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DEVELOPING A SIRAH INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK: INTEGRATING THE COMPOSITION OF HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS (HOTS)

**Muhammad Talhah Ajmain @ Jima'ain¹, Mohd Shukri Hanapi², Muhammad
Dhiauddin Ahmad Termizi³, Muhamad Nasir Mohamad Salleh⁴,
Mohd Huefiros Efizi Husain⁵, Arniza Mohd Shah⁶**

^{1,3,6}*Academy of Islamic Civilisation, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA*

²*Centre for Islamic Development Management Studies,
UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA*

⁴*Department of Islamic History, Civilization and Education,
Academy of Islamic Studies,
UNIVERSITI MALAYA*

⁵*Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies,
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA*

Abstract

This study adopts a mixed-contribution design comprising two integrated scholarly objectives: (1) a quantitative descriptive survey to evaluate the implementation level of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-integrated instructional composition among Islamic Education Teachers (IETs) in Sirah Education at the secondary school level, and (2) a framework development component that proposes a HOTS Composition-Based Sirah Instructional Planning Framework grounded in the empirical findings. Although HOTS has been institutionalised within the national curriculum, its execution in Sirah instruction necessitates structured planning to ensure the continuity of cognitive development among students. This research aims to identify the level of instructional composition implementation, covering the induction, developmental, and closure phases that integrate HOTS elements. Adopting a quantitative survey design, the study involved 406 IETs from national secondary schools across five major zones in Malaysia. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire adapted from the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document (DSKP) and relevant literature. Descriptive statistical analysis, performed using IBM SPSS 29.0, was employed to determine mean scores and implementation levels. Findings indicate that the implementation of HOTS-integrated instructional composition is at a moderately high level (mean = 3.90). The induction phase recorded the highest mean score (4.03), followed by the developmental (3.87) and closure (3.83) phases. Although HOTS elements are present in each phase, the progression of cognitive levels throughout the teaching and learning (T&L) process requires further strengthening. This study proposes the development of a HOTS Composition-Based Sirah Instructional Planning Framework to ensure more systematic alignment between objectives, pedagogical strategies, and assessment. This framework offers significant potential to enhance pedagogical planning and elevate the quality of Sirah instruction, as well as other fact-based disciplines.

Keywords: Instructional Framework, Sirah Education, Instructional Composition, Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)

¹ Corresponding author. Email: muhammadtalhah.j@utm.my

INTRODUCTION

The study of Sirah constitutes a core component of Islamic Education, serving to elucidate and operationalise the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah within contemporary contexts. Its importance has been widely highlighted in global Islamic education reform, particularly during the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Mecca (1977), which called for a holistic transformation of the curriculum (Farid et al., 2012). In Malaysia, this aspiration was institutionalised through the National Education Philosophy (FPN) and the Islamic Education Philosophy (FPI) in 1987, both of which emphasise holistic human development grounded in religious values and aligned with national principles (KPM, 2012). Within this framework, Sirah is not merely a historical account of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), but a practical model demonstrating the application of Quranic principles in real-life contexts (Abdul Karim, 2015).

However, existing studies indicate that Sirah instructional practices remain in need of substantial improvement, particularly in developing pedagogical approaches that meaningfully connect content with students' cognitive development and lived experiences (Jahidih et al., 2025). This limitation calls for a shift in instructional planning, where Sirah is no longer treated as a collection of facts, but as a discipline that fosters critical understanding, internalisation, and transformation. Accordingly, Islamic Education and Sirah must evolve towards cultivating complex competencies, especially leadership and higher-order thinking skills (Khairul Aiman et al., 2025). This transformation aligns with the national emphasis on Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), which has become a central agenda in Malaysia's education system (KPM, 2014), grounded in Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) and its revision by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001).

