

The HOTS Approach to Teaching Understanding Culture, Society, and Politics: A Study of Pedagogy in Sociocultural Education

*Jurich P. Mojello¹, Rael Christopher O. Plaza²

¹Department of Education, Placer, Surigao del Norte, Philippines

²Graduate School, North Eastern Mindanao State University, Tandag City, Surigao del Sur, Philippines

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100600377>

Received: 13 June 2026; Accepted: 18 June 2026; Published: 24 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to analyze the implementation and effectiveness of teaching and learning Understanding Culture, Society and Politics (UCSP) using Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) approach. Specifically, it determined the extent to which Grade 11 teachers implemented HOTS, described the perceived effectiveness of HOTS-based instructional approaches in supporting students' UCSP learning, and tested whether HOTS implementation was significantly related to perceived instructional effectiveness. This study employed quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. Data were gathered from 327 Grade 11 students and 9 UCSP teachers from four public senior high schools in Placer, Surigao del Norte, Philippines. Using researcher-developed and validated survey questionnaires, the reliability coefficient for the student questionnaire was 0.95 and the teacher questionnaire was 0.96. Mean, verbal interpretation, and correlation analysis were used to analyze the data. Results showed that teachers often implemented HOTS-based instruction, with questioning technique and classroom discourse rated highest, while scaffolding of thinking processes was rated lowest. Students rated the HOTS-based instructional approaches as effective, while teachers strongly agreed that these approaches were effective. The association between frequency of HOTS implementation and perceived instructional effectiveness, however, was not significant. The results indicate that the effectiveness of HOTS pedagogy is not only based on the frequency of using the strategies, but also on the level of task design, scaffolding, integration of assessment and feedback for the learners.

Keywords: Higher-order thinking skills, UCSP, instructional effectiveness, sociocultural education, HOTS pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Learning should go beyond rote memorization and should focus on complex analysis, evaluation, and reflective judgment in order to help build students' critical awareness. In the subject Understanding Culture, Society and Politics (UCSP), which is based on culture, social structures, political participation, identity, inequality and civic responsibility, this is especially relevant. It is not enough, then, that pedagogy should encourage recall but should also enable students to explore the sociocultural realities through evidence, perspective and critical thinking.

In recent years, the significance of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) has been validated in the educational literature and the difficulties in its classroom implementation have also been acknowledged. Pedagogies can be planned and executed appropriately to foster higher order thinking, for example, problem-based learning, Socratic questioning, authentic tasks, and performance assessment. Research also indicates that teachers might struggle to get HOTS from the curriculum intention to the classroom implementation due to their lack of preparation, resources, assessment pressure, and the abstractness of the sociocultural concepts.

A consistent lack of mastery was identified in the Placer National High School District in the competency that asks learners to examine the functions and importance of education in society in the local context. This means

that the learning of students might still be superficial and many lack the understanding of the impact of education on social structures, opportunities and participation. The current research looks at this issue by describing how the HOTS-based instruction was implemented, seeing how effective it was in classrooms, and determining if the frequency of implementing the instruction was significantly related to the perceived effectiveness in the UCSP classrooms.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the implementation and perceived effectiveness of HOTS-based instructional approaches in teaching UCSP. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the extent to which Grade 11 teachers implement higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) based on questioning technique, learning task design, classroom discourse and interaction, assessment integration, and scaffolding of thinking processes?
2. What is the perceived level of effectiveness of HOTS-based instructional approaches in supporting students' UCSP learning in terms of analytical depth in deconstructing social systems, evaluative judgment of culture and politics, problem solving in relation to social issues, perspective taking and empathy, and argumentation rigor?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the extent to which Grade 11 teachers implement HOTS and the perceived level of effectiveness of the instructional approaches in supporting students' UCSP learning?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive-correlational research method using a quantitative approach. The descriptive component was employed to determine how well HOTS was implemented in the schools, as well as the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of HOTS-based instructional approaches in supporting their learning of UCSP. A correlational approach was used to find out if there was a significant relationship between the HOTS implementation and perceived effectiveness of instruction. Since the study was correlational, it examined associations between variables and did not attempt to establish causal relationships.

The study was carried out in four public Senior High Schools (SHS) in Placer District, Municipality of Placer in Surigao del Norte. The respondents were 327 Grade 11 students who were taking UCSP classes and nine (9) UCSP teachers. Because of the small population size and easy accessibility, complete enumeration was used for the teacher-respondents. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation of student-respondents across schools and strands. The total population of Grade 11 UCSP students was 478, while the sample size of 327 was computed using Slovin's formula with a five percent margin of error.

The main instruments used were the survey questionnaires developed by the researchers which were formulated according to the research objective and the indicators of the implementation and perceived effectiveness of HOTS. The teacher questionnaire assessed the level of HOTS implementation in terms of questioning technique, learning task design, classroom discourse and interaction, assessment integration, and scaffolding of thinking processes. The student effectiveness scale evaluated students' perceived effectiveness in the areas of analytical depth, evaluative judgment, problem solving, perspective taking, and argumentation rigor, while the teacher effectiveness scale evaluated perceived effectiveness in the same areas. Five social science and education experts validated the instruments for face and content validation. A pilot test was conducted in a similar public senior high school environment, and the Cronbach's alpha values were excellent, with 0.95 for the student questionnaire and 0.96 for the teacher questionnaire.

