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Examining ELT-Knowledge-Based Learning Outcomes Within the National Curriculum Guidelines of Indonesian Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract

The study aims to critically analyse the clarity, observability, and measurability of ELT knowledge-based learning outcomes (LOs) as outlined in the current national curriculum guidelines for Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions. The researchers employed document analysis to assess 22 items of the LOs within the guidelines published in 2018 by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) through the Directorate of Indonesian Islamic Higher Education. Then, the researchers applied the Bloom's revised taxonomy as the theoretical framework, converting LOs' illustrative verbs to Bloom's illustrative verbs to examine the quality of LOs to determine whether the LOs promote higher- or lower-order thinking skills. This study shows that a significant majority (95.45%) of the analysed LOs in the current national guidelines suffer from poor design (unclear, unobservable, and unmeasurable) due to the absence of Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs. Collectively, these findings have important implications for educators and policymakers to pay more attention to the quality of their designed LOs. It suggests an urgent need for the Directorate of Indonesian Islamic Higher Education to revise its LOs because they risk affecting the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of their education in generating graduates who have global competitiveness. Poorly designed LOs promote only lower-order skills, which paralyse graduates' global competitiveness because they do not possess the

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knowledge required in the international arena. It is hoped that this study will serve as an inspiration to other countries and educational authorities facing similar challenges, encouraging them to be more meticulous in crafting well-designed LOs.

Keywords: Bloom's illustrative verbs, curriculum, English language teaching, Indonesian Islamic higher education, learning outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning outcomes (LOs) refer to the statements of what students are supposed to demonstrate and comprehend at the end of a course (Brooks et al., 2014; Buckley & Michel, 2020; Dobbins et al., 2016; Kennedy, 2007; Suskie, 2018). They should be clearly stated, as they bridge pedagogical interchange between teachers and students (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2000). Interestingly, LOs have been placed at the centre of learning by most universities across the globe (Meda & Swart, 2018) as they can promote students' learning with higher-order thinking skills (Collins, 2014; Mitchell & Manzo, 2018), leading to effective teaching and learning. This is supported by evidence that the use of LOs has been widely adopted by hosts of higher education institutions across the world. This can be illustrated briefly by the case of the United Kingdom, which requires its higher education institutions to define their LOs clearly and to "align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications" (Quality Assurance Agency, 2014, p. 33). In a similar case in America, Hart Research Associates (2016) has reported that the concept of learning outcomes has been applied by all members of the AACU (Association of American Colleges and Universities) within all their courses. Additionally, the adoption of LOs can be found within the Malaysian qualification framework (Malaysian Qualification Agency, 2017), and the Australian qualification framework (McInnis, 2010). Additionally, South Africa also adopted learning outcomes as the framework for their higher education qualifications ("The South African qualifications authority," 2012).

Following the aforementioned countries, Indonesia has also adopted the LOs concept (Sukirman, 2022b) within the Indonesian National Qualification Framework (known as KKNI, standing for *Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia*). This was officially regulated by the government through Presidential Decree No. 8, 2012. This endorsement officially encourages Indonesian higher education institutions to design their LOs based on the KKNI concept. It aims to generate well-qualified and certified higher education graduates with global recognition who have 21st century competencies (Sukirman, 2022a). Several national guidelines on how to design the KKNI-based learning outcomes were subsequently published. One of these is published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) through the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education, widely known as *Diktis*. In particular, the Diktis guideline explicitly covers learning outcomes for each of 52 study programmes within Islamic higher education institutions. One of these is English language teaching (ELT), covering learning outcomes related to attitudes and values (18 items), knowledge mastery (22 items), and skills (26 items). The Diktis national guideline plays an

essential role in guiding ELT curriculum designers within Islamic higher education institutions to develop their KKNI-based learning outcomes.

The current national curriculum guidelines clearly state that the LOs are ideally designed by using the Bloom taxonomy as the most appropriate theoretical lens in formulating well-designed (clear, observable, and measurable) LOs. This notable learning taxonomy was originally proposed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2000). It proposes three classifications of learning domains, namely affective, cognitive and psychomotor (Hoque, 2016). Unfortunately, the debates in the literature suggest that the cognitive domain seemingly attracts scholars' interests more than the other two (Luebke & Lorié, 2013). In particular, the cognitive domain deals with complex cognitive functions, ranging from lower to higher learning thinking skills (Hoque, 2016; Luebke & Lorié, 2013). It was originally arranged in the form of a hierarchy with six categories of cognitive complexity, namely 'knowledge', 'comprehension', 'application', 'analysis', 'synthesis' and 'evaluation' (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2000; Hoque, 2016). Swart (2010) classifies the categories of knowledge and comprehension as the lower level, and 'application', 'analysis', 'synthesis' and 'evaluation' as the higher level.

