

# Building Critical and Moral Generation: The Implementation of HOTS Approach in Islamic Religious Education

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\*Ahmad, Ruslan, Nasaruddin<sup>1,2,3</sup> 

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Bima, Indonesia.

Corresponding Author: [ahmadlatief947@gmail.com](mailto:ahmadlatief947@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMAN 4 Kota Bima. HOTS, which includes analytical, evaluative, and creative abilities, is expected to enhance students' critical, creative, and innovative thinking skills in the 21st century. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that key supporting factors for HOTS implementation include adequate infrastructure, teacher competence, and active student participation. However, challenges such as limited teacher understanding of HOTS, insufficient resources, and resistance to paradigm shifts in learning were identified. To optimize HOTS implementation, recommendations include improving teacher training, developing relevant curricula, and integrating educational technology and project-based assessments. The study concludes that, with proper support, HOTS can significantly improve the quality of learning and better prepare students to face global challenges. This research highlights the importance of HOTS in transforming PAI learning to meet the demands of the 21st century.

**Keywords:** *Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), Islamic Religious Education.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic role in shaping the character of students who are faithful, pious, and noble. However, in facing the challenges of the 21st century, education is not only required to equip students with theoretical knowledge, but also to develop higher order thinking skills (HOTS). These skills include the abilities of analysis, evaluation, and creation, which are key to dealing with the complexity of modern life, technological advances, and the dynamics of globalization. In the context of PAI learning, the HOTS approach becomes very relevant because it not only aims to improve religious understanding, but also to form a generation that is critical, creative, and able to apply Islamic values in everyday life.

The 21st century is characterized by rapid changes in various fields, including technology, economy, and socio-culture. Learners are faced with challenges such as technological disruption, information overload, and global issues such as climate change, intolerance, and social inequality. To face these challenges, education must be able to equip students with skills that are not only cognitive, but also affective and psychomotor. The 21st century skills known as 4C (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication) are very important, and the HOTS approach is one way to develop these skills. In PAI learning, HOTS can help students not only understand religious texts literally, but also analyze, evaluate, and create meanings that are relevant to the current context.

However, the reality of PAI learning in schools, including at SMAN 4 Kota Bima, shows that the implementation of HOTS still faces various obstacles. PAI learning often focuses on memorization and basic conceptual understanding, while activities that encourage critical, creative, and innovative thinking skills are still minimal. Most students are only directed to memorize Qur'anic verses, hadith, or Islamic concepts without being involved in in-depth discussions or exploration of the application of Islamic values in daily life. In fact, the essence of PAI learning is to shape character and behavior in accordance with Islamic values, which requires deep understanding and the ability to apply it in various contexts.

On the other hand, teacher competence in designing and implementing HOTS-based learning is also a challenge. Not all teachers have an adequate understanding of how to integrate the HOTS approach into PAI learning. This has an impact on the lack of a variety of learning methods that can encourage students to think critically and creatively. For example, PAI learning should not only be limited to lectures and memorization, but also involve discussions, projects, and problem-based learning that allow students to analyze real problems and find solutions based on Islamic values.

In addition, limited learning facilities, such as the lack of interactive media and supporting technology, become an obstacle in creating a conducive and interesting learning atmosphere. Social and cultural environments that are less supportive of the application of Islamic values also add to the complexity of developing students' higher order thinking skills. For example, students may find it difficult to relate Islamic values to contemporary issues such as tolerance, environment, or social justice if they are not given the space to think critically and creatively.

Given these problems, the implementation of the HOTS approach in PAI learning is an important agenda to improve the quality of learning. This approach is not only relevant to improve student learning outcomes, but also to form a critical, creative, and innovative generation in accordance with the demands of the 21st century. In the context of PAI, HOTS can help students understand Islamic teachings more deeply, criticize social phenomena with an Islamic perspective, and create innovative solutions to problems faced by mankind. Therefore, research on the application of HOTS in PAI learning at SMAN 4 Kota Bima City Class X is important to be conducted as a strategic step in overcoming existing problems while improving the quality of Islamic education.

## METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with descriptive research. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide an in-depth and holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study, namely the implementation of the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) approach in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMAN 4 Kota Bima class X. Descriptive research aims to describe in detail how the HOTS approach is implemented in Islamic Education learning, including strategies, methods, and constraints faced by teachers as well as its impact on students' learning process. The research data were obtained from two main sources, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with the principal, PAI teachers, and grade X students. The principal provided information on school policies related to HOTS implementation, while PAI teachers explained the learning practices, planning, and evaluation conducted. Grade X students were the source of information to understand their perceptions and experiences in participating in HOTS-based learning.

In addition, secondary data were obtained from school documents such as lesson plans, syllabus, evaluation results, and supporting references such as journals, books, and photographs of learning activities. The data analysis technique used refers to the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is done by simplifying and organizing the data that has been collected to make it more structured and easy to analyze. Furthermore, the data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives equipped with tables or diagrams to facilitate

understanding. The final stage is drawing conclusions based on the findings obtained during the research. With this approach, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of HOTS approach in PAI learning at SMAN 4 Kota Bima.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) refer to thinking abilities that involve more complex mental processes, such as analysis, evaluation and creation, compared to lower order thinking skills that focus more on remembering or understanding information. HOTS enables students to think critically, creatively and innovatively, which is essential in facing the challenges of the 21st century. The HOTS approach does not only require students to remember facts, but also to process information, evaluate alternatives, and create new solutions. In a learning context, HOTS helps students develop the ability to analyze problems in depth, assess multiple perspectives, and generate original ideas that can be applied in real life. The scope of HOTS involves three main components: analysis, evaluation and creation. First, analysis involves the ability to break down information into smaller parts, identify patterns, and understand relationships between concepts. Second, evaluation allows students to assess the validity of information, make decisions based on certain criteria, and provide logical arguments. Third, creation encourages students to combine existing ideas into something new, design innovative solutions, and develop original products or ideas. These three components are interrelated and form the foundation for developing higher order thinking skills.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, HOTS can be applied to help students not only understand religious texts literally, but also analyze the meaning contained in them, evaluate their relevance to the current context, and create practical applications in everyday life. For example, students can be asked to analyze Islamic values in dealing with contemporary issues such as tolerance, social justice, or the environment. Thus, HOTS not only enhances students' religious understanding, but also equips them with the necessary skills to become critical, creative individuals who contribute positively to society. For more details related to the scope of HOTS involving three main components are as follows:

### **Analisis**

Analysis is the process of breaking down information or a problem into smaller parts for deeper understanding and finding relationships between the elements. In the context of learning, analysis helps students to identify patterns, structures and relationships between complex concepts. For example, in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI), students can be invited to analyze verses of the Qur'an or hadith by breaking them down into specific themes, such as the value of justice, tolerance, or social care. Thus, students not only understand the text literally, but are also able to relate it to the context of real life. Analysis also involves the ability to compare, contrast and categorize information, which helps students develop systematic and structured thinking. Through this process, students learn to think logically and critically, which is an important foundation to face the challenges of the 21st century that are full of complexity and dynamics.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation is the ability to pass judgment on information, arguments or solutions based on certain criteria, as well as determining the value or quality of something. In learning, evaluation encourages students to think critically and objectively in assessing information or situations. For example, in PAI learning, students can be invited to evaluate various religious opinions or fatwas by considering the social, cultural, and age contexts. Students can also assess actions or decisions based on Islamic values, such as justice, truth, and humanity. Evaluation skills help students to not only passively accept information, but also question, test, and conclude based on evidence and logic. This is very important in

forming a generation that is critical and able to make the right decisions in dealing with complex problems in the era of globalization..