Nevertheless, effective HOTS integration in Sirah Education requires systematic instructional planning that balances cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Jahidih et al., 2025). Without structured pedagogical design, HOTS risks remaining theoretical rather than meaningfully translated into classroom practice. Consequently, there is an urgent need to develop a HOTS Composition-Based Sirah Instructional Planning Framework that systematically organises content elements, pedagogical strategies, and learning outcomes to support students' higher-order cognitive development (Nurhayati et al., 2024), aligning with the national agenda to cultivate critical, reflective, and morally upright individuals capable of navigating 21st-century challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sirah Instruction and the Imperative for Pedagogical Transformation

The instruction of Sirah within Islamic Education serves as a critical conduit for students to comprehend the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah through their practical applications. Sirah transcends the mere narration of historical events; it encapsulates how the actions, ethics (akhlak), and cognitive paradigms of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) were manifested within the societal realities of his time (Abdul Karim, 2018), necessitating strategic pedagogical planning capable of fostering profound understanding and internalising core values among learners. Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that current practices remain anchored in rote-memorisation and exam-centric approaches (Rosnani et al., 2022), with conventional evaluations prioritising memorisation at the expense of spiritual formation and critical thinking (Ahmad Termizi, 2025), thereby restricting students' ability to synthesise Sirah content with contemporary challenges. Sirah instruction therefore demands a more structured design to holistically engage the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains within the framework of 21st-century education (KPM, 2014).

Integration of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Education

The implementation of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) remains a pivotal agenda in the national curriculum transformation. Anchored in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) and the revised framework by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), HOTS pertains to a student's capacity to analyse, evaluate, and create through complex cognitive processes. Within the ambit of Islamic Education, HOTS should not be perceived solely as a cognitive faculty. Rather, it serves as a pedagogical approach that facilitates deeper comprehension and fortifies students' convictions regarding the knowledge they acquire and the faith they embrace (Talhah Ajmain & Ahmad Marzuki, 2020; Farid et al., 2025).

Despite its importance, empirical findings indicate that the integration of HOTS within Islamic Education Teaching and Learning (T&L) remains inconsistent. Research by Saidatul et al. (2024) suggests that the instructional practices of Islamic Education Teachers (IETs) are still largely traditional. A related study by Talhah Ajmain et al. (2024) further confirms that HOTS integration in Sirah lessons operates only at a moderate level, particularly at the closure stage, underscoring the need for more structured pedagogical frameworks. Similarly, Ab. Halim and Nik Mohd. Rahimi (2011) observe that teaching remains predominantly anchored in didactic methods, such as lectures, rote explanations, and conventional inquiry, which often fail to stimulate critical and reflective thinking.

Furthermore, studies by Mazlan (2018) highlight that students are insufficiently engaged in higher-level cognitive activities, with fragmented

instructional planning, limited use of instructional media, and failure to contextualise content with contemporary issues resulting in passive knowledge assimilation (Cathrine & Sabariah, 2019).

Instructional Planning and the Concept of Composition

Within the pedagogical realm, instructional planning serves as the fundamental cornerstone that determines classroom efficacy. Systematic planning ensures rigorous alignment between learning objectives, content selection, pedagogical strategies, and assessment modalities. The concept of instructional composition pertains to the strategic arrangement of these elements to form a cohesive, interconnected, and meaningful structural whole (Syaubari, 2018; Talhah Ajmain, 2021).

Operationally, instructional composition refers to the synergistic sequencing of the induction, developmental, and closure phases, meticulously designed to ensure a progressive and lucid learning trajectory (KPM, 2014; Slavin, 2015). This composition transcends a mere chronological sequence of steps; it is a deliberate architecture that dictates how ideas are introduced, scaffolded, and synthesised within a single instructional session. While existing literature has explored composition within the context of Islamic Education Teachers (IETs) (Hanani, 2017), these studies have predominantly focused on the nexus between instructional practice and student achievement, often without explicitly integrating the HOTS dimension. Conversely, research linking composition with HOTS has been concentrated in other domains, such as Aqidah (Syaubari, 2018), leaving a notable research lacuna within the field of Sirah.

In summary, the literature highlights three major challenges in Sirah instruction: reliance on rote-learning approaches, inconsistent implementation of HOTS, and the absence of a systematic instructional planning structure. While HOTS integration has proven effective across disciplines such as history (Mazlan, 2018), and science (Norshuhada & Kamisah, 2019), its application within Sirah Education remains underexplored. Therefore, there is a critical need to develop a HOTS Composition-Based Sirah Instructional Planning Framework that systematically embeds HOTS across all instructional phases, providing a structured guide for Islamic Education Teachers (IETs) to design impactful Sirah lessons.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a purely quantitative methodology employing a cross-sectional survey research design to evaluate the implementation level of instructional composition among Islamic Education Teachers (IETs) in Sirah Education, specifically focusing on the integration of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). The quantitative approach was selected to facilitate a systematic

measurement of research variables and to analyse implementation patterns across a substantial population. According to Othman Lebar (2007), quantitative research is inherently deductive, aiming to elucidate phenomena through empirical measurements that allow for statistical generalisation.

