

# Implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills-Based Instructions, Teachers Competencies, and Learners' Critical Reading Abilities: Basis for an Intervention Program

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the implementation of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS)-based instruction, teachers' competencies, and learners' critical reading abilities in eight public secondary schools in Silang 2 District, Cavite, as a basis for an intervention program. A descriptive-correlational design was used, with purposive sampling involving 316 respondents composed of 4 supervisors, 48 school administrators, and 264 junior high school English teachers. A researcher-made, expert-validated and pilot-tested survey questionnaire assessed HOTS implementation, teacher competencies, perceived learners' critical reading abilities, implementation problems, and the proposed intervention program. Percentage, weighted mean, analysis of variance, and Pearson product-moment correlation were used. HOTS-based instruction was implemented across all domains (overall WM = 4.00), while teachers were generally competent (overall

WM = 4.01), with communication competence rated highest (WM = 4.24). Learners' critical reading ability was reported as evident (overall mean = 3.99), with evaluation and judgment obtaining the highest domain mean (3.88). No significant differences were found in HOTS implementation or teacher competencies across respondent groups. HOTS implementation was strongly and significantly related to learners' critical reading ability ( $r = .838$ ), whereas its relationship with teacher competencies and the relationship between teacher competencies and critical reading ability were weak and nonsignificant ( $r = .339$ ). Problems in implementation were encountered ( $M = 3.53$ ), particularly technological-skill and pedagogical-support limitations. The proposed intervention was rated highly suitable (4.44), highly acceptable (4.56), and feasible (4.19). The findings support sustained, aligned HOTS pedagogy, technology-focused professional development, and integrated critical reading interventions.

**Keywords:** *higher-order thinking skills, teacher competencies, critical reading, English instruction, intervention program, secondary education*

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education requires learners to do more than recall information. They are expected to interpret, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, communicate, and apply knowledge in unfamiliar situations. In English reading, these demands are especially important because meaningful comprehension requires readers to move from literal understanding toward inference, evaluation, and reasoned judgment. Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) therefore provide a useful instructional lens for designing learning experiences that engage students in cognitively demanding tasks rather than routine recall (Hess et al., 2009; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2023).

Within Philippine basic education, curriculum reforms have increasingly emphasized competency-based learning, critical thinking, and standards-aligned assessment. The MATATAG Curriculum and related Department

of Education policies reinforce the use of instruction and assessment that develop deeper thinking, while the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers frame teacher competence as central to effective classroom practice (Department of Education, 2016, 2020, 2023). These directions place English teachers in a critical position because their lesson planning, classroom delivery, questioning, reading tasks, and assessment practices directly shape opportunities for critical literacy.

Effective HOTS implementation depends on teacher competence. Pedagogical knowledge supports the selection and sequencing of cognitively demanding strategies; professional competence sustains reflective practice and continuous development; communication competence enables teachers to scaffold reasoning and dialogue; and technological competence expands access to interactive texts, digital resources, and technology-supported assessment. Research has similarly emphasized the importance of pedagogical decision making, professional learning, classroom communication, and purposeful technology integration in strengthening instructional effectiveness (Zou et al., 2024; Hattie & Yates, 2023; Wiranda & Ciptaningrum, 2024).

Critical reading represents an important learning outcome of such instruction. It requires learners to comprehend explicit and implied meanings, analyze relationships among ideas, evaluate claims and evidence, synthesize information, and monitor their own understanding. These processes are supported by explicit critical-reading and metacognitive strategies and by learning environments that require active reasoning rather than passive reception (Ness, 2020; Paige et al., 2024; Yang, 2020). However, studies in Philippine and comparable contexts continue to report weaknesses in inferential, analytical, evaluative, and metacognitive reading processes, indicating the need for more coherent instructional support (Abadiano & Quijano, 2023; Pascual & Alonzo, 2023; Torres & Malate, 2023).

Despite substantial literature on HOTS, teacher competence, and reading, the thesis identified a gap in studies examining these variables together within a single localized framework and using the combined evidence as a basis for intervention. The present study therefore examined the implementation of HOTS-based English instruction, teachers' competencies, and learners' critical reading abilities in Silang 2 District, Cavite; determined differences in the assessments of supervisors, school administrators, and teachers; tested the relationships among the major variables; identified implementation problems; and developed and evaluated an intervention program responsive to the findings.