### **Creation**

Creation is the ability to generate new ideas, design innovative solutions, and develop original products or concepts based on existing knowledge. In learning, creation encourages students to think beyond conventional boundaries and create something new and useful. For example, in PAI learning, students can be invited to design social projects that apply Islamic values, such as anti-bullying campaigns, environmental care programs, or initiatives to increase tolerance between religions. Creation also involves the ability to combine existing ideas into something unique and relevant to the current context. By developing creation skills, students become not only consumers of knowledge, but also producers who are able to make positive contributions to society. This ability is crucial in facing the challenges of the 21st century, where innovation and creativity are key to solving complex global problems.

Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) is important to be applied in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning because it can help students develop critical, creative, and independent thinking skills. In the context of PAI, HOTS not only focuses on understanding religious texts literally, but also encourages students to analyze, evaluate, and create meanings that are relevant to the current context. By having HOTS skills, students can understand Islamic teachings more deeply, such as the values of justice, tolerance, and social care, and be able to apply them in dealing with daily life problems. For example, students can be invited to analyze contemporary issues such as the environment, social justice, or tolerance through an Islamic perspective, so that they are not only passive recipients of information, but also active thinkers who are able to provide solutions based on religious values. In addition, HOTS equips students with skills that are highly needed in the world of work and social life in the 21st century, such as problem solving, decision making, and innovation. In an era of globalization full of rapid change and complexity, students need to be equipped with the ability to think critically in assessing information, creatively in creating solutions, and innovatively in facing challenges. PAI learning that integrates HOTS can help students develop these skills through activities such as in-depth discussions, problem-based projects, and assessments that demand analysis and creation. Thus, students not only become faithful and pious individuals, but also ready to face global challenges with high-level thinking skills. By applying HOTS in PAI learning, teachers can create a more dynamic and meaningful learning environment. Students are not only invited to memorize and understand, but also to think deeply, evaluate various perspectives, and create innovative solutions. This is in line with the goal of 21st century education, which is to form a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also has strong character and the ability to contribute positively to society. Therefore, the integration of HOTS in PAI learning is a strategic step to prepare students for a challenging future. For more details, it is described as follows:.

### **The Importance of HOTS in Modern Learning**

Higher order thinking skills (HOTS) have become very important in modern learning as it meets the increasingly complex and dynamic needs of education in the 21st century. Learning today does not only focus on memorizing facts or basic understanding, but rather on developing skills that enable students to think critically, creatively and independently. Here are some reasons why HOTS is essential in modern learning:

### **Responding to 21st Century Challenges**

The 21st century is characterized by rapid technological development, social change, and global challenges such as climate change, social conflict, and economic uncertainty. To face these challenges, students need to have the ability to think critically, make the right decisions, and innovate. HOTS enables students to process information deeply and come up with creative solutions to problems.

**Encourages Critical Thinking and Innovative Solutions**

HOTS do not only encourage students to passively receive information, but also invites them to analyze, evaluate, and create new ideas. Thus, students can think critically in assessing various information and produce innovative solutions to existing problems, both in academic contexts and everyday life.

**Improving Adaptability to Change**

In an ever-changing world, the ability to adapt is key to success. HOTS helps students to develop analysis and evaluation skills that enable them to assess changes, process new information, and make informed decisions. With these skills, students are better prepared to face changes and challenges that may arise in the future.

**Preparing Students for the World of Work**

Today's workforce requires individuals who possess not only knowledge, but also higher-order thinking skills such as problem solving, data analysis, and creativity. Many modern jobs, especially in technology, research and innovation, require the ability to think critically and creatively. By practicing HOTS, students will be better prepared to enter the workforce with skills that are relevant and needed by the industry.

**Developing Learning Independence**

One important aspect of HOTS is the ability to think independently. In modern learning, students are encouraged not only to rely on the teacher as the main source of information, but also to explore, analyze and develop their own knowledge. HOTS helps students become independent learners, able to find solutions to problems faced, and develop their ideas without relying too much on others.

