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STUDENTS' HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS (HOTS) IN READING EXPOSITORY TEXT FOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the high-order thinking skills (HOTS) of second-grade students at senior high school in Kefamenanu in understanding expository texts. This study investigated students' abilities in evaluating, analyzing, making connections, drawing conclusions, and synthesizing information using HOTS-oriented assessments. This study used a quantitative method with a total of 25 students as samples. The results showed various levels of student competence: high, medium, and low. Evaluation and drawing conclusions were identified as the easiest skills, with synthesis as the most challenging. Students with high ability demonstrated critical thinking and creativity in applying HOTS, achieving excellent results in all categories. Students with medium ability demonstrated moderate proficiency, especially in connecting and summarizing ideas, while students with low ability experienced significant difficulties, especially in synthesizing information. Challenges faced by students included understanding complex vocabulary, handling application-based questions, and interpreting text structures. This study emphasizes the importance of tailored teaching strategies to improve HOTS, such as providing various levels of questions and engaging learning activities. This study offers insights for educators and future researchers to improve HOTS-based learning, fostering critical thinking and comprehensive reading skills that are essential for academic success.
Keywords: *higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), expository text, reading comprehension*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an activity that involves many aspects, both physical and mental. As explained by Olviyanti (2015), reading is a physical activity because it requires the use of the eyes to process written text, and a mental activity because it involves understanding the meaning of words, sentences, and ideas. According to Brown (2007), reading is a negotiation of meaning, where readers combine textual information with prior knowledge to build understanding. This process requires attention to elements of language, such as words, sentences, and their relationships, which enable understanding.

One of the programs implemented in Indonesia to develop reading skills is literacy activities. According to the National Assessment (NA) of Education Report (2022), although the

literacy of elementary, middle, and high school students has improved compared to the previous year, many students have not yet reached the minimum literacy competence standards. The literacy skills of students at all levels of education, including the ability to understand various types of texts and solve problems, are still categorized as moderate. At the elementary school level, only 61.53% of the student population has competencies above the minimum standard, while for junior high school students, the figure is approximately 59%. The lowest competency rates are found in high school, where only 49.26% of students have reached the required standard, down from last year's 53.85%. Additionally, UNESCO has reported that Indonesia ranks second from the bottom in world literacy, indicating that Indonesian reading interest is very low. According to UNESCO data, Indonesia's reading interest is concerning, with only 0.001% of the population classified as avid readers — meaning that out of 1,000 Indonesians, only 1 person is a frequent reader.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) involve advanced cognitive processes like analyzing, evaluating, and creating. These skills require students to engage with ideas, objects, and situations in complex, reflective, and evidence-seeking ways. HOTS help students differentiate ideas, solve problems, construct explanations, and understand complex concepts (Schraw & Robinson, 2011; Newman & Whelage, 2013). The goal is to develop critical thinking, creativity in problem-solving, and informed decision-making (Saputra, 2016).

Despite its importance, literacy challenges in increasing students' HOTS still occur in Indonesia. The National Assessment (2022) revealed that although literacy rates have increased, many students still do not meet minimum competency standards. Based on the 2016 PISA results, 70% Indonesian students struggled with HOTS, indicating that they remain at a Lower-Order Thinking Skill (LOTS) level. High school students, in particular, showed the lowest literacy achievement, with only 49.26% achieving the required standard. In addition, UNESCO data highlights that Indonesia is ranked second from the bottom globally in terms of literacy, with only 0.001% of its population being active readers.

To address this, the Indonesian education system has implemented a curriculum that emphasizes Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), such as the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum introduced in 2021. These curricula focus on developing logical reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills to better prepare students for academic and real-world

challenges (Newman & Whelage, 2013). HOTS involves advanced cognitive processes such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating, which are essential for understanding complex texts, such as expository texts (Brookhart, 2010; Hammond & Bransford, 2005; and Misa, 2013).

Expository texts, characterized by factual and nonfiction content, demand critical engagement through analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. According to Sanggam Siahaan and Kisno Shinoda (2008), expository texts aim to inform or persuade readers, which requires higher cognitive engagement. Suparman et al. (2020) emphasize that reading comprehension, especially expository texts, cannot be separated from critical thinking.

However, interviews conducted at a public senior high school in Kefamenanu revealed that students face significant challenges in comprehending HOTS-based expository texts. Students are less familiar with this type of text and related questions, as their reading experience focuses more on identifying main ideas than critically analyzing content. This study aims to analyze the HOTS skills of second-grade senior high students in reading expository texts. This study seeks to investigate their ability to evaluate, analyze, make connections, draw conclusions, and synthesize information while identifying the challenges they face in comprehending the text.