## Literature Review

### *Higher-Order Thinking Skills-Based Instruction in English*

HOTS-based instruction requires deliberate alignment among learning objectives, instructional activities, classroom interactions, and assessment. The Cognitive Rigor framework integrates the cognitive processes of Bloom's revised taxonomy with Webb's Depth of Knowledge and emphasizes that demanding learning is defined not only by the verb used in an objective but also by the depth, complexity, and transfer required of learners (Hess et al., 2009). Anderson and Krathwohl (2023) likewise emphasize analyzing, evaluating, and creating as advanced cognitive processes that should be embedded in normal instruction rather than treated as occasional enrichment.

In English classrooms, HOTS can be developed through inquiry, problem-based tasks, interpretive discussion, open-ended questioning, authentic texts, performance tasks, and reflective writing. Brookhart (2023) argues that assessment of higher-order thinking should require students to explain reasoning, make judgments, and transfer learning rather than merely select recalled answers. Zohar and Dori (2019) similarly stress that higher-order thinking should be accessible to diverse learners when teachers provide appropriate scaffolding. Empirical work by Purwati et al. (2024) further supports integrating HOTS-oriented learning activities with assessment so that instructional design and evidence of learning reinforce one another.

### *Teacher Competencies for HOTS Integration*

Teacher competence is multidimensional and includes knowledge, instructional decision making, beliefs, motivation, self-regulation, and the capacity to adapt practice to learner needs. The COACTIV model positions

professional knowledge and motivational-affective characteristics as central elements of teacher competence (Baumert & Kunter, 2013). In the present study, this broader construct is represented through pedagogical, professional, communication, and technological competencies, reflecting the knowledge and skills required to design, facilitate, assess, and sustain HOTS-based English instruction.

Professional learning and collaboration remain important because competence must be continually developed as curricula, learner needs, and technologies change. De Guzman et al. (2021) found that professional learning communities can strengthen instructional practice through collaborative planning, mentoring, observation, and reflection when adequate time and institutional support are available. Flores and Dizon (2023) likewise linked professional competence with instructional effectiveness. Communication is also essential because teacher explanations, questioning, feedback, and classroom dialogue scaffold learners' thinking (Hattie & Yates, 2023), while technology integration can extend opportunities for collaboration, creativity, and deeper engagement when it is pedagogically purposeful rather than merely technical (Wiranda & Ciptaningrum, 2024).

### ***Learners' Critical Reading Abilities***

Critical reading is an active process that moves beyond decoding and literal comprehension toward interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Ness (2020) emphasizes that higher-order thinking is integral to reading comprehension, while Paige et al. (2024) identify inferential and critical processes as important components of deeper reading. In the study, critical reading is operationalized through literal and inferential comprehension, analytical and interpretive reasoning, evaluation and judgment, application and synthesis of ideas, and metacognitive awareness.

Metacognition is particularly important because readers must plan, monitor, evaluate, and adjust their strategies when comprehension breaks down. Yang (2020) reports that metacognitive awareness supports English reading comprehension among ESL/EFL learners. Local and related studies also indicate that learners may demonstrate acceptable literal comprehension while encountering greater difficulty with inferential, analytical, evaluative, and integrative tasks (Abadiano & Quijano, 2023; Pascual & Alonzo, 2023; Torres & Malate, 2023). These patterns justify instruction that simultaneously strengthens foundational comprehension and advanced reasoning.

### ***Challenges in HOTS Implementation and Professional Support***

The implementation of HOTS is influenced by more than teachers' intentions. Time, instructional materials, assessment tools, learner readiness, technological capacity, and opportunities for professional development can either enable or constrain classroom practice. Labrador and Sanchez (2023) reported that although teachers recognize the importance of HOTS, gaps in pedagogical and professional competence can limit consistent implementation. Ortega and Villamor (2024) likewise identified inadequate training and limited instructional resources as constraints affecting teachers' confidence and effectiveness in secondary English classrooms.

Professional support is therefore essential for moving from policy expectations to sustained practice. Coching (2025) reported that teachers encounter common challenges in teaching and learning HOTS across profile groups, reinforcing the need for system-level responses rather than isolated individual remedies. Technology is another important area because limited digital competence can constrain access to interactive tasks and feedback tools. These findings support intervention approaches that combine HOTS pedagogy, technology integration, assessment literacy, resource development, coaching, and continuous professional learning rather than addressing a single competency in isolation.