Interestingly, the original cognitive taxonomy was then amended in 2001 by one of Bloom's original co-authors with the aim of simplifying learning design and assessment (Green, 2011). This is widely known as *BRT* standing for Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2000). Through this revision, the original cognitive taxonomy underwent several notable changes (Amer, 2006; Krathwohl, 2002; Tutkun et al., 2012). Firstly, the six terminological categories of the original version changed from nouns to verbs – from 'knowledge', 'comprehension', 'application', 'analysis', 'synthesis' and 'evaluation' to 'remembering', 'understanding', 'applying', 'analysing', 'evaluating' and 'creating' respectively (Amer, 2006; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2000; Krathwohl, 2002). The original taxonomy was also restructured by substituting the category of 'creating' for 'evaluating', as the highest order of thinking skills. Additionally, the revised taxonomy covers lists of illustrative verbs for each cognitive level, indicating what actions should be demonstrated by students. Such verbs will help teachers design clear, measurable, and observable learning outcomes (Biggs, 1999). For clarity, Table 1 presents the differences between the original and the revised taxonomy.

Table 1. The terminology differs in the two versions of Bloom's taxonomy.

No.	Original Version	Revised Version
1	Knowledge	Remembering
2	Comprehension	Understanding
3	Application	Applying
4	Analysis	Analysing
5	Synthesis	Evaluating
6	Evaluation	Creating

Practically, Bloom's revised taxonomy provides several advantages as a theoretical lens in developing and analysing learning outcomes. Armstrong (2010) explicitly points out the fundamental reasons for using Bloom's taxonomy. Firstly, learning outcomes are essential factors in promoting a pedagogical interchange in the teaching and learning process, through which both teachers and students understand the aim of that interchange. Secondly, learning outcomes should be well organised to

make them clearer, helping students to know what they need to demonstrate. Thirdly, well-organised learning outcomes help teachers significantly "plan and deliver appropriate instruction, design valid assessment tasks and strategies, and ensure that instruction and assessment are aligned with the objectives" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 3). Particularly, the use of Bloom's illustrative verbs for different cognitive levels could show the clarity, observability, and measurability ofx the learning outcomes.

Considering the aforementioned advantages, Bloom's revised taxonomy could become an analytical tool to design well-formulated LOs, enabling students to grasp what they are expected to know, comprehend, and demonstrate by the end of their courses. Failing to design well-structured LOs can have negative impacts on the quality of graduates, departments and universities, hampering the students' ability to achieve the national educational goals of certain countries. In particular, poorly structured LOs fail to guide student learning, creating confusion or frustration as they do not understand what to know or demonstrate by the end of their programme. Also, they negatively contribute to teachers' performance in planning, organising, and assessing their teaching practice (Dobbins et al., 2016; Hadjianastasis, 2017). Such conditions risk a significant decline in the quality of graduates, as what they are expected to know, comprehend, and demonstrate are not clearly defined, leading to ineffective teaching and assessment.

The above-mentioned conditions indicate an urgent need to continuously examine the quality of LOs to anticipate the impact of poorly structured LOs. So far, there is a notable paucity of studies investigating the quality of LOs in an Indonesian Islamic higher education context, particularly their clarity, measurability and observability. What is documented in the literature is largely derived from studies of: (1) academics' perspectives on LOs (Dobbins et al., 2016; Hadjianastasis, 2017; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2016), (2) the use of LOs (Dobbins et al., 2016; Hussey & Smith, 2003), (3) students' perspectives on LOs (Aziza et al., 2012; Brooks et al., 2014), (4) the trouble with LOs (Hussey & Smith, 2002), and (5) measuring LOs (Caspersen et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2012). None of these analysed how far learning outcomes were measurable, clear, or observable – particularly the LOs within the current national curriculum guidelines for Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions.

After reviewing the existing literature, one related study in an Indonesian context has been identified, conducted by Solikhah and Budiharso (2019), examining the learning outcomes of ELT programmes in Indonesia. They report that the learning outcomes stated within five ELT curriculums in Central Java tended to be unfocused, overly general, and missing the professional outcomes expected in ELT programmes. However, this study lacks clarity regarding the indicators used in determining the learning outcomes, and thus suffers from a methodological weakness. Also, it lacks clarity in defining the university curriculum analysed – whether it was from an Islamic or a public university. It is essential to provide such information because it directly impacts the generalizability and applicability of the research findings. Without specifying the type of university curriculum analyzed, the conclusions may not be relevant to a broader educational context. Therefore, there are two significant differences between Solikhah and Budiharso's (2019) study and the present study. Firstly, the present study focuses only on the national guidelines for the Indonesian Islamic higher education curriculum, not the ELT curriculum from specific universities, as studied by Solikhah and Budiharso (2019). Secondly, the present study

analyses in particular the clarity, observability and measurability of each learning outcome within the aforementioned guideline using Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs; meanwhile, the previous one analysed the unfocused, overly general, and missing learning outcomes (without clear indicators).

