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IMPROVING STUDENTS' INQUIRY SKILLS IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION THROUGH *HIKMAH* PEDAGOGY AND COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – Empowering students has become one of the primary goals of education in the 21st century. The current trend of education is moving towards student-centred and independent learning. The core success of student empowerment lies in the teaching and learning approaches used to engage students. Thus, the present study aims to examine how *Hikmah* pedagogy, a philosophical inquiry approach, empowers students through the development of a community of inquiry and students' inquiry skills in learning Islamic Education.

Method – This study employed a case study design on a Form 4 class comprising 24 students. The method of data collection involved classroom observation and students’ reflective journaling. Analysis of classroom discourse was conducted according to Bloom’s Taxonomy to identify higher-order levels of thinking engaged by the students. Meanwhile, students’ journals were analysed thematically to examine how *Hikmah* pedagogy empowered their thinking.

Findings – The study found that after four *Hikmah* pedagogy sessions, students’ thinking improved from lower-order to higher-order thinking (HOT) based on the students’ level of questions posed in the *Hikmah* sessions. Questions posed by the students also indicated an improvement in terms of the quantity and quality of the questions. Finally, analysis of the students’ journals showed that students found *Hikmah* pedagogy a provoking approach that continuously engaged them to be independent in their thinking. This is most useful when learning Islamic Education since it deals with many abstract concepts that require deep understanding.

Significance – Results of the study have shown that *Hikmah* pedagogy can empower students by improving their HOT, developing their inquiry skills and independent thinking, which directly assist in realising the objectives of Islamic Education, which are to understand, internalise and practise Islamic principles and values.

Keywords: Community of inquiry, *Hikmah* pedagogy, students’ critical thinking skills, higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), inquiry skills, independent thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and information in the 21st century are transferred in a manner that is dynamic yet challenging. Dynamic in the sense that it is exchanged without inhibition in a borderless world, yet challenging as individuals are compelled to identify and choose what is deemed as useful knowledge and discard what is deemed not. This suggests the importance of developing students’ critical thinking and reasoning abilities to make ethically and morally right decisions when encountering new information and knowledge in the virtual world. On this note, the emphasis on inquiry learning is imperative as it allows students to discover knowledge, making them more participative and proactive in the classroom. The process of discovering knowledge

entails that students will have to assess received knowledge, prioritise, relate it to previously acquired knowledge, reason and summarise it as new knowledge. Besides engaging students in in-depth discussions, inquiry learning also requires students to reason and think critically (Ghaemi & Mirsaed, 2017).

Several studies have shown that the use of inquiry learning in different subjects and levels of education have led to improved critical thinking and reasoning skills, including more independent and meaningful learning (Ghaemi & Mirsaed, 2017; Smallhorn et al., 2015; Sriarunrasmee et al., 2015). Most of these studies were in science, social studies and language-based subjects; yet, limited in studies focused on inquiry learning in Islamic Education (Alameddine & Ahwal, 2016; Dek Ngurah et al., 2019). Islamic Education is most appropriate to be taught using an inquiry-based approach since it deals with many concepts and principles that need to be translated into practice. To practice Islam in students' daily lives, they first need to deeply understand the concepts and internalise them. The current teaching of Islamic Education in schools is still relatively traditional to some extent. Simultaneously, in many instances, emphasis is placed on finishing the syllabus more than developing well-rounded and balanced Muslim students (Hussin et al., 2014).

It has also been found that the culture of critical thinking, reasoning and inquisitiveness have not been stressed in Islamic Education classes. Students were taught mostly using traditional and teacher-centred pedagogy, where the teacher is the sage on the stage, while students only listen to the teacher (Che Noh & Kassim, 2012). Thus, there is a need to break away from the traditional approach and introduce inquiry learning in Islamic Education. Among many inquiry-based pedagogies, the pedagogy of philosophical inquiry introduced by Matthew Lipman (Lipman, et. al., 1980) has been found to be quite useful in promoting reasoning and change of behaviour among students (Siddiqui et al., 2019). Lipman's pedagogy, known as philosophy for children (P4C), has been widely used in many countries for character building and civic and citizenship education (CCE) (Cassidy et al., 2018). Kizel (2016, p. 4) argued that 'P4C as a pedagogy of searching encourages students to pursue the understanding of meanings to facilitate their personal development for self-direction and capability.'

To suit the context of Malaysian and Islamic Education, Hashim adopted the P4C programme and introduced it as Hikmah pedagogy (Preece & Juhasni, 2014). A few studies have been conducted on

Hikmah pedagogy and found that it has the potential to develop critical thinking and provide a meaningful learning experience for students, similar to the pedagogy of P4C (Lafrarchi, 2017; Hashim et al., 2018). An exciting feature in *Hikmah* pedagogy that is unique and distinctive is the community of inquiry (COI) that it fosters. The COI is the dialogue or discussion between teacher and students, and between the students themselves that are emphasised by *Hikmah* pedagogy to explore and dissect an issue. The active participation of every student is necessary to ensure students' discovery of knowledge. The COI reflects the inquiry nature of *Hikmah* pedagogy. Hence, the present study aimed to explore students' experience in their engagement in *Hikmah* pedagogy during Islamic Education lessons and how it empowers students' thinking and improves their inquiry skills through a selected case study of an Islamic Education class.