### ***Theoretical Integration and Research Gap***

The study is anchored on three complementary perspectives. Cognitive Rigor Theory explains how task complexity and higher cognitive processes can be intentionally combined in instruction (Hess et al., 2009). The COACTIV model of teacher professional competence explains the knowledge, skills, beliefs, and self-regulatory capacities teachers draw upon when making instructional decisions (Baumert & Kunter, 2013). Social

Constructivist Theory explains how learners develop more complex thinking through scaffolding, interaction, collaborative inquiry, and progressively independent performance within the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Together, these perspectives explain the pathway proposed by the thesis: teachers with the necessary competencies design and facilitate cognitively rigorous learning experiences, and learners develop critical reading through active engagement with demanding texts and tasks. The reviewed literature provides substantial evidence on HOTS instruction, teacher competence, and reading separately, but fewer studies examine their interrelationships in one district-level framework and then translate the findings into a locally evaluated intervention. The present study addresses that gap by integrating instructional implementation, competence, critical reading, implementation problems, and intervention evaluation in a single research design.

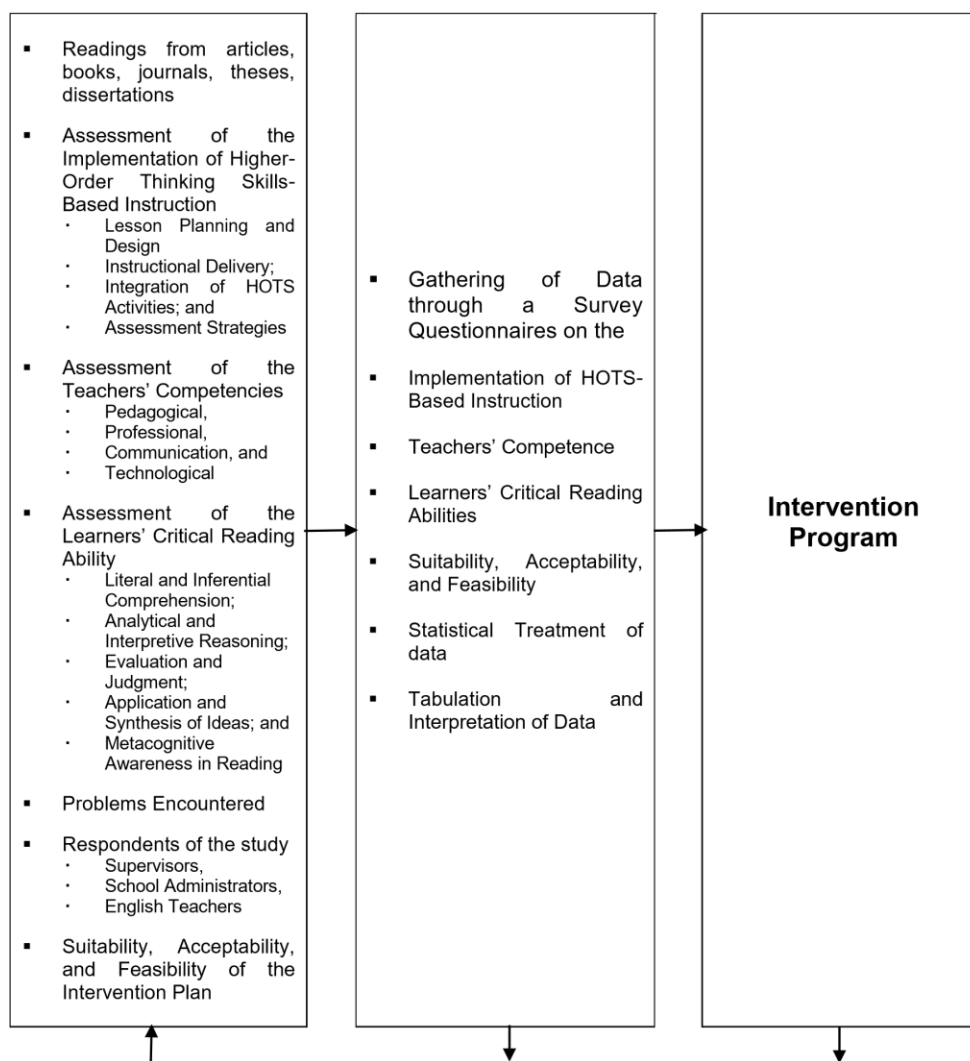


Figure 1. *Conceptual Paradigm of the Study*

## METHODS

### Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. It described the implementation of HOTS-based English instruction, teachers' competencies, learners' critical reading abilities, implementation problems, and the evaluation of the proposed intervention, while also examining relationships among the principal variables without experimental manipulation. This design was appropriate for identifying patterns of association that could serve as an empirical basis for instructional intervention (Fraenkel et al., 2020).

### Research Locale

The study was conducted in eight public secondary schools in Silang 2 District, Cavite: Bulihan Integrated National High School, Emilia Ambalada Poblete Integrated High School, General Vito Belarmino Integrated National High School, Kaong Integrated National High School, Lumil Integrated National High School, Malabag Integrated National High School, Munting Ilog Integrated National High School, and Ulat Integrated High School. The study focused on English instruction at the junior high school level and was conducted from October 2025 to May 2026.

### Participants and Sampling Technique

The population comprised 360 potential respondents from the selected schools and district context. The final sample included 316 respondents: 4 supervisors, 48 school administrators, and 264 junior high school English teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents with direct involvement in HOTS-based instruction, instructional supervision, school leadership, and critical reading development. The approach was consistent with the study's intention to obtain information from participants whose roles were directly relevant to the variables under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020; Nikolopoulou, 2023).