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the pertinent offices and collaborating schools. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. The accomplished questionnaires were checked, coded, and analyzed. The descriptive results on HOTS implementation and perceived effectiveness were analyzed using mean and verbal description, while the relationship between HOTS implementation and perceived instructional effectiveness was tested using correlation analysis.

RESULTS

The results are presented according to the three research questions of the study.

Table 1: Extent of Implementation of Higher-Order Thinking Skills Among Grade 11 Teachers

Parameter	Mean	Verbal Description
Questioning Technique	4.38	Always
Learning Task Design	4.16	Often
Classroom Discourse and Interaction	4.29	Always
Assessment Integration	4.16	Often
Scaffolding of Thinking Processes	4.02	Often
Overall	4.20	Often

Table 1 shows that Grade 11 teachers often implemented HOTS-based instructional approaches, with an overall mean of 4.20. Questioning technique obtained the highest mean, followed by classroom discourse and interaction. These results suggest that teachers frequently used open-ended questioning and discussion-based strategies. However, scaffolding of thinking processes obtained the lowest mean, indicating that students may still need stronger guided support as they move from recall and comprehension toward analysis, evaluation, and creation.

Table 2: Perceived Level of Effectiveness of HOTS-Based Instructional Approaches in Supporting Students' UCSP Learning

Indicator	Student Mean	Student Rating	Teacher Mean	Teacher Rating
Analytical depth in deconstructing social system	3.11	Effective	4.40	Strongly Agree
Evaluative judgment of culture and politics	3.09	Effective	4.13	Agree
Problem solving in relation to social issues	3.14	Effective	4.31	Strongly Agree
Perspective taking, empathy, and understanding diverse viewpoints	3.09	Effective	4.38	Strongly Agree
Argumentation rigor in defending concepts with evidence	3.14	Effective	4.24	Strongly Agree
Overall	3.11	Effective	4.29	Strongly Agree

Table 2 presents the perceived level of effectiveness of HOTS-based instructional approaches as rated by students and teachers. Students rated the approaches as Effective, with an overall mean of 3.11. The highest student ratings were recorded in problem solving and argumentation rigor, while evaluative judgment and perspective taking obtained the lowest means. Teachers, on the other hand, strongly agreed that the approaches were effective, with an overall mean of 4.29. The difference between student and teacher ratings suggests that teachers may view HOTS-based instruction as more effective than how students experience it during actual learning.

Table 3: Relationship Between HOTS Implementation and Perceived Instructional Effectiveness

HOTS Implementation Parameter	Relationship with Effectiveness Indicators	Interpretation
Questioning Technique	No significant relationship across effectiveness indicators	Not Significant
Learning Task Design	No significant relationship across effectiveness indicators	Not Significant
Classroom Discourse and Interaction	No significant relationship across effectiveness indicators	Not Significant
Assessment Integration	No significant relationship across effectiveness indicators	Not Significant
Scaffolding of Thinking Processes	No significant relationship across effectiveness indicators	Not Significant
Overall Pattern	Across the twenty-five correlation tests, no statistically significant relationship was found between frequency of HOTS implementation and perceived effectiveness.	Not Significant

Table 3 shows that the extent of HOTS implementation was not significantly related to perceived instructional effectiveness. Across the implementation parameters, the relationship with the effectiveness indicators did not reach statistical significance. This suggests that more frequent use of HOTS-labeled strategies did not automatically correspond to higher perceived effectiveness in supporting students' UCSP learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the HOTS-based instruction is already in the classrooms of UCSP, especially in the form of questioning and classroom discourse. Practices are significant because they are necessary for students to communicate about social realities, describe cultural patterns, examine institutions, and provide evidence to support ideas. But the lower rating for scaffolding implies that the implementation of HOTS at the level of guided cognitive support may be less than at the level of questioning. That is, teachers can often pose higher-order questions, and students might still require more explicit modeling, step-by-step thinking, feedback about their learning along the way, and explicit ground rules for self-evaluation.

The efficacy findings also show a gap between the perception of the efficacy of students and teachers. The students rated the HOTS based instructional approaches as effective yet at moderate level as compared to the higher rating by the teachers. This could mean that teachers are aware of the intent and structure of their own strategies, and students evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies as they consider whether they are clear in helping to understand the difficult concepts in the UCSP. Lower ratings by students in evaluative judgment and perspective taking indicate that these might be ones that would benefit from more continuous practice as they involve analyzing evidence, contrasting positions, and forming well-informed judgments about complex social and political matters.

One of the most significant findings is that there is no relationship between the implementation of HOTS and instructional effectiveness. It means that frequency isn't sufficient on its own. While questioning, discourse, tasks, assessment, and scaffolding are common features of a teacher's repertoire, these will not be effective unless they are cognitively aligned, supported, and connected to students' lived experiences. This reinforces the worry that HOTS teaching can turn into a buzzword instead of a meaningful pedagogical practice when activities seem to be higher order, but lack sufficient scaffolding, assessment clarity and feedback.