Another similar study identified in the literature, conducted by Meda and Swart (2018), analysed the clarity, observability and measurability of every single LO item stated within the electrical engineering curriculum at the University of Technology, South Africa. The researchers applied Bloom's revised taxonomy as their theoretical framework, particularly the Bloom's illustrative verbs. They classified the LOs according to two broad categories: 'well designed' and 'poorly designed'. The poorly designed ones were classified into 'unclear', 'unobservable', and 'unmeasurable'. Interestingly, they report that 42% of the 600 LOs are considered as poorly structured, and these are classified into unclear (9%), unobservable (10%), and unmeasurable (23%). This indicates that almost a half of the analysed LOs do not promote student learning with higher-order thinking skills. Despite its contribution to the literature, this study seems to suffer from a lack of clarity in defining two of the poorly designed categories: 'unclear' and 'unobservable'. It seems that these categories overlap due to the ambiguity of the given terminology. LOs are considered unclear if students do not know what to do or demonstrate; meanwhile, they are considered unobservable if students are not required to demonstrate anything specific. Such definitions tend to be confusing, as the two refer to the inability of LOs to show what students are expected to demonstrate. The difference lies only in the statement of something specific in the 'unobservable' category; however, it can also refer to the unclear ones, as they do not cover anything specific – making them unclear. The two categories can be observed through the use of Bloom's illustrative verbs: the given terminology can seemingly be used interchangeably; thus, both should be defined in a significantly different way, for clarity purposes.

The above-mentioned literature review clearly shows a gap that needs to be addressed, which is to analyse the quality of ELT LOs within the current national curriculum guidelines for Indonesian Islamic higher education. While the Indonesian educational authorities, specifically the Directorate of Indonesian Islamic Higher Education, officially formulates the LOs, their quality remains uncertain. It is essential to evaluate their quality through research, as there is a risk of being misled by guidelines that might encompass poorly designed LOs (Meda & Swart, 2018). Unfortunately, there is limited studies which analyse the clarity, observability, and measurability of ELT knowledge-based learning outcomes (LOs) within the current national curriculum guidelines. To bridge the gap, this study utilises qualitative data to examine whether the structures of LOs enable student learning with higher-order thinking skills. In other words, it examines the clarity, observability and measurability of ELT LOs within the national guidelines for Indonesian Islamic higher education by employing Bloom's taxonomy. However, due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of all learning outcomes within the national guideline. It analyses only the ELT learning outcomes related to cognitive domains – it is not the task of this study to examine those related to affective or psychomotor domains. Hopefully, this study could benefit not only the development of the Indonesian Islamic higher education curriculum but also curricula in other countries to formulate their high-quality learning outcomes, ensuring the sustainability of higher education curriculum quality. Additionally, this study could make an important

contribution to the literature by showing how to analyse LOs' clarity, observability and measurability, and this could be applied in other countries facing similar aspirations or struggles. Finally, the specific questions which drive the research are:

1. What level of Bloom's illustrative verbs are mostly utilised in formulating the ELT LOs?
2. How clear, observable, and measurable are the ELT LOs?

2. METHODS

This section presents the research methods applied in analysing the ELT learning outcomes within the current national guideline of the Indonesian Islamic higher education curriculum. It begins by contextualising the chosen research design, followed by data sources, data collection, and data analysis, as shown under the following sub-headings.

2.1 Research Design

This study applies a document analysis that is considered as a powerful research design in answering the research questions. It is a research design commonly used in qualitative research, which involves a systematic examination and interpretation of written, printed, or electronic documents to extract valuable information and insights related to a specific research question or area of study (Bowen, 2009). The use of qualitative analysis is a well-established approach in conducting document analysis as it "enables researchers to generate rich textual data from the reviewed documents" (Meda & Swart, 2018, p. 404). Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic material" (p. 27). It aims at examining and interpreting information in written text(s) to obtain and understand data being studied, developing empirical knowledge. Furthermore, document analysis offers several advantages over other qualitative research designs (Bowen, 2009; Mogalakwe, 2006), including: reduced time requirements, as data collection from individuals is unnecessary; easy accessibility, as analysed documents are freely available on the internet; no need for ethical approvals; and cost savings, since there is no requirement to travel – one can work from their home or office to select relevant data within a chosen document.

2.2 Data Sources

The primary data of this study was collected within the current national curriculum guideline of Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions. This was officially published by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) through the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education in 2018 (Diktis, 2018), which is freely accessible on the internet (downloadable). In addition, this guideline specifically covers design of LOs based on national standards for all departments in Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions, including English education departments. In this case, all departments can adopt the LOs completely, or improvise based on their needs. In addition to English education department LOs, the guideline further classifies them into related attitudes and values (18 items), knowledge mastery (22 items), and skills

(26 items). Due to time constraints, this study focuses only on analysing those related to knowledge mastery (known as cognitive domains, based on Bloom's taxonomy). They were originally formulated in *Bahasa* (the Indonesian national language), requiring the researchers to carefully translate them into English by selecting appropriate dictions for the proper translation. For clarity, all analysed LOs are designed by Indonesian educational authorities through the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education. Neither ELT lecturers nor institutions designed the selected LOs.