Table 1. *Distribution of Participants*

| Respondent Group      | Population (N) | Sample (n) |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------|
| Supervisors           | 10             | 4          |
| School Administrators | 50             | 48         |
| English Teachers      | 300            | 264        |
| Total                 | 360            | 316        |

### Research Instrument

A researcher-made survey questionnaire was developed from the study variables and related literature. The instrument gathered respondent profile information and assessed six substantive areas: implementation of HOTS-based instruction in English; teacher competencies; learners' critical reading abilities; problems encountered in HOTS implementation and teacher competence; and the suitability, acceptability, and feasibility of the proposed intervention program. HOTS implementation covered lesson planning and design, instructional delivery, integration of HOTS activities, and assessment strategies. Teacher competence covered pedagogical, professional, communication, and technological competencies, while critical reading covered literal and inferential comprehension, analytical and interpretive reasoning, evaluation and judgment, application and synthesis, and metacognitive awareness.

The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in English education, curriculum development, and educational research to establish content relevance and clarity. It was also pilot-tested before final administration to establish reliability and identify ambiguous items. The thesis did not report a numerical reliability coefficient; therefore, no coefficient is introduced in this article. A five-point Likert scale was used for the principal survey measures, with verbal interpretations corresponding to each construct.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher first secured approval from the Schools Division Office and the school heads of the eight participating public secondary schools. Coordination was then undertaken with administrators and teachers. Questionnaires were distributed to identified respondents, using Google Forms for teachers and hard-copy forms for school heads where applicable. Completed responses were retrieved, organized, encoded, checked, and subjected to statistical treatment. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the data-gathering process.

### Data Analysis

Percentage was used to describe respondent profile information, and weighted mean summarized HOTS implementation, teacher competencies, learners' critical reading abilities, encountered problems, and evaluations of the intervention program. Analysis of variance (F-test) examined differences among supervisors, school administrators, and teachers. Pearson product-moment correlation tested the relationships among HOTS implementation, teacher competencies, and learners' critical reading abilities. Statistical decisions were made at the .05 level of significance, following the analytical procedures reported in the thesis.