**Optimizing the Use of Technology in Learning**

Modern learning is heavily influenced by the use of technology. HOTS allows students to make optimal use of technology, not only to find information, but also to analyze, evaluate and create something new. Technology-based learning supported by HOTS skills can provide a more interactive, collaborative and meaningful learning experience for students.

**Increasing Student Engagement in Learning**

HOTS-focused learning challenges and inspires students to think deeply and creatively. By being given tasks that involve analysis, evaluation and creation, students are more motivated to actively participate in learning. This contributes to increased student interest and motivation in the learning process.

**Helping Students Deal with Complex Problems**

HOTS enables students to tackle complex and multidimensional problems. Learning that emphasizes these skills prepares students to deal with situations that do not have simple solutions and allows them to develop a more holistic and systematic approach to problem solving.

**Facilitating Continuous Learning**

Modern learning prioritizes lifelong learning, where students continue to learn and develop throughout their lives. By mastering HOTS, students not only gain knowledge that can be applied today, but also skills that will be useful to continue learning and adapting to the times in the future.

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that HOTS in modern learning cannot be underestimated. These skills are the foundation for the development of students who are able to think critically, creatively and independently, and are ready to face the challenges of a changing world. By focusing on HOTS, education can produce a generation that is more ready to innovate and make a positive contribution to society and the world of work in the future.

**Implementation of HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) Based Learning in Education**

The implementation of HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) based learning at SMAN 4 Kota Bima aims to develop students' critical, analytical, creative, and innovative thinking skills, especially in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This approach not only focuses on improving students' academic understanding, but also aims to shape the

character of students who are able to think and act wisely and independently. In the context of Islamic Education learning, HOTS encourages students to not only memorize and understand religious texts, but also analyze their meaning, evaluate their relevance to the current context, and create innovative solutions that are in accordance with Islamic values. For example, students are invited to analyze social issues such as tolerance, justice, or the environment through an Islamic perspective, and design projects that apply these values in everyday life. To support the implementation of HOTS, SMAN 4 Kota Bima takes several strategic steps. First, schools develop a curriculum specifically designed to encourage higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, evaluation and creation. Teachers design learning activities that challenge students to think critically, such as in-depth discussions, case studies, and problem-based projects. Secondly, teachers are given special training to understand the concept of HOTS and how to integrate it in PAI learning. This training includes the use of innovative learning methods, such as problem-based learning and project-based learning, which encourage students to be actively involved in the learning process. Third, schools utilize educational technology, such as interactive media and digital platforms, to create a more engaging learning environment that supports the development of HOTS skills.

In addition, learning assessment is also designed to measure students' higher order thinking skills. Teachers use assessment instruments such as project assignments, presentations, and reflective essays that require students to analyze, evaluate, and create solutions based on the knowledge they have. Students' involvement in the learning process is also enhanced through activities such as debates, simulations, and social experiments, which encourage them to think independently and responsibly. With these steps, the implementation of HOTS at SMAN 4 Kota Bima is expected to create a generation of students who are not only academically intelligent, but also have strong character and the ability to contribute positively in facing global challenges in the 21st century.

The implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) at SMAN 4 Kota Bima aims to enhance students' critical, analytical, and creative thinking abilities. One of the first steps in this process is designing HOTS-oriented lesson plans (RPP). Teachers are required to set challenging learning objectives that encourage students to analyze, evaluate, and create. The selection of relevant materials ensures that learning is contextual and applicable to real-life situations. Additionally, lesson activities incorporate case analysis, group discussions, and collaborative projects to develop students' higher-order thinking skills.

To further support HOTS, SMAN 4 Kota Bima integrates various teaching strategies that promote critical thinking. Problem-Based Learning (PBL) allows students to tackle social or moral problems by analyzing them through the lens of Islamic teachings. Collaborative Learning encourages teamwork and discussion, helping students evaluate real-world issues based on religious values. Inquiry-Based Learning fosters curiosity by allowing students to explore topics in depth. Meanwhile, critical discussions enable students to express their opinions and engage in debates, strengthening their ability to analyze different perspectives.

