

## Arabic Language Curriculum Design Based on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Islamic Educational Institutions

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze and conceptualize an integrative Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-based Arabic language curriculum design in Islamic educational institutions. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative framework that combines instructional design models, HOTS pedagogy, and Islamic epistemological perspectives. This research employs a qualitative literature review method by analyzing curriculum policy documents and relevant scientific literature. The data were selected based on relevance, recency, and contribution to HOTS-based curriculum development. The findings reveal a significant gap between curriculum policy and classroom implementation, particularly in teaching materials and assessment practices that remain dominated by LOTS. This study proposes an integrative curriculum model connecting objectives, materials, strategies, and assessment. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of HOTS-based curriculum design within Islamic education. Practically, it offers a framework for educators and policymakers. However, this study is limited to literature-based analysis and does not include empirical field validation.

**keyword:** Arabic language, curriculum, HOTS

### INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is not to develop a curriculum model empirically, but to synthesize and conceptualize an integrative HOTS-based Arabic curriculum framework through literature review. (Sari and Kholifah 2025).



The demands for classroom learning and graduates capable of critical, creative, communicative, and collaborative thinking are increasingly pressing. Several educational studies indicate that the education system in Arabic-speaking countries still faces challenges in producing competent and competitive human resources (Al Munawar, Ali, and Nurbayan 2025), one of which is influenced by learning that does not fully encourage good thinking skills in producing a work. However, this makes the reconstruction of the curriculum oriented towards Higher Order Thinking Skills a necessity, not just an option in learning.

Scientific studies conducted by Arabic language teachers reveal that the integration of technology and digital pedagogical frameworks in the Arabic language curriculum can improve competency in independent learning (Fatem 2025), but this is still hampered by the inadequate readiness of teacher resources and infrastructure (Fatimah, Jumriyah, and Mubasyiroh 2025). Meanwhile, several studies in Indonesia confirm that education is faced with a strong current of globalization, where graduates often become unskilled workers due to a lack of good thinking skills (Pramesti, Meisya, and Amrillah 2024), so that a change in the learning mindset from low-level thinking to high-level thinking in Arabic is urgently needed. Thus, efforts to integrate HOTS (*Higher Order Thinking Skills*) into the design of the Arabic language learning curriculum in Islamic educational institutions are crucial to the needs of the times to ensure the relevance and competitiveness of graduates of Islamic boarding schools, madrasah, and religious universiti.

Previous studies have explored the application of HOTS (*Higher Order Thinking Skills*) and technology integration in Arabic language learning (Aziz et al. 2024), but the focus on integrative and contextual curriculum design for Islamic educational institutions is still limited, and more in-depth research is still needed for Arabic language learning needs.

The existing literature tends to be fragmented. Most studies focus on HOTS strategies in the classroom, the development of HOTS assessment tools in textbooks, or technology integration in general (Maslihah, Aziroh, and Bashith 2025). However, a comprehensive approach, which systematically integrates HOTS principles into curriculum design, from planning, implementation, to evaluation in the specific context of Islamic education, remains largely unexplored. Existing integration is often partial and suboptimal.

A comprehensive study of technology integration in the Arabic language curriculum, while identifying challenges such as the gap between curriculum policy and implementation in the field, as well as the need for a clearer pedagogical framework (Triantoro et al. 2025). On the other hand, efforts to integrate Arabic with other disciplines are still limited and their implementation is not optimal (Roziqin and Khasanah 2025), thus requiring the development of an integrative and cross-disciplinary curriculum design. So far, the implementation of HOTS (*Higher Order Thinking Skills*) has been in the form of practice questions, and not many have made students the direct subjects (Beddu 2019) or explored a comprehensive instructional design model. Although the basics of thinking about Higher Order Thinking Skills and technology have been laid, there is a literature gap on how to design a coherent, integrative, and contextual Higher Order Thinking Skills-based Arabic curriculum in Islamic educational institutions.