### Ethical Consideration

The study observed institutional permission, confidentiality, anonymity, and responsible data handling. Approval to conduct the research was secured from the Schools Division Office and participating school heads. Respondents' identities were protected in the reporting of findings, and responses were treated as confidential. The manuscript also contains an ethical-clearance appendix; however, because the source text available for this article does not state a clearance number or approving-board details, no such number is claimed here.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Implementation of HOTS-Based Instruction in English

Table 2. *Summary Assessment of HOTS-Based Instruction*

| Domain                         | Supervisors | School Admins. | Teachers | Composite WM | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------|--------------|----------------|
| Lesson Planning and Design     | 3.86        | 3.87           | 3.89     | 3.87         | Implemented    |
| Instructional Delivery         | 3.90        | 3.91           | 3.97     | 3.93         | Implemented    |
| Integration of HOTS Activities | 4.09        | 4.10           | 4.12     | 4.10         | Implemented    |
| Assessment Strategies          | 4.08        | 4.09           | 4.12     | 4.10         | Implemented    |
| Overall                        | 3.98        | 3.99           | 4.03     | 4.00         | Implemented    |

HOTS-based instruction was implemented across all four domains, with an overall composite weighted mean of 4.00. Integration of HOTS activities and assessment strategies obtained the highest composite means (both 4.10), followed by instructional delivery (3.93) and lesson planning and design (3.87). The pattern indicates that respondents perceived teachers as more consistent in embedding higher-order tasks and assessment practices than in systematically planning and delivering lessons around HOTS from the outset.

This finding supports the view that higher-order learning is strongest when objectives, activities, and assessment are aligned. Anderson and Krathwohl (2023) and Brookhart (2023) emphasize that demanding cognitive outcomes require both appropriate learning experiences and assessments that elicit reasoning, judgment, and transfer. The comparatively lower scores for lesson planning and instructional delivery therefore identify important leverage points for professional development even though all domains were rated as implemented.

## Teachers' Competencies

Table 3. *Summary Assessment of Teachers' Competencies*

| Competency Domain | Supervisors | School Admins. | Teachers | Composite WM | Interpretation |
|-------------------|-------------|----------------|----------|--------------|----------------|
| Pedagogical       | 4.15        | 4.15           | 4.18     | 4.16         | Competent      |
| Professional      | 3.98        | 3.99           | 4.04     | 4.00         | Competent      |
| Communication     | 4.23        | 4.23           | 4.25     | 4.24         | Very Competent |
| Technological     | 3.64        | 3.65           | 3.68     | 3.66         | Competent      |
| Overall           | 4.00        | 4.01           | 4.04     | 4.01         | Competent      |

Teachers were assessed as competent overall (WM = 4.01). Communication competence ranked highest and was rated Very Competent (WM = 4.24), followed by pedagogical competence (4.16), professional competence (4.00), and technological competence (3.66). The results indicate a strong foundation in classroom interaction and pedagogy but a comparatively greater need to strengthen technology-related practice and continuing professional engagement.

The result is consistent with literature positioning communication and pedagogical decision making as core to effective learning interactions (Hattie & Yates, 2023; Zou et al., 2024). The lower technological mean also parallels Wiranda and Ciptaningrum's (2024) observation that technology integration may remain at relatively basic levels unless teachers are supported by appropriate frameworks and professional learning. This makes technological competence an important focus for the proposed intervention.

## Differences Across Respondent Groups

Table 4. *ANOVA Results for HOTS Implementation and Teacher Competencies*

| Variable                             | F-computed | F-critical (.05) | Decision        |
|--------------------------------------|------------|------------------|-----------------|
| HOTS: Lesson Planning and Design     | 0.18       | 3.55             | Not Significant |
| HOTS: Instructional Delivery         | 0.42       | 3.55             | Not Significant |
| HOTS: Integration of HOTS Activities | 0.36       | 3.55             | Not Significant |
| HOTS: Assessment Strategies          | 0.28       | 3.55             | Not Significant |
| Competency: Pedagogical              | 0.09       | 3.47             | Not Significant |
| Competency: Professional             | 0.31       | 3.47             | Not Significant |
| Competency: Communication            | 0.11       | 3.47             | Not Significant |
| Competency: Technological            | 0.21       | 3.47             | Not Significant |

All computed F-values were below the corresponding critical values at the .05 level. Accordingly, the thesis accepted the null hypothesis for each HOTS implementation domain and for each teacher-competency domain. Supervisors, school administrators, and teachers therefore did not differ significantly in their assessments of how HOTS-based instruction was implemented or in their assessments of teachers' competencies.

The consistency of assessments suggests a shared perception of instructional practice across groups occupying different organizational roles. This finding is compatible with Coching (2025), who reported no significant differences in HOTS-related strategy use and perceived challenges across selected teacher profile variables. In practical terms, the absence of group differences supports district-wide rather than group-specific intervention in the domains identified for improvement.