2.3 Data Collection

For data collection, the researchers employed document analysis procedures (six steps) proposed by O'Leary (2004). Firstly, in the planning process, the researchers searched not only for any documents related to the guidelines for the KKNI-based ELT curriculum, but also all related studies to find out the existing gaps in ELT LOs. Literature related to Bloom's revised taxonomy was also reviewed in this step to decide the appropriate theoretical framework for this study. Surprisingly, the researchers found the national guideline documents and questioned the quality of the ELT LOs in terms of how well they were structured. Secondly, the researchers gathered the document being studied, downloading the national KKNI-based ELT curriculum guideline from the official website of the Directorate of Indonesian Islamic Higher Education. Each ELT LO within the document was translated for the analysis. For validity, the translation was confirmed by an expert who understands the context in order to anticipate biases and subjectivity, resulting in proper and appropriate translation. It was then printed to make it easier to annotate any related data within the document. Thirdly, the researchers comprehensively reviewed the national guideline by carefully identifying the use of Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs within the ELT LOs to decide how well they were formulated. Any potential biases—both from the researchers and author (O'Leary, 2004)—should also be identified in this step, minimising their negative impacts on the data interpretation. Fourthly, in the step termed as 'interrogating', each ELT LO was extracted by annotating the keywords related to: (i) Bloom's illustrative verbs used; (ii) variables; (iii) sentence complexity; and (iv) specific teaching materials. Fifthly, inreflecting or refining process, the researchers reflected the previous steps from beginning to end several times to anticipate any issues that might create unclear analysis, misinterpretation, and/or missing data during the processes. The last step refers to analysing, where the researchers analysed the obtained data using Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs based on the six cognitive categories of Bloom's taxonomy, as presented in Table 2.

2.4 Data Analysis

For data analysis, the application of the illustrative verbs becomes a fundamental indicator for the answers to both the first and second research questions, as the verbs promote observable and measurable behaviours (Krathwohl, 2002). In particular, the first research question data was analysed by identifying and listing all verbs applied by the twenty-two ELT LOs, then converting them into Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs (see Table 2). This analysis shows which of Bloom's illustrative verbs were mostly utilised by the ELT LOs. Meanwhile, the second research question data was interpreted by using two broad categories (well-designed and poorly designed) adapted

from Meda and Swart (2018). A well-designed LO refers to the use of a Bloom's illustrative verb, clearly showing what students are expected to know and demonstrate. It covers three indicators, i.e., (i) 'clear' if the LO's structure covers not many verbs and variables (simple and understandable), clearly stating what learning is being demonstrated by students – it is completely different compared to that applied by Meda and Swart (2018), (ii) 'observable' if LO uses Bloom's illustrative verbs to show what students need to know and demonstrate, and (iii) 'measurable' if it clearly shows how to measure the cognitive process. However, an LO that does not meet one of the indicators is then classified as a poorly designed LO, referring to an unclear, unobservable, and unmeasurable LO. A poorly designed LO makes it totally difficult to observe and measure what students are expected to be able to do at the end of their programme.

Table 2. Bloom's revised taxonomy (adapted from Krathwohl, 2002; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2000).

Cognitive process categories	**Description**	**Illustrative verb examples**
Remembering	Retrieving, recognising, and recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory.	arrange, cite, copy, define, describe, discover, draw, duplicate, enumerate, examine, identify, indicate, label, list, listen, locate, match, memorise, name, observe, omit, order, outline, point, quote, read, recall, recite, recognise, record, relate, repeat, reproduce, retell, state, tell, trace, rewrite
Understanding	Constructing meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarising, inferring, comparing, and explaining.	ask, associate, cite, discover, classify, compare, contrast, convert, defend, demonstrate, describe, differentiate, discuss, distinguish, estimate, explain, express, extend, generalise, give example, identify, illustrate, indicate, infer, interpret, judge, locate, observe, order, report, paraphrase, predict, recognise, relate, report, represent, research, restate, review, show, trace, summarise, transform, translate
Applying	Carrying out or using a procedure through executing or implementing.	act, administer, apply, articulate, calculate, change, chart, choose, collect, complete, compute, construct, demonstrate, determine, develop, discover, employ, establish, examine, explain, illustrate, interpolate, interpret, interview, judge, list, manipulate, modify, use, calculate, operate, order, paint, practise, predict, prepare, produce, record, relate, report, restate, review, schedule, show, simulate, solve, apply, teach, transfer, translate, use, utilise, write
Analysing	Breaking material into constituent parts, determining how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose through differentiating, organising, and attributing.	analyse, appraise, categorise, classify, compare, conclude, connect, contrast, correlate, criticise, debate, deduce, devise, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, divide, estimate, evaluate, examine, explain, focus, identify, illustrate, infer, inspect, prioritise, question, relate, select, separate, subdivide, summarise, survey, test

Table 2 continued…

Evaluating	Making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing.	argue, assess, attach, choose, compare, conclude, consider, contrast, convince, criticise, critique, debate, decide, defend, describe, determine, diagnose, discriminate, distinguish, justify, estimate, evaluate, find errors, interpret, judge, justify, measure, persuade, predict, rate, rank relate, recommend, reframe, review, revise, score, select, summarise, support, test, value
Creating	Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganising elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing.	combine, compile, comply, compose, construct, create, design, detect, develop, devise, facilitate, formulate, generalise, generate, hypothesise, imagine, infer, integrate, intervene, invent, justify, make, manage, modify, negotiate, organise, originate, plan, prepare, prescribe, produce, propose, rearrange, reconstruct, reorganise, report, revise, rewrite, role play, schematise, set up, simulate, solve, speculate, specify, structure, substitute, summarise, support, synthesise, write