The assessment of HOTS elements in this study is grounded in the policies and rubrics established by the Curriculum Development Division (BPK) of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), encompassing the cognitive levels of applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating. This framework is aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) and its subsequent revision by Anderson et al. (2001), while being conceptually enriched by Ibn Khaldun's hierarchy of intellect (1958). Consequently, this study focuses exclusively on the cognitive dimension of HOTS; while the affective and psychomotor dimensions are not directly measured, they are acknowledged as vital supportive elements in reinforcing the cognitive aspects of instruction.

The research population comprises all IETs serving in National Secondary Schools (SMK) across Malaysia, totalling 38,502 individuals based on data from the Daily School Management Division, MOE. Utilizing the sample size determination guidelines by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and supported by Pallant (2010) as per shown in table 1 below, a total of 406 IETs were selected as respondents. A multistage cluster sampling technique was employed across five major geographical zones (Northern, Central, Southern, Eastern, and East Malaysia) to ensure balanced representation. The scope is delimited to IETs teaching lower secondary levels (Forms 1 and 2) in public national schools; private, international, and vocational religious schools were excluded to maintain curricular uniformity.

Table 1: Population and Study Sample Size.

No.	Zone	Population size	Sample
1	Northern	3,554	80
2	Central	3,424	89
3	Southern	3,123	77
4	Eastern	3,240	77
5	East Malaysia	3,872	83
Total numbers in Malaysia		38,502	406

The research instrument consists of a structured questionnaire adapted and validated from previous scholarly works (Syaubari, 2018; Zarkhuan Zainol, 2019) to ensure its suitability within the Sirah instructional context. The questionnaire comprises three main dimensions corresponding to the three instructional phases under investigation: (1) the Induction Phase (3 items), (2) the Developmental Phase (5 items), and (3) the Closure Phase (3 items), yielding a total of 11 items. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging

from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Item development was strictly guided by the Standard Curriculum and Assessment Document (DSKP) for lower secondary Islamic Education (Forms 1 and 2). The instrument encompasses key thematic units, including Pre-Islamic (Jahiliyyah) society, the biographical narrative of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the Hijrah, the establishment of the Islamic state, the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Khulafa' al-Rasyidin), as well as themes of fraternity (ukhuwwah), the construction of mosques, and the contributions of the Companions (Sahabah).

This delimited scope ensures rigorous alignment between the national curriculum and the instructional composition constructs under investigation. Content validity of the instrument was established through expert review involving a panel of Islamic Education specialists and curriculum experts prior to data collection. Reliability analysis was subsequently conducted on pilot data (n=30), yielding Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.928 for the Induction Phase, 0.954 for the Developmental Phase, and 0.927 for the Closure Phase, with an overall reliability index of 0.974. All values exceed the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Pallant, 2010; Uma Sekaran, 1992), thereby confirming the high internal consistency of the instrument. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed to account for non-returns, of which 406 were returned fully completed, representing a response rate of 90.2%. All participants were informed of the voluntary and confidential nature of their involvement, and data were collected in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, with formal research approval obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), KPM, and the respective State Education Departments (JPN) across all thirteen states involved.

This study examines the implementation of instructional composition across three primary phases: induction, developmental, and closure, anchored in the pedagogical frameworks of Al-Qabisi (1955) and Le Francois (1997). The primary analytical focus is to ascertain the extent to which each phase integrates HOTS elements within the Teaching and Learning (T&L) process. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics to compute mean scores and determine implementation levels. The interpretation of these mean scores was based on the weighted ranges proposed by Pallant (2010) and Field (2012) as shown in table 2. This comprehensive analysis aims to provide an overarching profile of HOTS-based instructional composition within the context of secondary school Sirah Education in Malaysia.

Table 2: Min Score and Interpretation.