## Learners' Critical Reading Abilities

Table 5. *Summary Assessment of Learners' Critical Reading Abilities*

| Domain                                | Weighted Mean | Interpretation | Rank |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|------|
| Literal and Inferential Comprehension | 3.78          | Evident        | 5    |
| Analytical and Interpretive Reasoning | 3.82          | Evident        | 3    |
| Evaluation and Judgment               | 3.88          | Evident        | 1    |
| Application and Synthesis of Ideas    | 3.83          | Evident        | 2    |
| Metacognitive Awareness in Reading    | 3.80          | Evident        | 4    |
| Overall mean                          | 3.99          | Evident        | —    |

The reported learners' critical reading ability as Evident overall, with an overall mean of 3.99. Among the five component domains, evaluation and judgment had the highest mean (3.88), followed by application and synthesis of ideas (3.83), analytical and interpretive reasoning (3.82), metacognitive awareness (3.80), and literal and inferential comprehension (3.78). The pattern suggests that evaluative and integrative processes were relatively stronger than foundational comprehension and self-monitoring.

The findings support a balanced approach to critical-reading instruction. Paige et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of inferential and analytical processes for deep comprehension, while Yang (2020) identifies metacognitive awareness as a key support for reading regulation. The comparatively lower ratings for comprehension and metacognition therefore indicate that higher-order activities should be accompanied by explicit comprehension scaffolds and metacognitive strategy instruction rather than assuming that advanced reasoning can develop independently of foundational reading processes.

## Relationships Among HOTS Implementation, Teacher Competencies, and Critical Reading

Table 6. *Significant Relationships Among the Major Variables*

| Variable Pair                                   | r     | Critical Value | Interpretation        | Decision     |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| HOTS Implementation – Teacher Competencies      | 0.339 | 0.707          | Weak; Not Significant | Accept $H_0$ |
| HOTS Implementation – Critical Reading Ability  | 0.838 | 0.666          | Strong; Significant   | Reject $H_0$ |
| Teacher Competencies – Critical Reading Ability | 0.339 | 0.666          | Weak; Not Significant | Accept $H_0$ |

The strongest relationship was between HOTS implementation and learners' critical reading ability ( $r = .838$ ), which exceeded the critical value of .666 and was interpreted as a strong, significant relationship. By contrast, the relationship between HOTS implementation and teacher competencies was weak and nonsignificant ( $r = .339$ ), as was the relationship between teacher competencies and critical reading ability ( $r = .339$ ). These findings led the thesis to reject the null hypothesis only for the HOTS implementation–critical reading relationship.

The results indicate that the classroom application of cognitively demanding strategies was more closely associated with perceived critical-reading outcomes than teacher competence considered by itself. This does not imply causation because the design was correlational, but it underscores the importance of translating competence into actual instructional practice. Hidayati et al. (2020) similarly connect critical thinking, critical reading, and reading comprehension, while the social-constructivist perspective explains how guided participation in demanding reading tasks can support progressively independent higher-level reasoning (Vygotsky, 1978).

## Problems Encountered in HOTS-Based Instruction

Table 7. *Problems Encountered in HOTS Implementation and Teacher Competence*

| Problem Indicator                                                    | Weighted Mean | Interpretation | Rank |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|------|
| Insufficient technological skills to support HOTS-based reading      | 3.76          | Encountered    | 1    |
| Limited pedagogical knowledge in implementing HOTS-based instruction | 3.67          | Encountered    | 2    |
| Challenges in providing meaningful feedback for HOTS-based tasks     | 3.63          | Encountered    | 3    |
| Lack of appropriate HOTS-based reading materials                     | 3.56          | Encountered    | 4.5  |

|                                                                            |      |                        |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------------------------|-----|
| Limited professional-development opportunities focused on HOTS instruction | 3.56 | Encountered            | 4.5 |
| Insufficient assessment rubrics aligned with HOTS and curriculum standards | 3.55 | Encountered            | 6   |
| Insufficient training in planning HOTS-based English lessons               | 3.44 | Encountered            | 7.5 |
| Learners' limited readiness for HOTS-based reading activities              | 3.44 | Encountered            | 7.5 |
| Difficulty facilitating higher-order discussions during reading lessons    | 3.37 | Moderately Encountered | 9   |
| Difficulty aligning HOTS objectives with prescribed curriculum standards   | 3.35 | Moderately Encountered | 10  |
| Overall                                                                    | 3.53 | Encountered            | —   |