The novelty of this study is its integrative approach, which aims to understand the pedagogical dimensions of Higher Order Thinking Skills, modern instructional frameworks, and the socio-cultural context of Islamic educational institutions within a comprehensive curriculum design. The novelty of this research lies not only in the object of study, namely the reconstruction of the Arabic language curriculum, but also in its focus on a synthesis and reconstruction approach. This research will combine insights from contemporary instructional design models with HOTS-based active learning strategies, while also considering the dimensions of

language and cultural policies inherent in Islamic environments. This approach is expected to address the fragmentation that occurs in Arabic language learning.

Studies on instructional design in Arabic language learning emphasize the importance of models such as ADDIE, Morrison, Ross, and Kemp, as well as ASSURE, in creating effective and learner-centered learning environments, which can be adopted and adapted to develop HOTS-based curricula. Furthermore, strategies such as problem-based learning, discovery learning, and the use of infographics or multimedia have been shown to improve comprehension and motivation. Research conducted by Sari and Mestika shows that activities such as scriptwriting for theater performances and documentary production can be effective in enhancing HOTS (Sari 2023), as they encourage creativity and critical engagement. This framework will be combined with findings regarding the importance of considering linguistic and socio-cultural contexts for the effective adoption of new technologies and pedagogies. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its effort to present a curriculum design that not only includes HOTS components but also serves as a foundation for designing robust instruction that is sensitive to the context in which the curriculum is implemented.

The objective of this study is to develop a relevant and applicable Higher Order Thinking Skills (*HOTS*)-based Arabic language curriculum design model for Islamic educational institutions. To achieve this goal, this research requires more specific questions to identify needs and solve problems, as well as validate the model. Therefore, the research problem is how to design an integrative and contextual HOTS-based Arabic language curriculum for Islamic educational institutions.

The argument, based on the assumptions of this study, is that a structured approach that incorporates HOTS principles into all curriculum components—objectives, materials, learning strategies, and evaluation—will create an effective and efficient learning environment. Integration with other subject areas and the use

of technology can also increase student relevance and engagement. This argument is evident in the finding that an emphasis on academic success and active learning have a positive relationship with student achievement (AlSalouli et al. 2024). Furthermore, strategies that emphasize skill development, rather than content difficulty, have been shown to significantly improve understanding at various learning levels. The application of the discovery learning model in HOTS-based Arabic language learning design has also demonstrated its potential in creating active and enjoyable learning conditions (Widodo et al. 2021).

Based on the background above, the implementation of the curriculum design that is the subject of study in this research will not only improve students' Arabic language skills, but will also equip them with high-level thinking skills that are essential for facing the complexities of the global world.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative literature review approach.

### **1. Data Sources**

The data were obtained from scientific articles indexed in Google Scholar, Scopus, and national accredited journals, as well as relevant books and policy documents such as KMA 183 of 2019.

### **2. Selection Criteria**

The selection of literature was based on:

Relevance to HOTS and Arabic language curriculum

Publication within the last 5–7 years

Empirical or conceptual contribution to curriculum design

### **3. Analysis Technique**

The analysis followed three stages:

Data reduction (selection and categorization of relevant literature)

Data display (thematic organization of findings)

Conclusion drawing (synthesis into curriculum design model).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

These findings are consistent with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active knowledge construction through analysis and reflection. Previous studies (Maslihah et al., 2025; Aziz et al., 2024) also confirm that HOTS integration remains limited due to teachers' lack of pedagogical competence and reliance on traditional assessment methods. HOTS Integration in the National Curriculum Document (KMA 183 of 2019)

The research results in this study are in the form of curriculum design for component analysis of basic Arabic language competencies in KMA 183 of 2019, that the national curriculum framework has begun to accommodate thinking skills well, although it is not yet comprehensive and even across all levels and aspects of skills (*maharah*).

The receptive orientation of the *Maharah al-Istima'* and *Maharah al-Qira'ah* in basic Arabic language competencies demonstrates significant progress. At the Madrasah Aliyah level, the basic competency of the verb "*analyzing*" information from various audio sources on a specific topic and "*evaluating*" the moral message of a dialogue or interview was found (Muradi et al. 2020). This indicates a shift from literal comprehension (*listening/reading for detail*) to critical and analytical comprehension.