Min Score	Interpretation
1.00 - 2.33	Low
2.34 - 3.49	Medium
3.50 - 4.00	Medium High
4.01 - 4.49	High
4.50 - 5.00	Very High

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Induction Phase Composition in Sirah Instruction

The descriptive analysis of the induction phase, encompassing lesson planning, the formulation of learning objectives, and the implementation of induction sets, yielded an overall high mean score of 4.03 (Table 3), indicating that Islamic Education Teachers (IETs) have relatively institutionalised these preparatory elements. However, an elemental analysis reveals a moderately high implementation pattern across its sub-components. This nuance suggests that while the foundational structure exists, the integration of HOTS within the induction phase has yet to achieve total consistency and comprehensiveness across all teaching practices.

Table 3: Summary of Variance and Mean Scores for the Implementation of the Induction Phase among Islamic Education Teachers in Secondary School Sirah Education

Item	Statement	Variance	Mean	Int.
B1	Instructional planning integrating HOTS	0.489	4.15	H
B2	Formulation of learning objectives integrating HOTS	0.465	4.10	H
B3	Implementation of induction sets integrating HOTS	0.627	3.80	MH
	Overall Induction Phase Integrating HOTS	0.521	4.03	H

The instructional planning dimension recorded the highest mean (M=4.15), indicating that Islamic Education Teachers (IETs) prioritise systematic preparation aligned with the DSKP. However, this planning remains predominantly content-centric and compliance-driven, risking a pedagogical paradigm that prioritises syllabus coverage over profound contextual adaptation and higher-order cognitive development. This challenge extends to the formulation of learning objectives (M=4.10), which, despite being measurable, often lack clear operationalisation across distinct cognitive levels. As posited by Ibn Khaldun (1958), learning must progress through structured stages; thus, failing to explicitly orient objectives toward HOTS restricts students to passive information reception rather than active meaning construction.

Conversely, the implementation of induction sets yielded the lowest score within this phase (M=3.80), suggesting that while teachers consistently initiate lessons, these activities are frequently leveraged for motivation rather

than as intellectually provocative catalysts for cognitive activation. Theoretically, these results corroborate the frameworks of Al-Qabisi (1955) and Le Francois (1997), which anchor instructional efficacy in clear, strategic initiation. Consequently, the induction phase must be reconfigured from a routine classroom procedure into a strategic mechanism that establishes cognitive continuity through critical inquiry and analytical focus.

Implementation of the Developmental Phase Composition in Sirah Instruction

The instructional developmental component evaluates HOTS integration during the core phase of the T&L process, yielding an aggregate mean score of 3.87 (moderately high). This suggests that while implementation is relatively effective, it has yet to reach an optimal and consistent threshold. A multifaceted analysis across five dimensions, content delivery, questioning techniques, enrichment, remedial interventions, and resource utilization, reveals a consistent moderately high implementation pattern (Table 4), indicating that HOTS has not been fully mainstreamed within the broader Sirah pedagogical architecture.

Table 4: Summary of Variance and Mean Scores for the Implementation of the Developmental Phase in Secondary School Sirah Education

Item	Statement	Variance	Mean	Int.
C1	Instructional content delivery integrating HOTS	0.464	4.15	H
C2	Implementation of questioning techniques integrating HOTS	0.55	3.9	MH
C3	Implementation of enrichment strategies integrating HOTS	0.678	3.82	MH
C4	Implementation of remedial interventions integrating HOTS	0.595	3.78	MH
C5	Utilization of educational resources integrating HOTS	0.679	3.67	MH
Overall Developmental Phase Integrating HOTS		0.598	3.87	MH

Instructional content delivery achieved the highest mean score (M=4.15), reflecting structured and interactive execution aligned with both classical and contemporary pedagogical tenets (Al-Qabisi, 1955; Le Francois, 1997). However, a critical tension persists between teacher-led delivery and the profound activation of student cognition, as higher-order thinking requires a shift from exposition to student-centred inquiry. This is further highlighted in questioning techniques (M=3.90), where successful HOTS integration is fundamentally determined by the cognitive quality and depth of inquiries, specifically "why" and "how" prompts, rather than lower-level factual recall (Wan Ahmad Ismail et al., 2016)

Furthermore, enrichment and remedial strategies often function as supplementary tasks rather than progressive cognitive challenges (Ibn Khaldun, 1958), while instructional resource utilisation recorded the lowest mean ($M=3.67$), indicating insufficient technological integration to scaffold HOTS in the PAK 21 era (Mohd Isa, 2013). The developmental phase must therefore be systematically structured around a cognitive hierarchy to transition Sirah education from procedural compliance toward profound internalisation.

