result, students will have the opportunity to highlight themselves and their talents on par with the international level (Alhassora, Abu & Abdullah, 2017).

Correspond with the above development, the curriculum for the Form One Arabic KSSM textbook is also constantly updated and reviewed for improvement to make the content better. As mentioned in the textbook, the main objective of learning Arabic is to equip students with four basic language skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

According to Richards (2001), a textbook is a key component of most language programs that provides the basis for the content of the lessons, the balance of skills taught, and the kinds of language practice that students take part in. Good textbooks serve as guidelines in an official government syllabus into a rich source of contents, texts and activities that would be beyond the capacities of most teachers to develop on their own. In line with that, Cunningsworth (1995) stated that textbooks should correspond to learners' needs and match the aims and objectives of the language-learning program. Despite the impact of new technology, textbooks will doubtless

continue to play an important role in language teaching and provide a useful resource for both teachers and learners.

More specifically, Tajudin, Kamal and Zuryati (2019) mentioned that Arabic Language learning material at the High School level is important to improve students' Arabic language skills simultaneously. Linguistic competencies (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) can be learned systematically in stages to support the increased language skills. Based on this need, there is also a need for textbooks and media that support these capabilities. Therefore, Al-Shammari and Al-Samouk (2005) identified the school textbook as a holistic system that includes aims, activities, aids, and evaluation in addition to content.

In designing the context of learning the Arabic language, a selection of appropriate texts with student experiences must be taken into account. Difficulties of texts will cause students not interested to learn a language. On the other hand, easily understandable texts will help students to master the language (Abdullah & Mohamad, 2016). In reading skills, for instance, students rely on the ability to understand what they read (Taylor, 2018). Therefore, it is important to achieve the main purpose of reading and fulfil the aims of the curriculum to master HOTS in reading comprehension questions.

According to Marier (2000), 'good readers' with HOTS can ponder and self-monitoring their pre-reading while reading and after-reading thoughts, but 'poor readers' are not able to employ these thinking skill 9s and will be obstacles for their reading achievements. Applying HOTS in the learning process will encourage learners to evaluate, predict, and organise ideas that support value judgement, draw inferences, and arrive at a conclusion based on the evidence (Vaseghi, Gholami, & Basrjesteh, 2012). Ultimately, reading comprehension questions could guide students to comprehend text and assist the development of cognitive skills (Muayanah, 2014).

To sum up, it is important to create a reading habit that can read between the lines and spark their interests of inquiry that will help them in solving daily tasks (Shukor, 2018). To ensure that HOTS are realized in reading comprehension questions in the textbook, analysis is an appropriate way that can be employed. Therefore, the current study analyzed the realization of HOTS in reading comprehension questions in Arabic textbooks published by the Ministry of Education. The exploration of the realization of HOTS used the framework of cognitive level of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Bloom, 2001).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Malaysia context where the Arabic Language is learned as a foreign language, both teachers and learners are facing various challenges (Haron, Ahmad, Mamat & Rawash, 2016). Teachers and students rely heavily on textbooks as the main material in teaching and learning. Othman and Salleh (2005) mentioned that textbooks are one of the teaching tools used by teachers. The Ministry of Education Malaysia in their Professional Circular Volume 12/1999 stated that only textbooks certified by the Ministry of Education (MOE) must be used in all government schools. Due to this policy, any weaknesses and errors that happened in the textbook will affect students in the schools and will be the obstacles in achieving the national curriculum objectives (Hussin & Yusof, 2012).

Husaini, Mat Saad, Mohd Pesol and Mat Razali (2018) mentioned that the frequency level of teaching aids usage among Arabic language teachers is moderately low which majority choose a workbook as their favourite teaching aid. To improve the usefulness of Arabic language textbooks, the emphasis of the style from the common language is taught in the context of communication through activities that fit students'

lives and needs. A study by Omar and Zailani @Ahmad (2020) showed that teachers plan and choose suitable teaching and learning methods with their students' mastery levels. Hence, it is vital to determine whether the textbooks certified by the MOE incorporate higher-order cognitive skills as mentioned in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

Studies on cognitive activity in school textbooks are widely conducted worldwide. A study by Al-Hasanat (2016), for example, analysed assessment questions in an Arabic Textbook (Communication Skills) for eight grades in Jordan according to Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives. Additionally, Abderrahman (2014) analysed the tenth-grade English language textbooks questions in Jordan based on the revised edition of Bloom's Taxonomy. Furthermore, Assaly and Igbaria (2014) studied content analysis of the reading and listening activities in the EFL textbook of the Master class. Moreover, Fahmi (2020) analysed higher order thinking skills questions in the reading comprehension exercise of the "When English Rings a Bell" textbook. All these studies found that lower order thinking skills covered mostly of the questions appeared.