Following Meda and Swart (2018), who conducted a document analysis of LOs within the electrical engineering curriculum at the University of Technology, South Africa, the researchers also applied inter-rater reliability (IRR) technique to ensure data reliability. IRR is a method used to gauge the extent to which various judges or raters concur in their evaluation judgments (Meda & Swart, 2018), reducing subjectivity in the analysis. In this case, besides one of the researchers, another rater was involved in assessing the clarity, observability, and measurability of the ELT LOs. The findings from the appointed rater were compared with those from the researcher to determine their level of agreement. Both sets of findings were then analysed using Cohen's Kappa formula and converted to five different interpretations (Landis & Koch, 1977); poor agreement (< 0); slight disagreement (0.0-0.20); fair agreement (0.21-0.40); moderate disagreement (0.41-0.60); substantial disagreement (0.61-0.80); and almost perfect agreement (0.81-1.00). The kappa coefficient indicated a high inter-rater agreement of 0.94 between two assessors regarding the clarity, observability, and measurability of the learning outcomes (LOs).

3. RESULTS

This section presents the analysis of the ELT learning outcomes within the current national guideline of the Indonesian Islamic higher education curriculum. It begins by presenting the findings for the first research question, referring to the Bloom's illustrative verbs used within the analysed ELT LOs related to cognitive domains. This is followed by the second research question findings, which deal with how clear, observable, and measurable the ELT LOs are structured.

3.1 The Use of Bloom's Illustrative Verbs

The first research question is "What Bloom's illustrative verbs are utilised within the cognitive-related ELT learning outcomes?" To address this research question, all illustrative verbs used by the twenty-two ELT LOs related to cognitive domains within

the current national guideline of Indonesian Islamic higher education curriculum are analysed. The findings are presented in Figure 1.

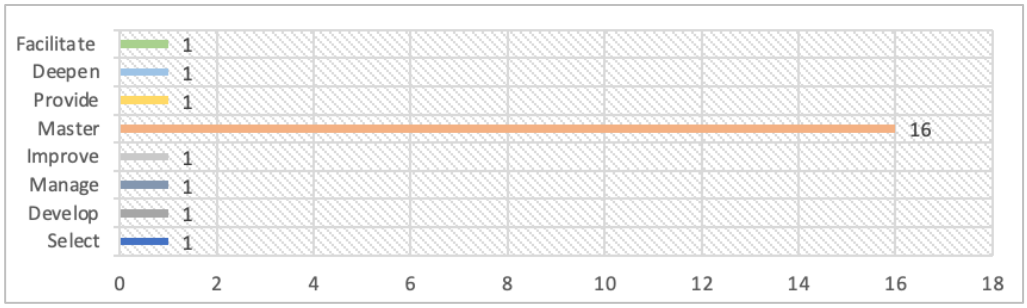

Figure 1. The illustrative verbs found within the ELT learning outcomes.

Figure 1 above presents the ranges of illustrative verbs found within the twenty-two ELT LOs related to cognitive domains. It is found that there are exactly eight different illustrative verbs used in the analysed LOs, namely 'select', 'develop', 'manage', 'improve', 'master', 'provide', 'deepen', and 'facilitate'. The verb used most often is the illustrative verb 'master', recurring 16 times. This frequency shows a significant difference compared to the other verbs, which are utilised only once for each. Another interesting finding refers to the number of illustrative verbs used in one LO; the overwhelming majority of LOs use only one illustrative verb each; meanwhile, only one LO uses two illustrative verbs. This seemingly meets one of the good LO standards, as one illustrative verb for one LO eases observability and measurability. Converting to the aforementioned list of Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs, it is surprising that not all of the used verbs are included within the list. Four of the verbs not included in the list are 'master', 'provide', 'improve', and 'deepen', indicating that nineteen (86.36%) LOs within the guideline do not use Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs. In contrast, only four of the used verbs are included within the list – 'select', 'develop', 'manage', and 'facilitate' – suggesting that only three out of twenty-two (13.64%) ELT LOs use Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs. These verbs are classified into two different categories (analysing for 'select' and creating for 'develop', 'manage', and 'facilitate'), which belong to higher-order thinking skills in Bloom' revised taxonomy.

These results provide important insights into the low quality of cognitive-related ELT LOs within the current national guideline of Indonesian Islamic higher education curriculum. In this case, the majority of the ELT LOs are unobservable and unmeasurable due to the non-use of Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs, negatively affecting the graduates' competencies. These findings are further explored in the second research question to assess the clarity, observability, and measurability of the twenty-two ELT LOs within the national curriculum guidelines.

3.2 The Quality of the ELT LOs?

The second research question is "How clear, observable, and measurable are the ELT LOs?" The quality of the ELT LOs was assessed through three categories, i.e. clarity, observability, and measurability. Figure 2 displays an overview of the quality of the cognitive-related ELT learning outcomes within the current national guideline of Indonesian Islamic higher education curriculum.