Implementation of the Closure Phase Composition in Sirah Instruction

The instructional closure component evaluates HOTS integration during the final T&L stage, yielding a moderately high aggregate mean of 3.83 (Table 5). While closure elements are consistently implemented, the integration of HOTS at reflective and evaluative levels has yet to reach an optimal threshold. Within this component, the evaluation of student comprehension emerged as the highest-scoring dimension ($M=3.99$), followed by the synthesis of instructional content ($M=3.82$) and the reflective assessment of objectives ($M=3.68$).

Table 5: Summary of Variance and Mean Scores for the Implementation of the Closure Phase in Secondary School Sirah Education

Item	Statement	Variance	Mean	Int.
D1	Implementation of reflective assessment of objectives integrating HOTS	0.733	3.68	MH
D2	Synthesis of instructional content integrating HOTS	0.578	3.82	MH
D3	Evaluation of student comprehension integrating HOTS	0.496	3.99	MH
Overall Closure Phase integrating HOTS		0.601	3.83	MH

Evaluative assessment of student comprehension yielded the highest score in this phase ($M=3.99$), indicating that IETs prioritize monitoring student progress through conventional, content-centric modalities. However, effective evaluation must transcend rote-learning to measure analytical and creative capacities, ensuring rigorous alignment with high-level objectives (Muhd Zulhilmi Haron et al., 2019). This limitation is mirrored in the synthesis of instructional content ($M=3.82$), which, while providing structural clarity, often lacks student agency and fails to stimulate contemporary contextualisation as advocated by Le Francois (1997).

The reflective assessment of objectives recorded the lowest mean score ($M=3.68$), suggesting that reflection remains a superficial restatement of facts rather than a metacognitive mechanism for deep self-evaluation (Glaser, 1983; Aimi Hafizah, 2017). Consequently, the closure phase must be reconfigured from a routine conclusion into a sophisticated arena for high-level synthesis and internalisation. By orienting this phase toward metacognition and contextual

application, Sirah education can effectively bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical, real-world application.

Overall Summary of Descriptive Analysis Results

Comprehensive descriptive analysis (Table 6) indicates a moderately high implementation of HOTS-integrated instructional composition (M=3.90). While the induction phase exhibits high implementation (M=4.03), a marginal decline in the developmental (M=3.87) and closure (M=3.83) phases suggests that HOTS integration is more explicitly manifested during preparatory stages. This demonstrates that IETs prioritise planning, aligning with Le Francois (1997), yet struggle to maintain the continuity of cognitive progression throughout the Teaching and Learning (T&L) process.

Table 6: Overall Summary of Mean Scores and Variances for the Implementation of HOTS-Integrated Instructional Composition among Islamic Education Teachers (IETs) in Secondary School Sirah Education

Item	Statement	Variance	Mean	Int.
B	Induction phase integrating HOTS	0.521	4.03	H
C	Developmental phase integrating HOTS	0.598	3.87	MH
D	Closure phase integrating HOTS	0.601	3.83	MH
Overall findings of HOTS-integrated instructional composition		0.578	3.9	MH

These findings corroborate research asserting that effective thinking-based instruction is contingent upon the rigorous alignment of objectives, strategies, and assessment (Ghazali & Abd Rachman, 2012). Without systematic planning across all T&L phases, as emphasised by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2014), HOTS integration risks becoming a procedural routine with negligible impact on profound cognitive development. This reinforces Ibn Khaldun's (1958) theory of pedagogical progression, which necessitates a gradual and staged execution to cultivate complex thinking skills. Ultimately, as articulated by Al-Qabisi (1955), a structured instructional architecture is essential for guiding students toward deep-seated understanding. The synergy between induction, development, and closure must be viewed as an interconnected framework (Figure 1) rather than a mere sequence of steps. This justifies the need for the HOTS Composition-Based Sirah Instructional Planning Framework to ensure the holistic formation of higher-order cognitive faculties in secondary school Sirah Education.