Teaching of Thinking and Inquiry Based Learning

To promote higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) among students, two approaches are widely used in the teaching of thinking: infusion and stand-alone approaches. Some examples of the infusion approach are the Thinking Based Learning approach introduced by Swartz and Parks, Programme Instruction in the Learning of Thinking Skills Model (PILTS) or Intellectual Power Upgrades and Enhancements (PADI) developed by John Arul Phillips and Fatimah Hashim (Rajendran, 2001; Ismail et al., 2019). Examples of stand-alone approach are Edward de Bono's Cognitive Research Trust package (CoRT), Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking; Feuerstein's Enrichment and Philosophy for Children (P4C). However, some of these stand-alone approaches can also be infused, such as Six Thinking Hats and P4C. There is a long-standing debate in the teaching of thinking movement regarding the two approaches in terms of transferability of thinking skills to other contexts and the effectiveness of the programmes or approaches (Swartz & Perkins, 1990).

The shared aim of any thinking programme and instructions on whether critical or creative thinking is to arrive at a good decision and solve problems. All these approaches are based on constructivism, but most focus on solving the problem or making good decisions using tools of thinking and acquiring the content rather than engaging in the act of inquiry. The act of inquiry is more concerned with identifying the problem or issue, defining its concept and meaning, and evaluating arguments for responding or resolving the issue in different contexts. Although inquiry learning approach is focused on a problem, the

emphasis is not merely on seeking a solution that works. Instead, it becomes meaningful learning as it focuses on the discovery process and the students' independence to recognise the issue, deliberate and find the best solution to it. An important point to note is that not all teaching thinking approaches are considered inquiry-based teaching, particularly when concerned with the end product rather than the process.

***Hikmah* Pedagogy and Community of Inquiry**

Among the many thinking approaches, one which is geared towards inquiry learning, is the Matthew Lipman's P4C programme. Lipman's program is more suitable for western cultural context. To suit the Malaysian and specifically Muslim context, *Hikmah* pedagogy was developed and modelled based on P4C (Lafrarchi, 2017). *Hikmah* pedagogy incorporates discussions about common and central concepts and how they are viewed and practised in Muslim society. Nevertheless, *Hikmah* pedagogy strives to retain the main feature of P4C in its procedure to engage students in the act of inquiry, forming a community of inquiry (COI) (Preece & Juhasni, 2014).

Hikmah pedagogy, like P4C, can be taught using either the stand-alone or infusion approach. To select a suitable approach, it is essential to examine the whole curriculum since both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses. The lesson is taught directly in the stand-alone approach, focusing on particular concepts or leading ideas in the teacher's self-developed material and content. This approach requires additional time and is usually allocated as an additional programme in the existing curriculum (Swartz & Perkins, 1990). On the other hand, the infusion approach integrates the teaching of thinking lesson with normal subjects in school. In the context of teaching Islamic Education in a crowded curriculum like the Malaysian system of education, the best way to introduce *Hikmah* pedagogy is by infusing it in relevant Islamic Education lessons. Since there is a need to transform the way Islamic Education is being taught in Malaysian schools, *Hikmah* pedagogy is considered a suitable approach since it offers meaningful Islamic education to Muslim students.

According to Naji and Hashim (2017), the inquiry nature of *Hikmah* pedagogy is characterised by six elements, which are (i) interest, (ii) emotion, (iii) critical thinking, (iv) values, (v) creativity and (vi) community. *Hikmah* pedagogy uses stimuli to trigger discussions. The stimuli or stories are in various forms such as text, visual or

audio to attract students' interest to engage actively in the discussion. The stimulus usually concerns an issue that is close, relevant, yet controversial to them. *Hikmah* pedagogy is not only confined to critical thinking alone but also involves students' emotions in their attempt to understand the story. The critical thinking that students engage in also involves deep and profound thinking. The stories or stimuli also include hidden values that require students to identify, draw them out and evaluate them closely. Engaging in good thinking also leads to students being creative since they need to relate the story to their real lives—imagining what could have been beyond what already is. Finally, the dialogue and process of inquiry takes place and involves every member of a community. Together they explore the issue and concept(s) in the story, build their arguments collectively to arrive at a consensual conclusion while being guided and facilitated by the teacher. This process enables students to shift from a teacher to a student centred form of learning where students' voices are heard, and everyone's views and opinions (including the teacher's) are taken into account. In their experience of *Hikmah* pedagogy, previous studies have shown that students “learn to think for themselves; the pedagogy improves students' reasoning skills, creativity, personal and interpersonal skills, develops moral or ethical understanding (*adab*), and consequently, enables the practice of the principles and spirit of Islam in their daily lives” (Hashim, 2013, p. 41–47).