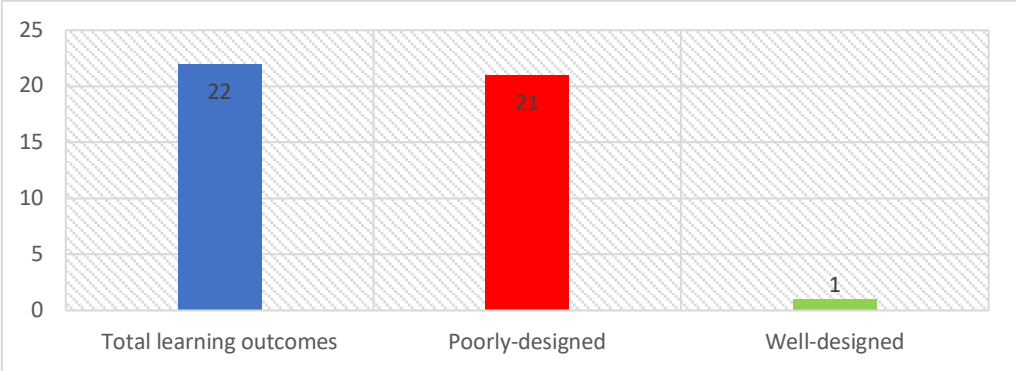

Figure 2. The overview of ELT learning outcomes within the national curriculum guidelines.

As presented in Figure 2, only one (4.55%) LO is rated as well-designed, clearly informing what students are supposed to do and demonstrate after accomplishing their courses. This can be illustrated briefly by the LO *memilih secara adekuat pendekatan dan model pembelajaran, bahan ajar, dan penilaian untuk kepentingan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris* (Diktis, 2018, p. 235), which translates into English as "to adequately select learning approaches and models, teaching materials, and assessments for the benefit of English learning". This LO uses only one illustrative verb, which is 'select'. This relates to one of the higher levels of cognitive domains (analysing) within Bloom's revised taxonomy that promotes higher-order thinking skills. The use of the verb could inform students what to do and demonstrate with observable and measurable cognitive behaviours. Additionally, what is being learned is clearly demonstrated by this LO, with the keywords learning approaches and models, teaching materials, and assessments. Taken together, this LO has principally met the fundamental requirements of a clear, observable, and measurable LO, prompting the researchers to label it a well-designed LO. It demonstrates observable and measurable behaviour and what is being learned by students.

Another surprising finding displayed in Figure 2 is related to poorly designed learning outcomes. This finding suggests that the overwhelming majority of the analysed ELT LOs – twenty-one out of twenty-two (95.45%) – are rated as poorly designed. This finding is then extracted as illustrated in Figure 3.

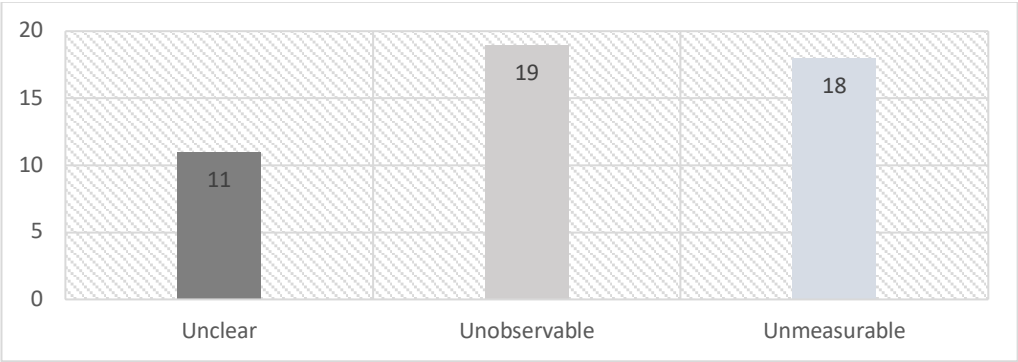

Figure 3. Poorly designed ELT learning outcomes within the national curriculum guidelines.

From Figure 3, the poorly designed ELT LOs are classified according to unclear, unobservable, and unmeasurable outcomes. The most striking finding to emerge from the data analysis displayed in Figure 3 is that the ELT LOs are mostly unobservable and unmeasurable, at 86.36% and 81.81% respectively, followed by unclear LOs with 50%. The most dramatic illustration of these is the LO *menguasai pengetahuan dan langkah-langkah dalam mengembangkan pemikiran kritis, logis, kreatif, inovatif, untuk memecahkan masalah pada tingkat individu dan kelompok dalam komunitas akademik dan non-akademik* (to master knowledge and steps in developing critical, logical, creative, innovative and systematic thinking as well as having intellectual curiosity to solve problems at the individual and group level in the academic and non-academic communities). This is rated not only as unclear but also as an unobservable and unmeasurable LO for several reasons. Firstly, it is extremely long (too wordy) and covers several variables and verbs, generating a vague LO. Secondly, it utilises non-Bloom's illustrative verbs, making it an unobservable LO. It is difficult to observe and measure 'master' as it cannot show how students master their learning or what students need to know or demonstrate. Lastly, this seemingly belongs to LO-related skills (psychomotor), by which students need to have skills in developing critical, logical, creative, innovative and systematic thinking. Simply, it does not deal with cognitive domains.