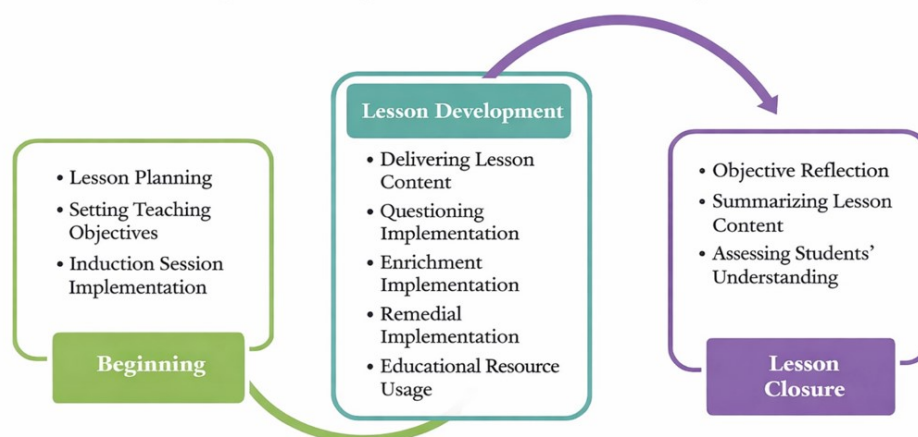


Figure 1: Development framework of Islamic History Teaching Planning Based on HOTS Composition

The HOTS Composition-Based Sirah Instructional Planning Framework

Grounded in the empirical findings of this study, the HOTS Composition-Based Sirah Instructional Planning Framework is proposed as a structured pedagogical model to systematically embed HOTS across all three phases of instructional composition. As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework comprises three interconnected components: (1) the Beginning Phase (Induction), (2) the Lesson Development Phase (Developmental), and (3) the Lesson Closure Phase, each operationalised through specific instructional elements aligned with HOTS cognitive levels per Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) and Anderson and Krathwohl (2001).

The Beginning Phase encompasses three elements: Lesson Planning, Setting Teaching Objectives, and Induction Session Implementation. Teachers are guided to formulate HOTS-oriented objectives targeting the higher cognitive levels of applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating, while the induction session functions as a deliberate cognitive activation mechanism employing provocative questioning and Sirah-based case studies rather than a mere motivational opener (Al-Qabisi, 1955; Ibn Khaldun, 1958).

The Lesson Development Phase comprises five elements: Delivering Lesson Content, Questioning Implementation, Enrichment Implementation, Remedial Implementation, and Educational Resource Usage. Teachers are guided to shift from content-centric exposition toward student-centred inquiry using Socratic "why" and "how" prompts, with enrichment and remedial activities structured as progressive cognitive challenges ensuring differentiated HOTS engagement. Strategic integration of digital tools and authentic Sirah-based

materials scaffolds complex thinking within the PAK 21 paradigm (Le Francois, 1997; Mohd Isa, 2013).

The Lesson Closure Phase encompasses three elements: Objective Reflection, Summarising Lesson Content, and Assessing Students' Understanding. This phase is reconceptualised as a metacognitive arena wherein teachers facilitate structured reflection requiring students to synthesise learning and evaluate the contemporary relevance of Sirah narratives. Assessment modalities are aligned with HOTS cognitive levels, measuring analytical and evaluative capacities rather than rote recall (Glaser, 1983; Le Francois, 1997).

Critically, the framework operates as an interconnected, cyclical architecture wherein each phase informs and reinforces the next, reflecting Ibn Khaldun's (1958) theory of graduated cognitive challenge as a prerequisite for cultivating complex thinking faculties. This evidence-based framework provides IETs a structured guide for designing pedagogically coherent Sirah lessons aligned with the national HOTS agenda. Expert validation and pilot implementation are recommended as essential next steps.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that HOTS-integrated instructional composition among IETs in Sirah Education is at a moderately high level overall. While the induction phase exhibits more robust implementation, the developmental and closure phases require further reinforcement to sustain higher-order cognitive development throughout the T&L process. These findings underscore that HOTS efficacy is not solely dependent on initial planning but requires sustained alignment between learning objectives, pedagogical strategies, and assessment modalities across all instructional phases. Consequently, this study proposes the HOTS Composition-Based Sirah Instructional Planning Framework as a systematic, evidence-based guide for IETs, strengthening synergy across all instructional phases to ensure HOTS cultivation occurs in a gradual and structured manner. The framework carries significant potential to elevate Sirah Education quality while supporting national aspirations to develop critical, analytical, and contextually aware students.

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