In a COI, students ask and answer questions based on their understanding, experience and reflections of the material they have discussed. When students are engaged in a dialogue session, they will present their views, argue and defend their opinion while processing the information. This process can only happen when students respect others' views by listening, exchanging and discussing their views together. Here, the class is viewed as a community where each member has an equal opportunity to question and offer their views on the topic of discussion; hence, the class is known as a community of inquiry (COI) (Nikolidaki, 2010). Therefore, by introducing the COI in the classroom, students engage in higher-order thinking (HOT) discussion, where the teacher facilitates the discussion of the community. The inquiry process begins by selecting a stimulus embedded with concepts and issues that require students to discover meaning through reflection, elaboration and explanation of their views. The stimulus is to generate questions from students and trigger an active discussion. Here, the teacher, as a facilitator, probes students' answers to strengthen or intensify the discussion. In this regard, the teachers' role is not merely to transfer knowledge but rather to help

identify better alternatives and eventually lead students to a possible conclusion. This way, wisdom or good judgement is developed among students, hence the name *Hikmah* (wisdom) pedagogy.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the exploratory case study design as it is concerned with answering the ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions, which is how *Hikmah* pedagogy helps empower students and improve their inquiry skills (Creswell, 2013). The class in the study was treated as a case, indicating the case study’s appropriateness as its research design. The exploratory case study was approached qualitatively since the question of how requires a deep understanding of a phenomenon or, in this case, a process—the experience of a group of people involved in the process.

Case and Context

The case identified was a class of Form 4 which consisted of 24 students in a public secondary school. *Hikmah* pedagogy was implemented by one of the researchers who was also the class *ustaz* (Islamic Education teacher) trained in *Hikmah* pedagogy (with two training levels: basic and advance levels). *Hikmah* pedagogy was used in four Islamic Education lessons that lasted for an hour for each class, which were conducted during Islamic Education classes. The lessons were video recorded to capture *Hikmah* discussions.

Stimulus Materials and Procedure

The topics discussed in the COI were taken from form four Islamic Education syllabus. The selected topics included two topics from *Tilawah al-Quran* (al-Quran recitation) and two topics from *Adab and Akhlak Islamiyah* (Islamic etiquette and ethics). Materials used in *Hikmah* pedagogy were stories and posters. The list of topics, materials and main ideas discussed in the *Hikmah* inquiry are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

List of Topics in Hikmah Pedagogy

Session no.	Area	Topic	Material	Main Idea
1	<i>Tilawah Quran</i>	Guidance belongs to Allah (<i>Hidayah milik Allah</i>)	<i>Surah al-An'am: 125</i>	The significance of guidance in one's life
2	<i>Tilawah Quran</i>	Characteristics of believers (<i>Ciri-ciri Mu'min yang berjaya</i>)	<i>Surah al-Mu'minun:3</i>	The significance of avoiding unbeneficial deeds
3	<i>Adab/Akhlaq</i>	Etiquette of maintaining public facilities (<i>Adab menjaga kemudahan awam</i>)	A poster	Anti-vandalism campaign
4	<i>Adab/Akhlaq</i>	God's remembrance as remedy for the heart (<i>Zikir pengubat hati</i>)	A poster	The scope of <i>zikr</i> (God's remembrance) in one's life

In the first session, students were given the translation of *Surah al-An'am: 125* as a stimulus. Students had to study the text to understand the translation of the verse, and then think of ideas or concept(s) related to it. The translation of the verse is as follows:

“Those whom Allah (in His plan) willeth to guide,- He openeth their breast to Islam; those whom He willeth to leave straying,- He maketh their breast close and constricted as if they had to climb up to the skies: thus doth Allah (heap) the penalty on those who refuse to believe.”

The students' discussion in this session was about Allah's guidance (*hidayah*) and its significance, as well as how to ease the hearts of Allah's vicegerents.

The translation of *Surah al-Mu'minun: 3* was discussed in the second session. The translation of the verse is as follows: “And they who avoid vain talk.”

Students' discussion in this session revolved around the concept of vain talk or "*lagha*" and its effects on individuals and society, factors leading to an individual committing unbeneficial deeds and how to avoid them.

Meanwhile in Session 3, students were given a poster that looked like graffiti but was actually vandalism of public utility. Students were given time to think and come up with ideas about the poster. They eventually came up with many ideas, such as vandalism, creative art, and graffiti. The discussion in this session revolved around graffiti and vandalism, factors that lead someone to commit vandalism, and how graffiti can be used to spread *da'wah* and attract tourists.