Particularly, it is found that some of the LOs are rated clear, but there is ambiguity in their observability and measurability. For instances, the LOs *menguasai teori belajar dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris* (to master theories of learning and English learning) is clear as it uses one verb and does not cover too many variables, demonstrating what is being learnt (theories of learning and English learning). However, the verb "master" does not belong to Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs, making it unobservable and unmeasurable. In this case, it does not require students to demonstrate any specific activities that can be clearly observed. Also, the entire concept is too general – it needs to specify which learning theories are major learning theories existing in the literature. This is also exemplified by the LO *meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran berdasarkan penilaian proses dan penilaian hasil belajar Bahasa Inggris* (to improve learning quality based on an assessment of learning process and outcomes). This is also clear but unobservable and unmeasurable, since it does not use a Bloom's illustrative verb. Also, to measure 'improve' needs pre- and post-testing to see the improvement before and after the whole courses, which is not an ideal method of measuring LOs.

The findings also suggest that an ELT LO is rated clear and observable but unmeasurable. This is true in the case of the LO *memfasilitasi pengembangan potensi kebahasaan peserta didik secara optimal* (to facilitate the development of students' linguistic potency optimally). The use of simple language and the verb 'facilitate' as one of Bloom's illustrative verbs makes this LO clear and observable. Unfortunately, the phrase "the development of students' linguistic potency" is too general, offering no way to measure the outcomes. It is also more related to a psychomotor outcome than a cognitive one. Furthermore, another notable finding referring to the LO is unclear but observable and measurable. This can be illustrated briefly by the LO *mengembangkan kurikulum untuk mata pelajaran bahasa Inggris sesuai dengan bidang tugas dan mengelola kurikulum tingkat satuan pendidikan* (to develop a curriculum for an English subject based on the field and manage a curriculum at the educational unit level). This LO is observable due to the use of a Bloom's illustrative

verb ('develop'). It is also measurable, by which learning is clearly demonstrated by specifying a specific curriculum (English subjects). Unfortunately, the use of two clauses with two verbs ('develop' and 'manage') makes this LO unclear, generating an ambiguous outcome.

These findings provide fundamental insights into the poorly designed ELT LOs within the current national guideline of the Indonesian Islamic higher education curriculum. The ignorance of Bloom's illustrative verbs in structuring learning outcomes could generate unclear, unobservable, and unmeasurable learning outcomes as illustrated in this study. Poorly designed learning outcomes could lead to ineffective instruction, as students do not know what they need to do; and teachers also do not know how to deliver and measure their instruction tasks. Such issues will be discussed further in the following section.

4. DISCUSSION

As mentioned previously, this study aims at examining the clarity, observability, and measurability of cognitive-related ELT LOs within the national guidelines of the Indonesian Islamic higher education curriculum. With respect to the first research question, it is found that most of the ELT LOs utilise non-Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs, notably 'master', recurring 16 times. Such findings clearly indicate that the LOs are not clearly contextualised based on Bloom's taxonomy. They also indicate that the awareness of the use of Bloom's illustrative verbs by some Indonesian scholars in designing LOs remains low, driving them to use lower-level Bloom's illustrative verbs. Another speculation from these findings relates to class sizes in most Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions. In this case, the presence of larger class sizes could potentially account for why learning outcomes often encourage lower-level thinking skills rather than higher-order ones. Then, the findings of the second research question are somewhat unexpected given the fact that the overwhelming majority of the ELT LOs are unclear, unobservable, and unmeasurable (poorly designed). What emerges from the results reported here is that the ELT LOs proposed by the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education could not promote student learning with higher-order thinking skills. Additionally, what is surprising is that the given examples of ELT LOs within the national curriculum guidelines are not structured based on Bloom's taxonomy. This result contradicts the previous technical guideline, which stipulates Bloom's taxonomy as the framework from which to decide the depth of learning within learning outcomes (see Diktis, 2018). This guideline was also published in 2018 by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) through the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education. Such inconsistency is, of course, very unfortunate because it might give negative impacts on ELT graduates in Islamic higher education institutions across Indonesia. In particular, the poorly designed ELT LOs within the national curriculum guidelines potentially become "bad" examples for ELT curriculum designers within Islamic higher education institutions across Indonesia in structuring their institutional LOs.

Connecting to the global interdisciplinary context, the findings of this study corroborate the study of Meda and Swart (2018), which also finds unclear, unobservable, and unmeasurable LOs within the electrical engineering curriculum in the University of Technology, South Africa. Regardless of the different contexts, these

two studies share similar findings with regard to the low quality of LOs obtained from the electrical engineering department in South Africa and the English education departments in Indonesian Islamic higher education. These suggest that some countries might also experience similar problems and struggles to those of Indonesian Islamic higher education in designing their higher education LOs, as also experienced by South Africa. Such struggles are further compounded by the ambition of elite countries to create world-class universities (Hou et al., 2012) by offering excellent learning opportunities for students with higher-order thinking skills. These leave small countries even further behind in developing their higher education curricula, particularly their learning outcomes.