*Maharah al-Kalam* and *Maharah al-Kitabah* on productive skills, HOTS integration is more inclined in the form of creative tasks. such as, basic competencies that ask students to design a presentation on a problem, compose a short drama, or write a simple article with a contemporary theme. However, research conducted by Fitri on "*analysis of teacher strategies in developing Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in thematic learning for class V MI Al Ihsan Jeru, Malang Regency*" found that the aspects of creative thinking and decision making as part of HOTS are still less explored in the competency formulation (Fitri 2023). Most of the basic competencies of *Maharah al-Kitabah* are still focused on the *tatbiq*

level, such as writing personal letters with the correct qawaid structure. And a significant finding in this study is the imbalance between the application of HOTS-based basic competencies (*KD*) which tend to focus on concentration at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (*MTs*) and Madrasah Aliyah (*MA*) levels, while at the MI level it is still dominated by low-level thinking skills (*LOTS*) such as memorizing vocabulary and mentioning. This condition has the potential to create a competency gap because the foundation of critical thinking has not been built from an early age.

Teaching materials and assessment instruments: An analysis of textbooks and assessment instruments used in Islamic educational institutions reveals a gap between curriculum expectations and practice. Monotonous, *LOTS*-oriented teaching materials: A critical study of sixth-grade Arabic textbooks in Islamic elementary schools (*MI*) found that the material and exercises for listening skills (*istima'*) were still very monotonous, focusing on vocabulary introduction and explicit information, without encouraging analysis, inference, or evaluation (Sayuti 2023). Exercises were dominated by multiple-choice and short answer questions that only tested memory and basic understanding.

*HOTS*-based questions and assignments at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (*MTs*) level are scarce in textbooks and exams, sometimes only one or two out of dozens of questions (Aziz et al. 2024). When *HOTS* questions do exist, they are often not supported by context-rich stimuli (*such as authentic text, images, or audio*) that would enable analysis and evaluation.

On the other hand, innovation in assessment using audio-visual media has great potential as a *HOTS* assessment tool for listening skills. Unlike conventional audio recordings, videos present multimodal stimuli (visual, verbal, and nonverbal) that enable students to analyze the context of a situation, assess the speaker's expressions and gestures, and evaluate the implicit messages of a presentation (Uluum et al. 2025). This assessment model can authentically measure students' analytical and evaluation skills.

## **Teaching Materials and Assessment Instruments**

Studies on teaching materials and assessment instruments used in Islamic educational institutions have so far been monotonous and LOTS-oriented. A critical study written by *Nihayatul Husna on Critical study of Arabic language books for grade VI MI found that the materials and exercises for listening skills (istima')* were still very monotonous, focusing on vocabulary introduction and explicit information, without encouraging analysis, inference, or evaluation (Husna and Bakar 2025) and the exercise questions were dominated by multiple-choice and short answer forms that only tested basic memory and understanding.

## **Implementation Challenges from the Perspective of Teachers and Institutions**

The implementation of a HOTS-based curriculum faces several structural and cultural challenges in Islamic educational institutions. Many teachers, despite their lack of competence and perception, have misconceptions about HOTS, regarding it as synonymous with difficult or complex problems, rather than as a thought process. Teachers' ability to design learning activities and assessment instruments that foster HOTS remains limited. Teachers are often constrained by long-standing habits focused on achieving dense curriculum targets.

Teachers in Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasas, are often burdened with administrative tasks and the availability of learning resources, leaving limited time to develop innovative HOTS-based learning tools. Furthermore, access to learning resources and media that support HOTS, such as authentic Arabic videos or interactive digital platforms, remains limited.

**Passive learning culture:** The learning culture in some Islamic educational institutions, which still employs a lecture-based model and passive transfer of knowledge, presents a psychological barrier. Students need to be trained and given the space to ask questions, challenge questions, and argue—a process that takes time and practice.

