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COGNITIVE ASSESSMENT TESTS BASED ON HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS (HOTS) IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to design a cognitive domain assessment test grounded in Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) for elementary school students. The research employs a Research and Development approach using a modified version of the Dick and Carrey model tailored to the study's objectives. This research was carried out in three elementary schools spread across the city and district of Sukabumi for user or teacher validation. Meanwhile, the validity and reliability tests for twelve students (one to one) were carried out in one elementary school. The developed assessment tests consisted of 180 items, including 89 multiple-choice and 91 essay questions for fifth-grade students. The findings indicated that the HOTS-based assessment was 91% valid, falling into the good category. Reliability testing showed that the instrument was consistent, with a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.6. The discrimination index for both multiple-choice and essay items was good, with an average range of 0.40–0.69, and very good for items with an average weight between 0.70–1.00. Additionally, the distractor effectiveness in multiple-choice options was confirmed to be effective, as results exceeded 5%. The implications for teachers are that the HOTS-based assessment tests developed is suitable for use in evaluating learning. As for students, assessment tests can hone and train higher-order thinking skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning is a structured process planned, carried out, and assessed by teachers in a sequential manner to help students achieve the intended learning goals (Fanani & Kusmaharti, 2018). For effective and structured learning to take place, teachers must ensure that all learning components are fulfilled. According to Fanani & Kusmaharti (2018) the main components consist of learning objectives, , methods and strategies, media, assessment, and instructional materials. Therefore, appropriate instruments or tools are needed to support teachers in evaluating students' learning activities (Fadilah et al., 2021). The purpose of assessment tests is to help teachers identify students' progress, achievements, and areas requiring improvement. As stated by Yasa et al. (2020), assessment allows teachers to monitor the level of student development or achievement. Similarly, Fadilah et al. (2021) explain that assessment tests function as instruments to analyze and determine students' understanding of the learning materials delivered by the teacher. Test-based assessment tools are often used by teachers to evaluate learning outcomes through questions that stimulate creativity (Rohim, 2019). Students' ability to analyze problems and connect them with prior knowledge reflects their Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). HOTS involves complex thinking processes such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Yen & S. H. Halili, 2015), as well as critical, logical, and creative reasoning (Mahanal, 2019; Serevina et al., 2019). Thus, HOTS emphasizes students' capacity to think critically and creatively in solving problems, and such skills can be developed through well-designed HOTS-oriented questions.

Ramadhana et al. (2018) explain that HOTS involves problem-solving, linking new and prior knowledge, and finding creative relationships. These skills help students complete tasks and understand materials more effectively (Heong et al., 2012). HOTS includes critical thinking, knowledge transfer, and solution finding (Driana & Ernawati, 2019; Kwangmuang et al., 2021; Hendriawan et al., 2019). It also supports the development of knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Darmawan & Hilmawan, 2021) and should be nurtured from an early age Laihat (2020). By fostering innovative and independent thinking, HOTS enhances the quality of learning (Singh & Marappan, 2020; Suhaimi et al., 2021). According to Prahasti & Maulana (2022) students need HOTS to meet 21st-century skill demands. HOTS is essential for this era and serves as a key learning model (Mubarok et al., 2019). Rohim (2019) states that 21st-century skills involve creative, critical, innovative, collaborative, and communicative thinking, which can be measured using HOTS-based questions. Providing challenging, problem-based questions helps train these skills. Sofyan (2019) adds that HOTS tests can use various formats, including multiple choice, matching, essays, and explanation-based questions.

Based on initial research findings in six public elementary schools across Sukabumi City and District, it was found that many students lacked higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) due to limited use of HOTS-based assessments. Most existing assessment tools focused on lower-(LOTS) and medium-order thinking skills (MOTS), with only about 15% of test items reflecting HOTS, 45% LOTS, and 40% MOTS. This lack of emphasis on HOTS results in students being less trained to think critically and deeply. From interviews with 15 teachers, 13 agreed on the need to develop HOTS-based assessment tests (particularly for grade 5) to better train students' higher-order thinking, while 2 teachers considered such development unnecessary. Based on the identified gaps between ideal conditions and reality, action is needed to improve students' HOTS and train teachers to develop HOTS-based assessment tools. Such tools are essential for evaluating students' learning outcomes, as emphasized by Hanifah (2019), who stated that teachers require assessment instruments to measure students' understanding. Therefore, this study aims to develop HOTS-based assessment tests for fifth-grade students. Previous studies,

such as Fanani and Kusmaharti (2018), demonstrated that HOTS-based learning in grade 5 achieved about 91% complete learning outcomes, while Cahyaningtyas et al. (2020) found that HOTS-based assessments effectively measured targeted cognitive skills in grade 3 students.