Respondents reported encountered problems overall ( $M = 3.53$ ). Insufficient technological skills was the highest-rated problem ( $M = 3.76$ ), followed by limited pedagogical knowledge in implementing HOTS (3.67) and challenges in providing meaningful feedback for HOTS-based tasks (3.63). Resource and professional-development limitations were also prominent. These findings show that implementation constraints were interconnected across teacher preparation, technology, assessment, learning resources, and learner readiness.

The result corresponds with Labrador and Sanchez (2023) and Ortega and Villamor (2024), who identify professional-development and resource gaps as important barriers to sustained HOTS practice. The findings justify an intervention that does not focus on a single teaching technique but integrates planning, pedagogy, digital tools, feedback, assessment rubrics, instructional resources, and coaching.

### Evaluation of the Proposed Intervention Program

Table 8. *Overall Evaluation of the Proposed Intervention Program*

| Criterion     | Supervisors | School Admins. | Teachers | Overall                  |
|---------------|-------------|----------------|----------|--------------------------|
| Suitability   | 4.42        | 4.43           | 4.47     | 4.44 – Highly Suitable   |
| Acceptability | 4.55        | 4.56           | 4.57     | 4.56 – Highly Acceptable |
| Feasibility   | 4.16        | 4.18           | 4.22     | 4.19 – Feasible          |

The proposed intervention program was rated Highly Suitable (overall WM = 4.44), Highly Acceptable (4.56), and Feasible (4.19). Suitability ratings indicate that the program was viewed as aligned with junior high school reading needs, developmental levels, English competencies, critical-reading development, and HOTS. Acceptability ratings indicate strong stakeholder support for classroom implementation, teacher participation, instructional strategies, learner engagement, and cultural responsiveness.

Feasibility was positive but comparatively lower. Teachers' skills to implement the program received the strongest feasibility rating, while the availability of materials and resources received the lowest. This pattern is consistent with the thesis conclusion that the intervention can be implemented using existing capacities provided that logistical concerns are addressed. The result supports implementation accompanied by resource provision, time management, administrative assistance, and continuous monitoring.

### CONCLUSION

The study concludes that HOTS-based English instruction was already implemented across lesson planning, instructional delivery, HOTS activities, and assessment, but stronger alignment in planning and delivery remains necessary. Teachers possessed functional competencies, with communication and pedagogical competence emerging as strengths and technological competence representing the clearest development need. Learners' critical reading abilities were generally evident, with stronger performance in evaluation and judgment and comparatively lower ratings in literal and inferential comprehension and metacognitive awareness.

Assessments of HOTS implementation and teacher competence were consistent across supervisors, school administrators, and teachers. The significant strong relationship between HOTS implementation and learners' critical reading ability indicates that classroom practice is closely associated with critical-reading development,

whereas teacher competence alone was not significantly related to either HOTS implementation or critical reading in the reported analysis. Implementation was constrained by technological, pedagogical, feedback, resource, and professional-development challenges. The proposed intervention program was strongly supported in terms of suitability and acceptability and was considered feasible, provided that logistical and resource concerns are addressed.

### Recommendation

Schools should maintain strong alignment among lesson planning, instructional delivery, learning activities, and assessment so that HOTS is embedded consistently throughout English reading instruction. Continuous professional development should prioritize technological competence, HOTS pedagogy, feedback strategies, assessment-rubric development, and the selection or creation of appropriate HOTS-based reading materials. Teachers should integrate comprehension instruction, metacognitive strategy training, and higher-order reading tasks so that foundational understanding and advanced reasoning develop together.

The proposed intervention program should be implemented with adequate time, materials, administrative support, coaching, and monitoring mechanisms. School leaders and supervisors should use regular professional-learning activities to help teachers translate competence into classroom practice and to monitor effects on critical reading. Future research may examine additional variables identified in the thesis, including learner motivation, school resources, and instructional leadership, and may use larger samples or complementary qualitative and longitudinal approaches to clarify how HOTS implementation and reading development change over time.

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