## **Recontextualizing HOTS Theory in the Epistemology of Arabic Language Education.**

The integration of HOTS in the Arabic language curriculum in Islamic educational institutions is not merely adopting global educational trends, but rather an effort to reactualize the richness of Islamic epistemology itself (Nasir and Sunardi 2025). Classical Islamic scientific traditions, such as in the science of ushul fiqh, tafsir muqaran, and hadith criticism (*al-jarh wa al-ta'dil*), are actually full of high-level thinking processes analyzing evidence (*tahlil al-adillah*), evaluating the quality of narrators (*naqd al-rijal*), and producing new legal conclusions (*ijtihad*). Therefore, HOTS-based curriculum design must utilize this "*Islamic context*" as a source of authentic and meaningful stimulus.

For example, learning about the recitation of Islamic teachings (*maharah qira'ah*) doesn't just use texts about "*daily activities*," but can also use quotations from scholarly disagreements (*khilafiyah*) from simple yellow books. Students are trained to analyze each side's arguments, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their linguistic logic, and finally, create a conclusion or personal position supported by reasoning. This approach achieves the dual goals of language mastery and strengthening Islamic reasoning.

## **Integrative Curriculum Design From Basic Competencies to Authentic Assessment**

Based on the research findings, a discussion of an integrative curriculum design model is needed to bridge the gap between policy and practice. This model must be circular and interconnected between its components. First, the Revision and Expansion of the Basic Competency Formulation (KD) requires efforts to strengthen and equalize HOTS operational verbs at all levels, including elementary madrasahs. For elementary madrasahs, HOTS can be introduced in simple forms, such as "*grouping*" vocabulary by category (*simple analysis*) or "*assessing*" the actions of characters in a story (*simple evaluation*). Second, the development of

problem-based and project-based learning materials (*Problem/Project-Based Learning*) textbooks and learning materials should be designed by presenting contextual problems or mini-projects that require solutions. For example, a project to create a short Arabic video about "*The Problem of Garbage in Schools*" requires students to collaborate, write a script, record, and present a solution. Third, innovation in learning strategies and media for teachers should be encouraged to use strategies such as debate, role-play, and simulation that naturally train analysis and evaluation.

The use of audio-visual media, such as short films, vlogs, or infographics in Arabic, as revealed in research, has proven effective as a rich stimulus that encourages critical thinking compared to written text alone. Fourth, the transformation of the assessment system must shift from summative and mechanistic to formative and authentic. Assessment instruments need to be designed to measure the thinking process, not just the final answer. Assessment techniques such as portfolios, performance assessments, and self-assessments are very suitable for capturing the development of HOTS skills (Adawiyah 2024). A clear assessment rubric with criteria focused on the quality of analysis, depth of evaluation, and originality of creation must be included.

### **Implications for Teacher Professional Development and Institutional Policy.**

The success of this curriculum design depends heavily on supporting factors. First, teacher professional development programs must be intensive and sustainable, focusing on lesson plan development workshops and HOTS assessment instruments, not just theoretical seminars. Second, Islamic educational institutions need to allocate resources to procure or develop HOTS-based question banks and assignments, and facilitate teacher access to digital learning resources. Third, there needs to be a shift in the institutional evaluation paradigm from simply pursuing high scores to fostering high-skill thinking skills. Fourth, collaboration between Islamic educational institutions and with professional organizations such as IMLA

(*Indonesian Arabic Language Teachers Association*) needs to be strengthened to share good practices and resources.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the above research, the HOTS-based Arabic curriculum design in Islamic Educational Institutions is in a critical transition phase. The most important findings indicate a significant gap between the national curriculum policy framework (KMA 183 of 2019), which has accommodated HOTS operational verbs, and the reality of implementation in the field. Curriculum documents are starting to move, but the majority of teaching materials, teaching methods, and assessment systems are still trapped in the Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) paradigm that is oriented towards memorization and basic understanding. The main lesson to be learned is that HOTS integration is not merely a technical-pedagogical change, but rather an epistemological reactualization. Arabic language learning must shift from a purely structural approach to a communicative-critical approach, where language is used as a tool for analysis, evaluation, and creation—as reflected in classical Islamic scientific traditions such as *ijtihad* and *naqd al-rijal*. The success of this transformation depends on the ability of stakeholders to bridge these gaps through integrative curriculum design, which holistically connects policies, teaching materials, learning strategies, and authentic assessments.

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