Based on previous related studies, this research aims to: (1) identify and analyze the initial conditions of cognitive assessment tests in elementary schools, and (2) develop HOTS-based cognitive assessment tests for grade 5. The development includes 180 questions in multiple-choice and essay formats, representing a new contribution compared to earlier studies. The research benefits both students and teachers—students can enhance their higher-order thinking skills, while teachers can improve their creativity and competence in developing and applying HOTS-based assessments. Ultimately, this study is expected to help teachers understand current assessment conditions and routinely implement HOTS-based evaluations to foster students’ critical and creative thinking.

2. METHODS

This study employs the Research and Development (R&D) method, which involves systematically designing, developing, and evaluating educational interventions to improve learning practices and knowledge (Rahardjanto and Husamah 2022). According to Sugiyono (in Subari, 2022), R&D aims to create, refine, and test the effectiveness of educational products, while Gustiani (2019) emphasizes that R&D focuses on developing practical and efficient tools rather than only testing theory. This research adopts the Dick and Carey model (2015), which has been adjusted to suit the study’s context, encompassing stages such as needs analysis, product design, expert validation, and individual (one-on-one) testing. Each phase is conducted systematically and measurably to ensure product quality and alignment with the chosen design model (Suradika et al., 2022). In this model, the initial stage involves needs analysis to determine goals, analyze instruction, learners, and context, and set performance objectives. The next stage includes designing instruction through developing test items, strategies, and materials, followed by formative evaluation. Afterward, revisions are made to improve the design, and finally, a summative evaluation is conducted (Dikmen, 2019). The R&D in this study applies a modified version of the Dick and Carey model tailored to the research needs.

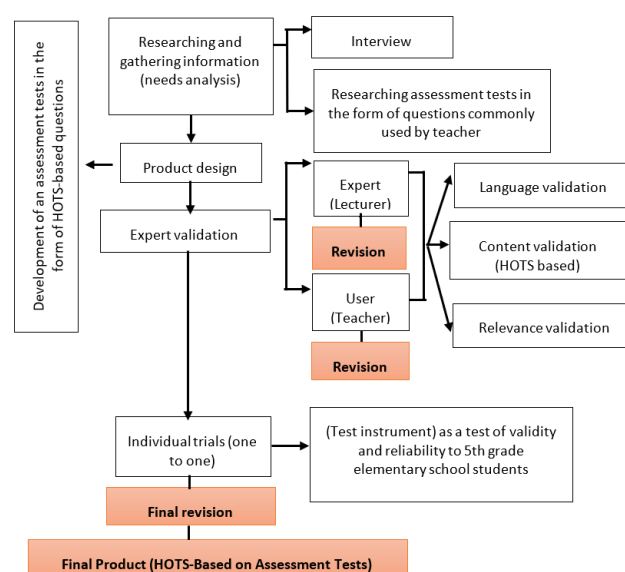


Figure 1. Modification of the Dick and Carey Model

This research was conducted in three elementary schools in Sukabumi for user validation, involving twelve fifth-grade students (six boys and six girls) selected based on varied cognitive levels and gender balance. According to Khaulani et al. (2020), students have diverse thinking characteristics. Data were collected using test and non-test techniques, including HOTS-based tests, interviews, and questionnaires. The questionnaire adapted from Fadilah et al. (2021) included expert and user validation (teachers) using a Likert scale (1–5) to assess language, content, and relevance to learning objectives. Instruments included validation sheets for content experts, subject experts, linguists, and user responses. Structured interviews were also conducted with teachers to explore their understanding of HOTS, commonly used assessment tests, and the need for HOTS-based instruments. Interviews were held three times: to collect initial data, analyze needs, and evaluate the developed HOTS-based assessment tests.