METHOD

This study used descriptive quantitative research methodology to assess the relationship between Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and reading comprehension. This method is suitable for this research to evaluate the application of HOTS in students' critical reading comprehension through the use of HOTS-based questions. Reading comprehension exercises based on expository texts were used to measure students' ability to analyze, interpret, and engage critically with the material (Creswell, 2018).

The population of this study is the students of second-grade students of senior high school in the academic year 2024/2025 which consist of two natural science classes (IPA) and two social science classes (IPS) with a total of 116 students. Samples taken randomly for this study is one class, namely class 11 IPA 2 totaling 25 students consisting of 4 boys and 21 girls.

The researcher examined students' answer sheets and calculate the correct answers into percent and find the highest and lowest components of HOTS in student answers. In analyzing

result of interview, the researcher presents the data in written form and draws conclusions from the results of the written interview.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings showed that students' ability in solving HOTS reading questions are on medium level. The student sgot average level of Good with score and 6.07 and 5.87 respectively. The results of students' ability in HOTS reading comprehension can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. The results of first test

No	Number of Question	HOTS Skills										Total Score	Level of Mastery
		Evalution		Analysis		Making connection		Drawing conclusion		Synthesis information			
		sc	%	sc	%	sc	%	sc	%	sc	%		
1.	5	6	60	5	50	7	70	8	80	7	70	6,6	Good
2.	5	6	60	5	50	7	70	6	60	7	70	6,2	Good
3.	5	5	50	6	60	5	50	6	60	4	40	5,2	Good
4.	5	5	50	6	60	5	50	6	60	4	40	5,2	Good
5.	5	5	50	6	60	6	60	5	50	4	40	5,2	Good
6.	5	6	60	5	50	5	50	4	40	5	50	5	Good
7.	5	7	70	8	80	6	60	6	60	6	60	6,6	Good
8.	5	7	70	7	70	6	60	6	60	7	70	6,6	Good
9.	5	6	60	6	60	5	50	7	70	3	30	5,4	Good
10.	5	5	50	5	50	4	40	3	30	6	60	4,6	Poor
11.	5	**8**	**80**	**8**	**80**	**7**	**70**	**8**	**80**	**8**	**80**	**7,8**	**Excellent**
12.	5	**6**	**60**	**6**	**60**	**7**	**70**	**7**	**70**	**6**	**60**	**6,4**	**Good**
13.	5	6	60	6	60	7	70	7	70	6	60	6,4	Good
14.	5	5	50	6	60	6	60	5	50	4	40	5,2	Good
15.	5	4	40	5	50	4	40	4	40	6	60	4,6	Poor
16.	5	**3**	**30**	**3**	**30**	**4**	**40**	**5**	**50**	**5**	**50**	**4**	**Poor**
17.	5	4	40	5	50	4	40	4	40	6	60	4,6	Poor
18.	5	7	70	6	60	6	60	7	70	6	60	6,4	Good
19.	5	7	70	6	60	6	60	7	70	6	60	6,4	Good
20.	5	8	80	7	70	7	70	8	80	7	70	7,4	Excellent
21.	5	8	80	7	70	7	70	8	80	7	70	7,4	Excellent
22.	5	7	70	7	70	7	70	8	80	7	70	7,2	Good
23.	5	7	70	7	70	7	70	8	80	7	70	7,2	Good
24.	5	7	70	7	70	7	70	8	80	7	70	7,2	Good
25	5	8	80	6	60	7	70	7	70	7	70	7	Good
Total Score		**61,2%**		**60,4%**		**59,6%**		**63,2%**		**59,2%**		**6,07**	**Good**

Table 2. The results of the second test

No	Number of Question	HOTS Skills										Total Score	Level of Mastery
		Evalution		Analysis		Making connection		Drawing conclusion		Synthesis information			
		sc	%	sc	%	sc	%	sc	%	sc	%		
1.	5	7	70	5	50	5	50	6	60	6	60	5,8	Good
2.	5	6	60	5	50	7	70	6	60	6	60	6	Good