Several teaching methods also facilitate HOTS-based learning. The case study method challenges students to assess real-world ethical and social issues using Islamic principles. Debates provide an opportunity for structured discussions, enabling students to refine their reasoning and argumentation skills. Role-playing and simulation activities allow students to step into decision-making roles, enhancing their analytical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, collaborative projects encourage research and data collection, helping students develop creative solutions based on religious and social contexts.

Assessment plays a vital role in measuring students' higher-order thinking skills. Performance-based assessments evaluate students on their ability to apply knowledge to real-life situations, such as analyzing social cases through an Islamic perspective. Problem-solving-based tests require students to provide logical solutions to moral and ethical dilemmas. Portfolios, which consist of analytical writing, projects, and reports, showcase

students' progress in critical thinking and creativity over time. These assessment methods ensure that students not only understand concepts but also apply them effectively.

The integration of technology further enhances HOTS-based learning. Online platforms like Google Classroom facilitate discussions and collaborative assignments, making learning more interactive. Interactive media and simulations help explain complex Islamic concepts in engaging ways, while educational videos provide visual explanations that promote deeper understanding. Increasing student engagement is also crucial, which can be achieved by providing challenging tasks, offering motivation, and creating a supportive learning environment. Through these comprehensive strategies, SMAN 4 Kota Bima ensures that students are well-equipped to face global challenges while maintaining strong religious and ethical values.

### Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The successful implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Islamic Religious Learning at SMAN 4 Kota Bima is influenced by several supporting factors. One crucial factor is the availability of resources and infrastructure, such as comfortable classrooms, technology access (computers, internet, projectors), and relevant educational materials. These resources enable students to engage with complex learning materials and develop their analytical and critical thinking skills. Additionally, teacher competence plays a significant role in HOTS implementation. Educators who are well-trained and knowledgeable about HOTS can design effective lesson plans and create engaging learning experiences that encourage students to think critically and creatively.

Another essential factor is student engagement, as active and motivated learners are more likely to benefit from HOTS-based learning. Encouraging participation through discussion, analysis, and collaborative projects helps students develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter. A supportive curriculum also contributes to the effective implementation of HOTS by integrating real-life contexts, problem-solving tasks, and opportunities for evaluation and reflection. Furthermore, school policies and environmental support, such as management initiatives that provide teacher training, technological resources, and assessment methods aligned with HOTS, play a critical role in ensuring the success of this learning approach.

Despite these supporting factors, several challenges can hinder the implementation of HOTS. One major obstacle is the lack of teachers' understanding and skills in applying HOTS-based methods. Some educators may struggle with designing lesson plans and choosing suitable teaching strategies, limiting the effectiveness of critical thinking development in students. Limited resources, such as insufficient technology and unstable internet access, can also prevent the full integration of digital tools in the learning process. Additionally, time constraints and heavy curriculum loads may pose challenges, as HOTS-based learning requires more time for in-depth discussions, projects, and debates, which may not always fit into the allocated class schedule.

Other challenges include limited access to quality learning materials and social-cultural factors that may resist new educational approaches emphasizing critical and creative thinking. In some cases, traditional teaching methods or mindsets may not align with HOTS-oriented learning, making it difficult to foster a culture of higher-order thinking. Moreover, inappropriate evaluation methods can also hinder HOTS implementation, as performance-based and project assessments require different approaches from conventional testing. To overcome these obstacles, continuous teacher training, improved infrastructure, and a shift in the learning paradigm are essential. By addressing these challenges, HOTS-based learning can be effectively implemented, allowing students to develop critical thinking skills and become better problem-solvers in their academic and personal lives.