In the final session, a poster with a picture of prayer beads (*tasbih*) was used to initiate students' discussion. Students discussed remembering and praising God (*zikr*), whether verbally or non-verbally. Students also discussed how to encourage people to always remember Allah, strengthen their *iman* (faith) and the effects of *zikr* in one's heart. Overall, the discussion in the final session was less interactive than in previous sessions, probably because it was during the last class of the day. Students were also tired since they just came back from a sports' day rehearsal.

Data Collection Method

The case study employed two methods of data collection, which were classroom observation and students' reflective journaling. The four *Hikmah* sessions were video recorded and discussions were transcribed for the purpose of identifying the level of questions that students posed in the discussions. The art of questioning is considered a complex process and an essential part of a philosophical inquiry approach (Lipman et al., 1980). In the COI, students were given the stimuli, namely translations of verses from the *al-Quran* (*al-An'am*; 125 and *al-Mu'minun*: 3) and posters showing acts of vandalism and prayer beads (*tasbih*). Students posed questions from the stimuli, and subsequently discussions ensued from the list of questions.

Each student in the class was asked to write a reflective journal at the end of every session. The students' journals enabled researchers to understand and analyse their reflections and experience after going through the *Hikmah* sessions. The students were also encouraged to comment and provide feedback on their experience of the COI sessions by answering a few guided questions prepared by the teacher in the journal.

Methods of Analysis and Credibility of Data

This study used two types of data, namely students' questions during the four class sessions and students' journals. Thus, different data analysis methods were also employed. All students in the class were assigned codes, while the students' attendance was recorded in all the four sessions. Apart from this, every student who contributed questions in each session was also documented. Students' questions which were posed during the sessions were analysed by categorising them according to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (older version) - the cognitive domain to determine the higher and lower order thinking (HOT and LOT) nature of the questions (Abdullah, 2014). The analysis of levels of questions that showed an improvement reflected the students' level of inquiry.

Six students' journals were selected and analysed in this study, as only six journals from 24 students were completed for all four *Hikmah* sessions. The students' journals were read, then their journal entries were categorised based on several main ideas. These main ideas were clustered into categories, which were later placed under broad themes. The six students were assigned codes, S1 to S6, for ease of identification. Both types of analysis were reviewed by two experts, of which the inter-rater reliability for the analysis of levels of questions was 100 percent, while the thematic analysis of the students' reflective journals received 98 percent agreement.

Analysis and Findings on Levels of Students' Questions

Students' inquiry skills can be measured by examining classroom discourse. In the present study, they were measured by analysing the levels of questions posed by the students in every session. A sample of the students' LOT and HOT questions are presented in Table 2 based on Bloom's level of taxonomy. These sample questions were selected from all the four sessions posed by different students.

Table 2

Sample of Students' Questions

No.	Student/Class Session	Student's Question	Level of Question
1.	S9/Session 1	What is the meaning of 'hidayah'?	Knowledge
2.	S10/Session 1	What are the characteristics of a person who receives 'hidayah'?	Comprehension
3.	S23/Session 4	How do we do <i>zikr</i> that can benefit us in this world and the hereafter?	Application
4.	S24/Session 2	Why do people tend to commit 'vain talk' even if they know they are wasting their time?	Analysis
5.	S1/Session 3	How can a graffiti artist make use of his talent properly?	Synthesis
6.	S24/Session 3	Should the government be blamed for not providing a space for artists to express their talent?	Evaluation

Students' attendance in the four sessions ranged from 20 to 24 students, as presented in Table 2. Although not all students contributed to the questions in each session, all students actively participated in all the four sessions. In Session 1, only 13 out of 20 students participated in asking questions. In this session, 53.3 percent of the questions asked by students were identified as LOT category, while 26.7 percent were under the HOT category, and 20.0 percent were considered irrelevant. A total of 15 questions were discussed in Session 1. Generally, the number of questions under the LOT category was higher than that of the HOT category, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3

Student Codes, LOTS and HOTS Questions in Hikmah Sessions

Level of Question	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4
	Student Code			
LOTS				
Knowledge	S19, S15, S7	-	S24, S12, S4, S15	S9, S15, S16, S19
Comprehension/ Understanding	S10, S17, S7, S11, S9	S23, S3, S14, S19, S13, S2,	S17, S11	S4, S23
Application	-	S1, S2, S20	S9	S1
Total LOTS	8	9	7	7
HOTS				
Analysis	S9, S4, S18, S4, S6	S12, S17, S4, S21, S24	S10, S16, S6, S18, S19, S9, S17	S16 (2), S3, S17, S7
Synthesis	-	-	S1	-
Evaluation	-	S15, S11, S3, S16	S5 (2), S13, S24, S21	S12, S10, S7, S4, S19, S23
Total HOTS	5	9	13	11
Irrelevant	S14, S12	-	-	S14, S17
Total no. of questions	15	18	20	20
No. of students with questions	13	16	16	14
Student attendance	20	24	24	20

In the second session, the total number of questions raised was 18. Table 3 shows that 16 students (67.7%) participated in asking questions in this session. There were 18 questions asked by 16 students, where Student 2 and Student 3 asked two questions each. There were nine LOT questions out of the 18 questions. Six questions were from the Comprehension or Understanding category, and three questions from the Application level. The other nine questions were from the HOT category. Five questions were from the Analysis level, and four questions were from the Evaluation level. In this session, the number of questions in the HOT category equalled the number of questions in the LOT category.