3.	5	6	60	5	50	4	40	6	60	4	40	5	Good
4.	5	6	60	5	50	4	40	6	60	4	40	5	Good
5.	5	6	60	5	50	4	40	5	50	4	40	4,8	Good
6.	5	5	50	4	40	4	40	4	40	5	50	4,4	poor
7.	5	6	60	6	60	5	50	6	60	5	50	5,6	Good
8.	5	7	70	6	60	7	70	6	60	7	70	6,6	Good
9.	5	**7**	**70**	**6**	**60**	**6**	**60**	**6**	**60**	**7**	**70**	**6,4**	Good
10.	5	5	50	5	50	4	40	6	60	7	70	5,4	Good
11.	5	8	80	7	70	8	80	7	70	7	70	7,4	Excellent
12.	5	6	60	6	60	6	60	6	60	6	60	6	Good
13.	5	6	60	6	60	6	60	6	60	6	60	6	Good
14.	5	5	50	5	50	6	60	6	60	5	50	5,4	Good
15.	5	**4**	**40**	**5**	**50**	**4**	**40**	**4**	**40**	**2**	**20**	**3,8**	**poor**
16.	5	4	40	5	50	5	50	6	60	6	60	5,2	Good
17.	5	4	40	5	50	4	40	4	40	2	20	3,8	Poor
18.	5	7	70	7	70	6	60	7	70	6	60	6,6	Good
19.	5	7	70	7	70	6	60	7	70	6	60	6,6	Good
20.	5	**8**	**80**	**8**	**80**	**7**	**70**	**8**	**80**	**7**	**70**	**7,6**	**Excellent**
21.	5	7	70	6	60	6	60	7	70	7	70	6,6	Good
22.	5	7	70	5	50	6	60	7	70	6	60	6,2	Good
23.	5	7	70	7	70	7	70	8	80	6	60	7	Good
24.	5	7	70	7	70	7	70	8	80	6	60	7	Good
25	5	7	70	7	70	6	60	7	70	6	60	6,6	Good
Total Score		**62%**		**58%**		**56%**		**62%**		**55,6%**		**5,87**	**Good**

After reviewing the test results completed by students, researchers can observe their ability in answering HOTS-type questions based on expository texts. From the test results, it was found that the easiest skill in Text 1 was drawing conclusions (63.2%) this indicates that most students find it relatively easier to interpret information, infer insights, and make logical conclusions from the text, while the most challenging skill was synthesizing information (59.2%) which indicates that students struggle to organize the information they receive and synthesize it into new insights or conclusions. Likewise, in Text 2, the easiest skills were evaluating (62%) and drawing conclusions (62%) and the most difficult skill was synthesizing information (55.6%) which indicates that it was the most difficult for students to do well. Therefore, it can be concluded that the easiest skill for students in solving HOTS-type questions based on expository texts is the ability to draw conclusions. Meanwhile, based on interviews with three students, researchers found that the difficulties faced by students were understanding complex vocabulary, application-based questions, and interpreting text structures.

Based on the results of test results on students with high ability at the evaluating level, student scored 8 (80%) showing excellent ability in judging the validity of arguments and evidence. For the analyzing level, student achieved 8 (80%) excelling in breaking down

information into components and understanding relationships. This demonstrates their strong grasp of dissecting complex ideas. While for the making connection level, student scored 7 (70%) indicating a good ability to relate ideas from the text to personal experiences or external concepts, fostering meaningful engagement. Then for drawing conclusion level, student scored 8 (80%) highlighting an excellent ability to synthesize ideas and infer logical conclusions based on textual evidence. Lastly for the synthesizing information level, student achieved 8 (80%), showing the ability to integrate ideas and create new insights effectively. This indicates creativity and a strong grasp of the material. So from this analysis, it can be concluded that the student with high abilities has developed critical thinking skills across these aspects, showing a strong grasp of interpreting, connecting, and applying ideas from the expository text.

Based on the results of test results on students with medium abilities at the evaluating level, student scored 6 (60%) indicating sufficient ability to evaluate text but with room for improvement. This student demonstrates partial understanding but might miss subtleties in complex arguments. For the analyzing level, student scored 6 (60%) showing moderate capability in analyzing texts. While able to identify main ideas and some relationships, this student may struggle with nuanced or multi-layered arguments. While for the making connection level, student scored 7 (70%) demonstrating the ability to make connections in straightforward contexts but struggling with more abstract or complex linkages. Then for drawing conclusion level, student scored 7 (70%) reflecting strong reasoning skills and the ability to draw conclusions in most cases, though with occasional oversights. Lastly for the synthesizing information level, student scored 6 (60%) showing a good understanding of how to combine ideas but might not always achieve originality or depth in synthesis. So from this analysis, it can be concluded that the student with medium abilities demonstrates critical and practical understanding of the text, emphasizing the topic's relevance in inspiring behavior change and promoting good environmental practices.