CONCLUSION

First, teachers of Grade 11 were more likely to use instructional practices based on HOTS in UCSP. The technique of questioning and classroom discourse was the most frequently practiced areas and scaffolding

thinking processes was the least practiced area. This means that teachers already employ some strategies that can encourage thinking, but a more organized strategy is required to steer students through complex thinking.

Second, the HOTS-based teaching methods were felt as effective in improving students' UCSP learning. The approaches were rated as effective by students and even more so by teachers. Results indicated that the use of HOTS-based instruction is valuable for increasing analytical depth, problem solving, perspective taking, and argumentation skills, however there was a slight difference between the student and teacher rating suggesting the need to match teacher intention with student experience.

Third, the amount of HOTS implementation was not significantly associated with instructional effectiveness. This does not imply that the more frequently one uses the HOTS strategies, the more effective the perceived effectiveness will be. The frequency of implementation doesn't seem to be as important as the quality of implementation, the clarity of scaffolding, feedback, alignment of assessment, and relevance of learning tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

UCSP teachers can support the quality of the implementation of HOTS by making thinking processes visible to students. In addition to posing higher-order questions, teachers can offer models, examples, thinking guides, rubrics, and feedback that will assist students with analysis, evaluation, and defense of ideas.

School administrators have the option to offer continued professional development about HOTS pedagogical approaches in the field of sociocultural education. The training must go beyond merely addressing the concepts of HOTS, but enable teachers to create tasks for learning and to scaffold abstract concepts, to evaluate argumentation, and to relate UCSP lessons to local realities.

Localized UCSP resources that feature case studies, community-based issues, discussion prompts, and performance tasks can be developed to support curriculum planners in helping teachers. These resources can be used to avoid superficial engagement in HOTS, and can facilitate in-depth engagement with social and political concepts.

Classroom observation, student tasks and qualitative interviews may be conducted in the future to confirm the reported implementation with classroom practice and observable cognitive benefits. Additional samples can also be used to determine if the same pattern can be found in other districts or regions.

Limitations Of the Study

The study is based on the answers given in the questionnaires by teachers and students; thus, the results cannot be directly extrapolated to the actual classroom situation. The study was descriptive-correlational, so the results indicate that there are relationships between variables, but are not able to show the cause-and-effect relationship between the implementation of HOTS and student learning outcomes. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported survey data and did not incorporate classroom observations, student-output analysis or teacher interviews, which might not fully reflect actual classroom practice or observed cognitive benefits. Only those teachers available at the selected locale were included in the number of teacher-respondents because of the limited number of teachers available for the UCSP. Since this is just the result of schools that were involved in the study, it is not advisable to draw a conclusion beyond the schools studied without testing in other larger settings.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher checked the ethical standards in the conduct of the study. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the respective offices and schools involved. The respondents were briefed regarding the purpose of the study, the voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses. Consent and/or assent were obtained from teacher-respondents, and appropriate consent and assent procedures were followed for student-respondents. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and the data were used only for academic and research purposes. All referenced works were properly acknowledged, and the results were

presented in an objective manner. AI tools were used only to refine the language, organization, and formatting of the text. The analysis, interpretation, and scholarly responsibility remain with the authors.

Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the conduct, analysis, interpretation, and publication of this study.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents. Aggregated results are presented in this manuscript, and related data may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to applicable ethical and institutional restrictions.

REFERENCES

1. Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001). A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. Longman.
2. Bloom, B. S., Engelhart, M. D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook I: Cognitive domain. Longmans, Green and Co.
3. Brookhart, S. M. (2023). How to assess higher-order thinking skills in your classroom (2nd ed.). ASCD.
4. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2025). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
5. Department of Education, Placer National High School District. (2023). Least learned competency report [Unpublished raw data].
6. Department of Education, Placer National High School District. (2024). Least learned competency report [Unpublished raw data].
7. Department of Education, Placer National High School District. (2025). Least learned competency report [Unpublished raw data].
8. Hattie, J., & Donoghue, G. (2023). Learning strategies: A synthesis and conceptual model. *npj Science of Learning*, 8(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-023-00170-1>
9. Lee, C. (2022). The HOTS facade: When activities masquerade as higher-order thinking. *Journal of Educational Research*, 115(4), 289-301.
10. Lian, L. H. (2023). Assessment of higher-order thinking skills: Is it simply determined by verbs? *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i2/16719>
11. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
12. Zaiful Shah, Z., & Zakaria, N. (2024). Teachers' beliefs and implementation of higher-order thinking skills in Malaysian classrooms: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Instructional Pedagogy*, 8(1), 45-59.
13. Zhou, Y., Gan, L., Chen, J., Wijaya, T. T., & Li, Y. (2023). Development and validation of a higher-order thinking skills assessment scale for pre-service teachers. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 48, Article 101272. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2023.101272>