In the third session, there were also 16 students (66.7%) who participated in asking questions. A total of 20 questions were asked whereby S5, S9, S17 and S 24 asked two questions each. There were seven LOT questions in this session; four from the Knowledge level, two from the Comprehension level, and one from the Application level. On the other hand, the HOT category had 13 questions with seven questions from the Analysis level, one question from the Synthesis level, followed by five questions from the Evaluation level. It was indicated that this session generated a higher number of HOT questions by 65.0 percent compared to the LOT category of 35.0 percent, as presented in Table 3.

For the final session, a total of 20 questions were raised by 14 students. S4, S17 and S23 asked two questions each, while S16 and S19 asked three questions each. In brief, there were seven questions (42.5%) under the LOT category, comprising four questions from the Knowledge level, two questions from the Comprehension level, and one from the Application level. In comparison, the HOT category consisted of 11 questions (52.1%), where six questions were on Analysis and five questions on Evaluation. There were two questions (10.0%) asked in the session which were considered irrelevant and neither applicable to the HOT nor LOT category. With regard to the number of questions asked, it was expected that students had taken more than two sessions to actively participate since they were still adjusting to the procedures of *Hikmah* and the new way of learning, which was geared towards student-centred learning and independent thinking, unlike their other classes (Juhani, 2012).

The overall results showed that the HOT category level was slightly higher than the LOT category at 52.1 percent and 42.5 percent, respectively (Table 3). A total of 11 questions were asked from

the Knowledge level, 15 questions from the Comprehension or Understanding level, and five questions from the Application level. Meanwhile, 22 questions were from the Analysis level, one question from the Synthesis level, and 15 questions from the Evaluation level for the HOT category. Table 3 also showed that Knowledge questions had increased slightly throughout the four sessions of *Hikmah*, while Comprehension or Understanding and Application level questions declined after Session 2, which contributed to a total of 31 LOTS questions. In contrast, there was a slight change in the Analysis and Synthesis questions in Session 3, while Evaluation level questions increased consistently. This is an interesting point to note because as the level of LOTS questions remained constant, the level of HOTS questions increased especially when more questions were generated from the Evaluation level, which is higher than the Analysis level. In other studies a significant increase was found in the move from LOTS to HOTS, with more sessions of *Hikmah* (Wan Yusoff & Hamzah, 2016). Perhaps, if the *Hikmah* sessions were extended, a significant increase of HOTS could also be observed.

Table 4

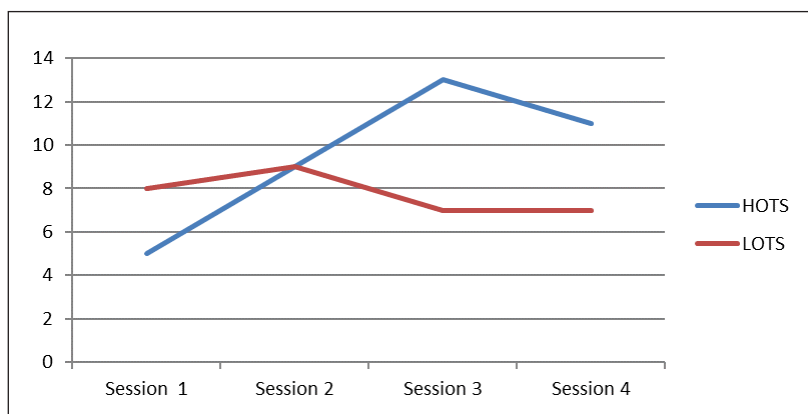
Level of Students' Questions in All Sessions

Level of Question	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Total
LOTS					
Knowledge	3	0	4	4	11
Comprehension/ Understanding	5	6	2	2	15
Application	0	3	1	1	5
Total no. of LOTS	8 (53.3%)	9 (50.0%)	7 (35.0%)	7 (35.0%)	31 (42.5%)
HOTS					
Analysis	5	5	7	5	22
Synthesis	0	0	1	0	1
Evaluation	0	4	5	6	15
Total no. of HOTS	5 (26.7%)	9 (50.0%)	13 (65.0%)	11 (55.0%)	38 (52.1%)
Irrelevant	2 (20.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (10.0%)	4 (5.5%)
Total no. of questions	15	18	20	20	73

Figure 1 shows the trend of LOTS and HOTS questions according to the number of sessions. The trend showed that except for the fourth session, the level of HOTS questions increased sharply, while the level of LOTS questions declined until Session 3, where they remained constant. Interestingly, the level of HOTS questions was initially lower than the LOTS questions in Session 1. After that both shared an equal number of questions in Session 2. The LOTS level questions then remained constant, whereas the HOTS level questions increased slightly in Session 3 before experiencing a slight decline in the final session. However, the level of HOTS questions were still relatively higher than the LOTS questions throughout the *Hikmah* sessions. Furthermore, there was also an increase in the total number of students' questions from the first until the last *Hikmah* session, which indicated the increase in students' HOTS and inquiry skills.