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. Quantitative data were derived from expert and teacher validation results, along with validity and reliability tests analyzed using SPSS 25. Meanwhile, qualitative data were obtained from expert and user feedback concerning the language, content, and relevance of the HOTS-based assessment. Validation sheets and Likert scale questionnaires (Sugiyono, 2020) were analyzed to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the developed HOTS-based assessment instruments.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The findings on the development carried out are as follows:

Needs Analysis

The first stage of this study involved collecting data on assessment tools commonly used by teachers through structured interviews with teachers from six elementary schools in Sukabumi City and District. Interviews were conducted twice: the first explored frequently used assessments, reference sources, and challenges faced by teachers; the second focused on teachers' understanding of HOTS, its importance, and the need for HOTS-based tools. Results showed that existing assessments were mostly LOTS (45%) and MOTS (40%), with only 15% HOTS-based. From 15 interviewed teachers, 13 agreed that developing HOTS-based assessment tests (especially for grade 5) was necessary to enhance students' HOTS.

Product Design

The development in this study focused on creating HOTS-based assessment tests for fifth-grade students. Prior to constructing the test items, a question blueprint was designed based on the relevant learning materials. As a result, the developed HOTS-based assessment consisted of 180 items, including 89 multiple-choice and 91 essay questions. Each question was created and aligned with the specific subjects covered in each lesson.

Expert and User Validation

After developing the HOTS-based assessment tool, each item was validated by experts and users, including linguists, HOTS content experts, and subject specialists. Validation used questionnaires to assess the tool's accuracy and quality, with revisions made based on validator feedback for low-rated items. Six validators participated (three lecturers and three teachers from different Sukabumi schools). Teachers also completed structured interviews about the tool's strengths, weaknesses, and feasibility. Validation results were analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

Table 1. Results of Validation by Experts (Lecturers)

| No. | Assessment Indicators | Total Score Achieved (TSe) | Expected Score (TSh) | Percentage | Ket. |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Language | 853,4 | 900 | 95% | Very Valid |
| 2 | Content (HOTS) | 900 | 900 | 100% | Very Valid |
| 3 | Relevance (Learning Material) | 717,5 | 900 | 80% | Quite Valid |
| Overall Expert Validation | | 2.470,9 | 2.700 | 92% | Very Valid |

Table 2. Results of Validation by User (Teachers)

| School | Assessment Indicators | Total Score Achieved (TSe) | Expected Score (TSh) | Percentage | Ket. |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Elementary School A | Language | 841,5 | 900 | 94% | Very Valid |
| | Content (HOTS) | 786 | 900 | 87% | Very Valid |
| | Relevance (Learning Material) | 798,65 | 900 | 89% | Very Valid |
| | Total | 2426,15 | 2.700 | 90% | Very Valid |
| Elementary School B | Language | 892,35 | 900 | 99% | Very Valid |
| | Content (HOTS) | 855,5 | 900 | 95% | Very Valid |
| | Relevance (Learning Material) | 900 | 900 | 100% | Very Valid |
| | Total | 2647,85 | 2.700 | 98% | Very Valid |
| Elementary School C | Language | 719,75 | 900 | 80% | Quite Valid |
| | Content (HOTS) | 785,75 | 900 | 87% | Very Valid |
| | Relevance (Learning Material) | 742,25 | 900 | 82% | Very Valid |
| | Total | 2247,75 | 2.700 | 83% | Very Valid |
| Overall User Validation | | 7291,75 | 8.100 | 90% | Very Valid |

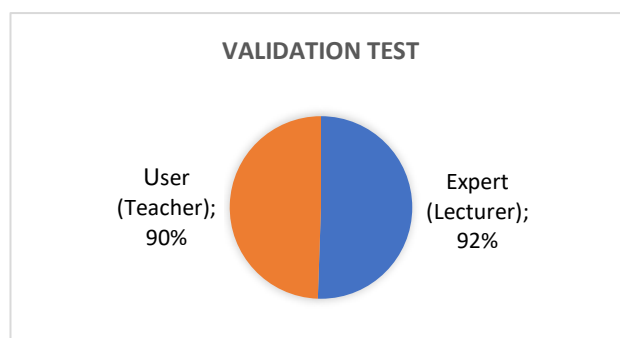


Figure 2. Validation Test Results

Individual Test (One-to-One)

After revisions, the developed HOTS-based assessment tool was tested on 12 fifth-grade students with varying cognitive levels, following Borg & Gall's guideline (in Sugiyono, 2020) for initial field tests. The test contained 180 HOTS-based questions (89 multiple choice and 91 essay). Results were analyzed to determine validity, reliability, discrimination, and distractor quality. Validity testing, conducted using SPSS 25, followed Sugiyono's (2020) criterion that an item is valid if its Pearson correlation value ≥ 0.3 . Reliability testing, also with SPSS 25, used Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient ≥ 0.6 indicating reliability (Sugiyono, 2020). Thus, valid and reliable instruments are those capable of consistently and accurately measuring the intended constructs.