**Solutions and Recommendations for HOTS Optimization**

To enhance the implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Islamic Religious Learning at SMAN 4 Kota Bima, strategic solutions must be applied to maximize its potential. One of the most important steps is improving teachers' skills and understanding of HOTS-based learning. Regular training and workshops should be organized to help teachers integrate HOTS effectively into their lesson plans. These training sessions can focus on designing learning activities that promote analysis, evaluation, and creativity. Additionally, forming collaborative teacher groups for mentoring and discussion can facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices, allowing more experienced teachers to support their colleagues in implementing HOTS strategies.

Optimizing the use of educational technology is another crucial step in enhancing HOTS-based learning. Schools should ensure that infrastructure, such as computers, stable internet connections, and other digital tools, are available to support interactive and technology-driven learning. Partnering with technology providers or the government can help acquire necessary resources. Furthermore, incorporating online learning platforms like Google Classroom or Moodle can enable students to engage in independent learning, collaborate effectively, and access diverse learning materials. These platforms allow students to develop their analytical and problem-solving skills while making the learning process more flexible and engaging.

Developing a HOTS-based curriculum and structured lesson plans is also necessary to align learning with higher-order thinking objectives. The Islamic Religious Education curriculum should be updated to include topics that require critical analysis and problem-solving, linking Islamic teachings with contemporary social issues. Teachers should design lesson plans that incorporate challenging activities, such as debates, case studies, and creative projects. These approaches encourage students to think critically about real-world applications of Islamic teachings and develop their reasoning and decision-making abilities.

Assessment methods must also be adapted to reflect HOTS principles. Instead of relying solely on conventional tests, teachers should implement performance and project-based assessments, which require students to analyze cases, develop solutions to faith-based issues, or conduct research on social topics related to Islamic teachings. This type of assessment allows students to demonstrate their critical and creative thinking skills in a more practical manner. Additionally, providing constructive feedback is essential to guide students in refining their thought processes and improving their higher-order thinking abilities. Well-structured feedback helps students recognize their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering a mindset of continuous learning.

Encouraging student engagement in learning is another key factor in the successful implementation of HOTS. Collaborative learning methods, such as group discussions and team projects, provide students with opportunities to analyze issues from different perspectives and develop evaluation skills. Challenging learning tasks should be assigned to push students to think more deeply. For example, students can be given assignments to analyze the role of Islamic values in addressing social problems in their community or create initiatives based on Islamic teachings to solve real-world issues. These approaches not only make learning more engaging but also strengthen students' problem-solving abilities.

Finally, strong support from both the school and parents is essential in fostering an environment that promotes HOTS. School policies should prioritize teacher training, resource availability, and an atmosphere conducive to higher-order thinking. Schools should also work closely with parents to encourage students to be more creative and critical in their studies. Providing diverse learning resources, such as in-depth textbooks, journal articles, videos, and case studies, further enriches students' understanding and analytical skills. By implementing these strategic solutions, SMAN 4 Kota Bima can overcome challenges and create a more effective HOTS-based learning environment in Islamic Religious Learning, ultimately developing students who are critical, creative, and innovative in their thinking.

## CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMAN 4 Kota Bima has great potential to develop students' critical, creative, and innovative thinking skills. This approach not only improves students' understanding of religious materials, but also equips them with the analysis, evaluation, and creation skills needed to face the challenges of the 21st century. Several supporting factors, such as the availability of adequate infrastructure and students' active involvement in the learning process, are key to the success of HOTS implementation. However, this study also identified a number of challenges, such as teachers' lack of understanding of HOTS concepts and strategies, limited resources, and resistance to change to a more innovative learning paradigm. To optimize the implementation of HOTS, strategic measures are needed, including increasing teachers' capacity through continuous training, integrating educational technology in learning, and developing HOTS-based curriculum and assessment instruments. In addition, collaboration between schools, parents and other stakeholders is essential to create a supportive environment for HOTS implementation. With adequate support, the HOTS approach can not only improve the quality of PAI learning, but also shape a generation of students who are ready to face the complexity and global dynamics with higher-order thinking skills. Thus, the implementation of HOTS in PAI learning is a strategic step to prepare students to become individuals with character, critical thinking, and positive contributions to society.

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