Figure 1

Trend in LOTS and HOTS Questions According to Sessions



In support of the levels of students' questions categorised under LOTS and HOTS, students' reflective journals were also used to explore their experience of *Hikmah* pedagogy.

Analysis and Findings of Students' Reflective Journals

The analysis of students' journal entries resulted in eight main ideas, which were later categorised into two broad themes: the nature and characteristics of *Hikmah* pedagogy. *Hikmah* pedagogy's nature was described in four main ideas: meaningful learning, freedom

to express ideas and opinions, active, and enjoyable. Meanwhile, Hikmah pedagogy's characteristics were explained in its inquiry and thinking-based characteristics, namely improved thinking – analytical and creative, collaborative and open-mindedness. The nature and characteristics of *Hikmah* pedagogy are closely related, and these were confirmed by the students' experiences.

Students admitted that they were able to understand the lessons in a more profound and meaningful way. For instance, S1 said, "I now realise that zikr helps increase our iman (faith) and is not only to be able to articulate verbally." In support of this point, S3 also said, "I was able to understand the meaning of zikr and acquire a deep knowledge about it." S2 also commented on the third session, "I was able to differentiate between graffiti and vandalism. Vandalism gives a negative impact on society and nation; it distorts the image of our country in the eyes of foreigners." On this point, S5 also agreed because she found that, "I never realised that meaning is very important. All this while, I thought any writing on the wall is vandalism, but this depends on how we define what vandalism means, and what graffiti means." This finding corroborated previous studies that highlighted the meaningful learning students experienced in *Hikmah* (Hashim et al., 2018; Lafrarchi, 2017).

Besides the deep and meaningful learning that they experienced in *Hikmah* sessions, unlike their previous Islamic Education lessons, they also agreed that Hikmah pedagogy freed them to think independently. They were confident in sharing their ideas as they were not constrained by any reference or textbook, which was expressed S6,

"The old method, in my opinion, is like we are too confined to the textbook, the answers that we have to provide are based on what has been written in the textbook, and we cannot provide our answers. But in the new method, we can think more freely to find the answers, our answers."

S5 also agreed on this point when she said, "Because before this, in other classes, maybe I feel I am not part of the discussion, but with this method, everyone was giving their opinion. It is not important whether it is correct or wrong as long as it is an idea." S3 agreed with S5 and S6, and added that,

"it means we do not need textbooks to inform us whether it is correct or not. But we need help from

the teacher to guide us to find the answer with the old method. From my point of view, it is pressure for the students to find the correct answers. But now, when I give my opinion, if it is wrong, it is okay, and I accept it; if it is right, then I feel good. We can actually say whatever is in our minds.”

Furthermore, S1 also reiterated that the sessions allowed him to be more open to different views since everyone was free to express their views, and he had to consider everyone’s views before he refuted or dismissed them. So he found that this made everyone participate actively in the discussion.

“In my opinion, the learning method you showed us was okay compared to the usual learning method that has been carried out in normal class. Because in this class, we feel more open and free to express ideas, and that every individual takes part in the learning session. Everyone participates out of their willingness. For me, I want the class to know my views. I feel good about doing this.”

While S1 mentioned that being open to different views benefitted him; he realised that his friends’ answers were acceptable and valuable, which made him revise his answers. He said,

“I can accept them, because like you said in class, nobody is right or wrong because all opinions can be acceptable. So, I think I can cooperate with others like I can accept others’ answers, and then I revise my answer, and then I improve my argument. I also feel confident.”

These journal entries described the nature of *Hikmah* which is democratic, as it provided space and equal opportunity for the members of the COI to express their differing perspectives (Wan Yusoff & Hamzah, 2016).

As a result of the nature of *Hikmah* that allowed students to express their ideas and views freely, S1 highlighted that students participated actively. S4 also opined that,

“The procedure of the session makes everyone participate actively because you encourage us to ask

questions. In other classes, we normally ask questions when we do not understand, but in this class, it is different. We can ask any questions we want. And for me, I ask questions because I want the class to hear the answers that I have. The ideas that I have.”