In Malaysia, studies on the cognitive domain in school textbooks become more important. Hussin and Yusof (2012), for instance, studied cognitive activity in the Arabic Curriculum and Arabic Textbook for Form One and the suitability between them in line with KBSM (Integrated Secondary School Curriculum). Almost similarly, Aji (2017) studied the cognitive levels of questions embedded in the Islamic Education textbooks for Malaysian Secondary Schools based on Bloom's Taxonomy. Furthermore, Shukor (2019) analysed higher-order thinking skills of reading tasks in a Malaysian Year Four of English textbook. Singh and Shaari (2019) also analysed higher-order thinking skills in English reading comprehension tests in Malaysia. Finally,

Cheng and Rosli (2020) studied the cognitive domain for exercises in National School and Chinese (Type) National School Mathematical Textbooks.

Therefore, looking at the importance of a study on cognitive activities in the textbooks, the researcher aimed to research analysing HOTS in a Form One Arabic KSSM textbook. This study is important to ascertain the integration of HOTS into the reading comprehension questions to inculcate HOTS effectively in students.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were:

1- To explore the cognitive level emphasised in the questions embedded in the reading comprehension questions in the Form One Arabic KSSM Textbook.

2- To ascertain the prevalence of higher-order thinking skills in the reading comprehension questions to establish whether they promote HOTS based on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the research objectives, this study drew the following research questions:

1- What are the cognitive levels emphasised in the questions embedded in the reading comprehension questions in the Form One Arabic KSSM Textbook?

2- What is the prevalence of higher-order thinking skills in the reading comprehension questions in the Form One Arabic KSSM Textbook based on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will contribute to the field of teaching and learning the Arabic language in Malaysia. It will help the implementers of the curricula to review the contents as it should reflect the objectives of Standard-Based Curriculum for Secondary School (KSSM). It will also determine whether the questions in the reading comprehension given in the textbooks are relevant to the objectives of embedding a balanced amount of knowledge and HOTS.

Additionally, the findings of this study will improve the awareness of concerned people, especially the implementers of the education towards the assessment questions embedded in the Form One Arabic KSSM Textbook and understand the importance of evaluating the textbook. In this regard, this study will help teachers to improve their teaching skills, materials, and practices to achieve higher levels in the teaching and learning process. As a result, it is essential to analyse the textbooks used to teach the Arabic language to know the level to which HOTS are integrated into alignment with the current curriculum goals.

1.6 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDIES

This study was confined to all reading comprehension questions in the Form One Arabic KSSM Textbook in Malaysian National Secondary Schools. In Additional, this study also used content analysis method which analyses the data manually.

1.7 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

1.7.1 Higher Order Thinking Skills

According to Lewis and Smith (1993, p.131-137):

> Higher-order thinking occurs when a person takes new information and information stored in memory and interrelates and/or rearrange and

> extends this information to achieve a purpose or find a possible answer in perplexing situations. These would include, deciding what to believe; deciding what to do; creating a new idea, a new object, or an artistic expression; making a prediction, and solving a non-routine problem.

In the Malaysian context, Hassan, Mohamad, Ajmain and Azudin (2020) described that HOTS is a set of learning skills that focuses more on the development of critical and creative thinking skills. Mastering these abilities will help an individual to create fresh and new ideas and think outside the box.

In this study, higher-order thinking refers to the level of cognition higher than remembering and understanding. It includes the ability to apply, analyse, evaluate, and create knowledge as defined in Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

1.7.2 Analysis

The analysis is the process of separating something into its constituent elements. In this study, analysis is the process of classifying the reading comprehension questions in the Form One Arabic KSSM Textbook according to the cognitive levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy.

1.7.3 Textbook

Al-Shammari and Al-Samouk (2005) identified a school textbook as a holistic system that includes aims, activities, aids, and evaluation in addition to contents. These components are designated to help teachers teach students certain subjects in a certain class and to achieve the aims introduced in a specific curriculum.

In this study, the textbook refers to the Form One Arabic KSSM Textbook that was being used in all national government secondary schools. This textbook focuses to

equip students with four basic language skills which are listening, speaking, readings, and writing. As mentioned in the Form One Arabic KSSM Textbook, the purpose of learning Arabic is focused on enriching students' vocabulary so that they can communicate in the Arabic language in their daily life conversations.

1.7.4 Reading

Kamhi (2009) stated that reading is a cognitive process that involves not only the process of decoding and making meaning, but also includes comprehension processes such as identifying themes, main topic, and characteristics.

1.7.5 Reading Comprehension

Kirby and Briggs (2007) defined reading comprehension as a process of understanding the text that is read. Parry and Taylor (2018) stated that reading comprehension is the ability to derive meaning from the text. Examples of reading comprehension include information search, fill in the blanks, state true or false, sequences, and information transfer.

1.7.6 Reading Comprehension Questions

According to Shabatat (2003), a question mark sentence requires a response and can be expressed by a clear and direct language that is easy for students to understand and suitable with their ages' interests and abilities. The question is a necessary requirement for the process of learning and teaching where it is an important part of the educational content to be carried out and processed through the teaching of educational materials. In this research, the reading comprehension questions are evaluated using an analysis