Table 3. Results of Item Validity of Multiple-Choice Questions

| Question Item Number | Validation Test Results (Pearson Correlation) | | Decision | Critical r Value | Information |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------|----------|------------------|-------------|
| | Highest Validation Value | Lowest Validation Value | | | |
| 1 - 89 | 0,875 | 0,491 | > | 0,3 | Valid |

Based on the calculations presented in table 3, the validity test results indicate that the Pearson correlation value for the multiple-choice items exceeds the critical r value, thereby confirming their validity.

Table 4. Results of Item Validity Essay Questions

| Question Item Number | Validation Test Results (Pearson Correlation) | | Decision | Critical r Value | Information |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------|----------|------------------|-------------|
| | Highest Validation Value | Lowest Validation Value | | | |
| 1 - 91 | 0,980 | 0,609 | > | 0,3 | Valid |

Based on the data in Table 4, the validity test results reveal that the Pearson correlation value for the essay items is higher than the critical r value, indicating that the items are valid.

The reliability test in this study used IBM SPSS 25, with results based on Cronbach's Alpha values. Reliability was assessed for both multiple-choice and essay items.

Table 5. Reliability Test Results

| Cronbach's Alpha | Types of Question Items | Question Items | Decision |
|------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------|
| 0,989 | Multiple-choice | 89 | Reliabel |
| 0,991 | Essay | 91 | Reliabel |

The differentiation test aims to identify how well each item distinguishes between students with high and low cognitive levels (Son, 2019; Magdalena et al., 2021).

Table 6. Differentiating Test Results

| Item Analysis | Total of Question Items | Results | Decision |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Multiple-choice | 42 | 0,40 – 0,69 | Good |
| | 47 | 0,70 – 1,00 | Very Good |
| Essay | 25 | 0,40 – 0,69 | Good |
| | 66 | 0,70 – 1,00 | Very Good |

The distraction test results for multiple-choice options A, B, C, and D showed an average value above 5%, indicating that the distractors were effective and suitable for use.

DISCUSSION

The HOTS-based assessment tests was developed through four stages: needs analysis, product design, expert validation, and one-to-one testing. Validation involved three experts and teachers from different elementary schools who assessed language, HOTS content, and subject relevance. After being declared valid and feasible, the tool proceeded to the one-to-one testing phase. Based on Figure 2, expert validators scored 92% and teacher validators 90%, resulting in a combined validity score of 91%, categorized as “excellent.” These results align with Pulungan et al. (2021), who reported a very good validity level of 89.5%. Expert validation was conducted to gather feedback and ensure the instrument met conceptual, structural, and linguistic standards before limited trials (Fanani, 2018; Pandra et al., 2021; Serevina et al., 2019)

The product trial stage involved a one-to-one test. Based on Table 3, all 89 multiple-choice and 91 essay items showed Pearson correlations above 0.3, indicating validity. Reliability was also high, with Cronbach’s alpha values of 0.989 for multiple-choice and 0.991 for essays, exceeding 0.6. Thus, the HOTS-based assessment tool is valid and reliable. These findings align with studies by Putu et al. (2021) and Rahmi et al. (2021), which also found HOTS-based instruments to be highly valid, reliable, and feasible for learning assessment.

The differentiation test showed that 42 of 89 multiple-choice items were in the “good” category and 47 in the “very good” category. Similarly, 25 of 91 essay items were “good” and 66 “very good,” with scores of 0.40–0.70 considered good and 0.70–1.00 very good (Son, 2019). The distraction test for multiple-choice options A–D was effective, with an average score above 5%. These findings align with Yudha (2023), who emphasized that HOTS instrument testing enhances measurement accuracy, assessment quality, and students’ higher-order thinking skills.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the data obtained from expert and user validation, validity and reliability testing (one-on-one tests), differentiation tests, and distractor analysis, the HOTS-based assessment tests were found to meet the required standards. The implication for teachers is that the developed HOTS-based assessment tests are appropriate for evaluating learning in fifth-grade elementary students. For students, these assessments serve as a tool to enhance and practice higher-order thinking skills.

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