Apart from students’ active participation, they also found the sessions to be enjoyable and more lively. S4 also echoed that, “It makes the classroom alive, and I enjoyed it.” S2 admitted that “This is an enjoyable experience because it is a new method of learning,” which was supported by S3 when he said, “It is not boring but entertaining and enjoyable ...” Based on students’ experience, they felt that *Hikmah* sessions were different from their regular Islamic Education classes because of the nature of *Hikmah* which is democratic, student-centred, and promotes deep thinking and meaningful learning. These point to the nature of *Hikmah*, which is suitable to be used to teach subjects like Islamic Education, Moral Education, and Civic and Citizenship Education because the objectives of these subjects are not just for the students’ knowledge, but also for them to think, do and act upon their knowledge (Hashim et al., 2014).

The second theme reiterated that *Hikmah* pedagogy improved thinking in four ways: analytical, critical, collaborative, and open-minded. Students agreed that the nature of *Hikmah* materials helped enhance their thinking and made them more creative as they had to think outside the box.

S5 said,

“The students in the class get more input with this new method because everyone puts forward their ideas. Thus, there are changes in the way of thinking. In the normal class, they only focus on the written material. But, with this method, the ideas are from our mind. Before giving the answer, firstly, we have to analyse the question and think about what the question requires us to answer; we give the answers based on our understanding. Besides, we have many views. Thus there are many answers to a question.”

S1 concurred with S5 when he asserted that “this class makes me think hard. Very hard because I cannot just accept someone’s views. The teacher will ask why I agree or disagree. So, I have to be ready. I have to think on my own.” These responses indicated that each

member of the COI has to be prepared to defend their views with counter-arguments.

Moreover, S3 agreed that, “It gives more knowledge and trains us to enhance our thinking technique.” At the same time, S1 said, “The topics discussed require students to formulate lots of questions based on one picture or text. We have to think outside the box.” These journal entries showed that the students were also required to think differently, imaginatively and creatively before they could come up with questions. Based on this line of reasoning, it is clear that analytical and critical thinking are involved together with creative and divergent thinking.

Besides improving students’ thinking, *Hikmah* sessions have also encouraged students to work together. S5 explained that “students are committed in the discussion. When we discuss in a group, we will have more choices to achieve an agreement—a mutual agreement.” Collaboration in the discussion has taught the community about mutual understanding of various ideas in the discussion. S6 said that “giving incorrect answers when discussing was not a big problem for us, as long as we can give good arguments to support our answers, then we are fine.” S2 agreed and elaborated that, “Sometimes, when we want to make sure our answers are accepted by others, some of my friends will help to support my ideas, especially if we have similar ideas. We work together in building our arguments and answers.”

Indirectly, this particular characteristic of *Hikmah* enabled students to be more open-minded. Concerning this point, S4 said that in the sessions, he has to “accept all views and ideas. The variety of ideas have to be accepted. I have to evaluate them. Even if I do not agree or do not like some ideas, I cannot just reject them. I have to accept them first, then analyse and evaluate them.” S3 also said that he “learned to be more open-minded in the sessions because of so many different ideas.” S2 agreed on this point when she elaborated,

“The discussion allows me to see different views from different angles. Some I have never thought of. But they were interesting and made me think harder. After the lesson on zikr, I tried to look at the poster differently to have a feel of how others may view it.”

The analysis of students’ reflective journals showed a favourable response from the students towards the *Hikmah* sessions, particularly

in its ability to develop students' reasoning and HOT skills, and to offer a meaningful learning experience. The latter can help students to appreciate the principles and values of Islamic education, eventually guiding them to internalise and practise Islamic teachings in their daily life.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It is interesting to note that *Hikmah* pedagogy like other inquiry based pedagogies, has been successful in improving students' reasoning and HOT skills. Most studies that are focused on inquiry based pedagogies such as problem-solving in science and mathematics teaching have also shown an increase in students' critical, reasoning and HOT skills when interventions were conducted for a certain period of time (Baskoro et al., 2018; Yasemin & Sare, 2020). This was evident in this study that the students' level of questions had progressed from LOT to HOT during the four *Hikmah* sessions. The study also found that while students' LOT questions declined, students' HOT questions increased throughout the *Hikmah* sessions. This result concurred with Juhasni's study (2012) where she also found that after a few sessions of *Hikmah* pedagogy, there was an increase in students' HOTS and quality of questions, i.e. students' inquiry skills. The analysis of students' LOTS and HOTS based on their level of questions showed that *Hikmah* pedagogy had improved students' HOTS and inquiry skills to some extent, in spite of only four sessions. This was because the HOTS category of questions asked by the students received a higher percentage than the LOTS category. The inquiry skills also improved as students asked more questions of a higher level within the HOTS category, which was illustrated by the higher number of questions at the Evaluation level than the Analysis level in the fourth *Hikmah* session. The findings also showed that students were able to generate a higher number of questions in the last *Hikmah* session as they became more familiar with the pedagogy and procedures, and the practice of asking questions. This also indicated that with more consistent practice of *Hikmah*, it is possible for students' HOTS and inquiry skills to be genuinely and continuously improved, as found in previous studies (Hashim et al., 2014; Wan Yusoff & Hamzah, 2016).