Based on the results of test results on students with low abilities at the evaluating level, students' scored 3 (30%) struggles significantly with evaluating information critically, possibly failing to identify relevance or validity. For the analyzing level, students' score 3 (30%) analytical skills are weak, showing difficulty in breaking down information or recognizing patterns and relationships. While for the making connection level, students' score 4 (40%) has limited ability

to connect ideas, reflecting a shallow understanding of the material. Then for drawing conclusion level, students' score 5 (50%) still struggles to draw accurate conclusions. Lastly for the synthesizing information level, students' score 5 (50%) demonstrates limited ability to combine information into a coherent whole. So from this analysis, it can be concluded that the student with low abilities needs support in vocabulary enhancement and text comprehension strategies, such as identifying main ideas and connecting them with supporting details. Improving these skills can help them better evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information.

The discussion of the research results revealed the varying levels of High Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in 25 students of grade XI IPA 2 at senior high school. The students were categorized into high, medium, and low HOTS abilities. The test results showed differences in the HOTS aspects: evaluation, analysis, making connections, drawing conclusions, and synthesizing information.

Based on the results of the students' test scores, it turns out that there are many students in the high ability, medium ability and low ability groups. This is in line with the findings of other relevant research results which show that each high-level thinking indicator shows very different results. Seman and Yusof (2017) research found that the students' high-level thinking skills in the analysis indicator were in the sufficient catogory, the evaluation indicator was in the very poor category, and synthesis indicator was in the poor category. Furthermore, research by Sukmawijaya, et.al (2020) found that students' high-level thinking skills in the analysis indicator were in the less category, the evaluation indicator was in the very less category, and the synthesis indicator was in the very less category. Ariyana and Chayadi (2018) shows that students' high-level thinking skills in the analysis indicator are in the low category, the evaluation indicator is in the low category, and the synthesis indicator is in the low category. Ariyani's (2020) research showed that students' high-level thinking skills in the analysis indicator are in the sufficient category, the evaluation indicator is in the low category, and the synthesis indicator is in the low category.

According to Sihombing (2023), questions in the cognitive domains of analysis, evaluation and synthesis require more complex solutions, because they are in the realm of high-level thinking skills. According Thamrin and Sari (2019), descriptive questions are useful for measuring students learning outcomes and student thinking abilities. Shalihah (2022) high-level thinking skills are a

process of thinking that is not just memorizing and re-conveying known information. High-level thinking skills are the ability to connect, manipulate, and transform knowledge and experience that has been owned to think critically and creatively in an effort to determine decisions and solve problems. Amin and Retnawati (2021) are complex thinking skills that involve all previous aspects to produce solutions. Saputra (2016) to solve problems at a higher level requires a unified level of below abilities, such as to solve C6-creating level questions, C4-analyzing and C5-evaluating skills are also required.

The comparison of the study highlighted that students' performance on the analysis, evaluation, and synthesis indicators varied greatly, with some showing sufficient abilities while others scored poorly. This study emphasized the complexity of high-level cognitive tasks and the need for students to connect and critically manipulate knowledge.

For high-ability students, scores indicated strong critical thinking skills in all aspects, with particular strengths in evaluating and synthesizing ideas. Medium-ability students showed moderate performance, with room for improvement in evaluation and analysis, while low-ability students experienced significant difficulties, especially with evaluation and analysis. This study concluded that each student's HOTS abilities vary, but teacher practice and guidance, including offering more HOTS-oriented questions and engaging strategies, can help improve students' skills in analyzing and synthesizing information. Teachers should encourage students to apply HOTS in English lessons to develop their cognitive abilities, especially in reading expository texts.

CONCLUSION

The research highlights that the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) of Class XI IPA 2 students at Noemuti State High School vary across five aspects: evaluating, analyzing, making connections, drawing conclusions, and synthesizing information. Students were categorized into high, medium, and low ability groups, reflecting their performance in each HOTS aspect.

The study found that the easiest skill for students was drawing conclusions (63.2% in Text 1, 62% in Text 2), while synthesizing information was the most challenging (59.2% in Text 1, 55.6% in Text 2). High-ability students excelled in all HOTS aspects, achieving scores between 70% and 80%, while medium-ability students showed adequate skills in evaluation and analysis (around 60%) and stronger abilities in making connections and drawing conclusions (70%). Low-

ability students struggled in all areas, with scores ranging from 30% to 50%, needing support in vocabulary, main idea identification, and information connection. The study also identified that students faced difficulties with complex vocabulary, application-based questions, and interpreting text structure when solving HOTS questions. So, for further research need to be more focus in overcoming the difficulties and challenges in solving HOTS questions.

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