From the students' experience shared in the reflective journals, they found that *Hikmah* sessions improved their thinking in terms of analytical, critical and creative aspects. They also found that it helped them be more collaborative and open-minded in their thinking and

perspectives. Similarly, a study by Hussien et al. (2017) also found that open-mindedness, tolerance and mutual respect were some of the distinctive values promoted among students when Hikmah pedagogy was used to teach Civic and Citizenship Education. The collaborative work of exploring meanings and values have driven students to be more open-minded and respectful of their differing views. These are some of the common characteristics developed by *Hikmah* pedagogy due to the COI process that is engaging and meaningful to students' learning (Hashim et al., 2018). These types of thinking, which are ethical and empathetic, can also be categorised as caring thinking. Uluçınar and Arı (2019) argued that the pedagogy of philosophical inquiry, such as *Hikmah* pedagogy, helped develop higher-order thinking and emotional maturity among students, eventually leading to caring thinking. In relation to this point, a study that examined the successful development of students' good character through an academic culture at an Islamic school is worthy to be mentioned (Isnaini et al., 2020). The study is notable since a closer examination of the *academic culture* that was practised in the school reflected the characteristics of a *Hikmah* pedagogy through its inquiry based learning using *scientific discussion*. It was found that the students were continuously engaged in *scientific discussions* of a dialogical nature, which resembled *Hikmah* pedagogy sessions because the discussions enabled the students to be more critical, inquisitive, open-minded, and respectful of the differences in opinion. This finding further strengthens the need for a pedagogy like *Hikmah* pedagogy as it can help to develop students' reasoning and critical thinking. Consequently, it can assist to mould students with good character as cognitive and emotional maturity may lead to ethical and spiritual thinking.

From this study, it can also be observed that materials in the *Hikmah* sessions played an important role in stimulating students' participation in the discussions. Furthermore, selecting the topic and an appropriate time for the sessions must also be considered to ensure that students can be actively involved in the sessions. This has been emphasised by Wan Yusoff and Hamzah (2016) in their explanation about the importance of the careful selection of materials and stimuli for *Hikmah* sessions. This is the responsibility of the teacher that requires due attention to ensure that the material is appropriate to the topic of the lesson and stimulating enough to trigger students' interest and inquiry skills. Students' sharing of their experiences have also revealed that *Hikmah* sessions offer meaningful learning, encourage active participation and freedom of expression of students' views—a

democratic and enjoyable form of learning. Students also found that the *Hikmah* sessions have improved their thinking, individually, collaboratively and made them more open-minded. This indicated the potential of *Hikmah* pedagogy in cultivating thinking as a disposition where its frequent use can be extended outside the classroom to their daily lives. Learning Islamic Education no longer remains theoretical because the students would have the disposition to recognise how to use the knowledge learnt and apply it in their lives as practising Muslims (Jasmi & Tamuri, 2007; Che Noh et al., 2013).

CONCLUSION

It is a well-known fact that education plays a vital role in developing individuals to be responsible and dynamic members of society, particularly in the 21st century. However, a more significant point that needs to be raised is regarding the nature of education. What kind of education would help produce the type of persons needed to develop and lead the nation in this challenging era? Given the contemporary demands of time, students need to be empowered to meet any challenges confronting them. Thus, this study aimed to examine how *Hikmah* pedagogy can help empower students in Islamic Education classes. The findings revealed that *Hikmah* pedagogy have brought about positive changes to the students' learning, such as improved HOTS and inquiry skills. In addition, the students have become more open-minded, analytical and creative in their thinking besides being more independent learners. This is in contrast to, for example, students in regular classes, who tend to memorise facts from textbooks, where learning is teacher-centred and examination-oriented. The students during the *Hikmah* sessions were more focused on giving reasons, counter arguments and spontaneous responses. They appreciated *Hikmah* pedagogy because of the meaningful learning that they had experienced. Thus, this is most useful for learning Islamic Education as it deals with many abstract concepts that require a deep understanding. It is hoped that students who acquire a deep understanding of Islamic Education will translate what they have learnt into practice, and consequently internalise the Islamic principles and values gathered.

It is also interesting to note that although this study was primarily focused on enhancing students' inquiry skills, findings have revealed that there were elements of caring thinking such as open-mindedness, tolerance and respect that were reflected among the students during the sessions. Hence, it would be interesting to explore how the pedagogy

can help develop ethical, caring and spiritual thinking among students, benefiting Islamic Education teachers including other subjects. If Hikmah pedagogy is implemented consistently in other subjects as well and at all levels of education, it will inevitably help empower students and eventually realise the noble aims of the NEP.

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