Going back to the Indonesian context, this study is in agreement with one previously carried out by Solikhah and Budiharso (2019), which reported that the learning outcomes stated within five ELT curricula in Central Java were unfocused, overly general, and missing the expected professional outcomes of ELT programmes. Regardless of the limitations, both studies indicate that poorly designed ELT LOs can be found not only within Indonesian Islamic but also general higher education institutions. Such issues highlight one of Indonesian higher education complexities (see also Azra, 2008) in following the rat race of global higher education in generating graduates with higher-order thinking skills. In other words, the ELT LOs within the national curriculum guidelines mostly deal with 'remembering' and 'understanding' level, referring to lower-order thinking skills. This evidence shows a significant gap compared to other countries, such as South Africa (Meda & Swart, 2018), Romania (Swart & Daneti, 2019), Korea and Singapore (Lee, et al., 2015), which focus on developing their graduates' higher-order thinking skills (Ganapathy et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2021; Suleman et al., 2021). In addition, considering the poor quality of ELT LOs found by this study, it requires extra efforts and struggles for ELT departments in Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions to globalise their graduates with global competencies, as one of the main goals of the current Indonesian qualification framework. Massive work remains to be carried out to deal with these issues.

To join the inexorable global challenge, higher education worldwide should design well-structured LOs. In particular, Indonesian Islamic higher education needs to be meticulous in structuring well-designed ELT LOs, especially those within the national curriculum guidelines used as references for all English education majors in Indonesian Islamic higher education. The LOs need to be clear, observable, and measurable (Cowan, 2009). Ignoring such principles will generate poorly designed LOs, which lead to ineffective teaching and learning processes due to the ambiguity of what students should demonstrate and how teachers assess students' learning (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2000; Brooks et al., 2014; Buckley & Michel, 2020; Chance & Peck, 2015; Dobbins et al., 2016; Suskie, 2018). To negate the ambiguity, the use of a Bloom's illustrative verb is a must in structuring an LO (Meda & Swart, 2018). In this case, it is suggested using only a single Bloom's illustrative verb for each learning outcome (Buckley & Michel, 2020; Chance & Peck, 2015; Meda & Swart, 2018).

In addition to the use of Bloom's illustrative verbs, curriculum designers or teachers should meticulously select appropriate illustrative verbs that promote higher-order thinking skills instead of the lower ones. In this case, higher-order thinking verbs encourage students to experience deep learning that requires them to apply their reasoning skills (Fiegel, 2013). This process contradicts the use of lower-order thinking verbs, which involve only simple recall of information skills (Anderson &

Krathwohl, 2000). Furthermore, it should be noted that not all verbs can accurately demonstrate observable and measurable cognitive behaviour – for example 'understand' and 'know' – it is suggested that even such verbs need to be avoided (Ağçama & Babanoğlu, 2020). The most dramatic illustration of this relates to the verb 'master', the verb most recurring in the ELT LOs found in this study. This verb is tantamount to the verb 'understand', and this verb is not included in the list of Bloom's cognitive illustrative verbs. The use of this verb should be avoided in writing learning outcomes as it is vague, blurring what students are expected to demonstrate or how teachers assess it (Chance & Peck, 2015). Surprisingly, although it is suggested that they be avoided, many educators still often use unobservable verbs such as 'appreciate', 'understand', 'familiarise' and 'know' (Kennedy, 2007). Such phenomena lead to the assumption that some scholars are still not fully cognisant of the positive impacts of using Bloom's illustrative verbs in designing LOs, as shown in this study.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to evaluate how clear, observable and measurable ELT LOs are within the current national guidelines of Indonesian Islamic higher education. The findings show that the overwhelming majority of the ELT LOs do not use Bloom's illustrative verbs, generating unclear, unobservable, and unmeasurable (poorly designed) LOs. These findings are very alarming. In line with the current national technical guideline, they should provide well-designed LO examples, not poorly designed ones. This might bring negative impacts on the quality of cross-national LOs set by ELT departments in Indonesian Islamic higher education. Taken together, these findings propose a principal theoretical implication, which suggests a role for Bloom's illustrative verbs in generating clear, observable, and measurable LOs. In this case, the use of Bloom's illustrative verbs could positively impact the constructive alignment between teaching and assessment. Hopefully, this study might also inspire other countries (educational authorities) with similar struggles and backgrounds to be more meticulous in structuring examples of well-designed learning outcomes.

These could be representative of an emerging trend in evaluating the clarity, observability, and measurability of ELT LOs in the global context, particularly in the Indonesian Islamic higher education context. Furthermore, this study has been one of the first attempts to thoroughly provide some tentative initial evidence regarding the quality of cognitive-related ELT LOs within the analysed document, which is mostly poorly designed. In this matter, it might lay the groundwork for future research into evaluating all of the learning outcomes within the current national guidelines of Indonesian Islamic higher education.

The issues that are not addressed in this study deal with the analysis of ELT LOs related to affective and psychomotor domains within the current national curriculum guideline. In other words, this study is not specifically designed to evaluate the quality of ELT LOs related to affective and psychomotor domains. It is, therefore, hoped that this study might help others with similar interests to design studies that specifically focus on examining the quality of ELT LOs related to the other domains. In addition, what is now needed is a cross-national study involving large samples of ELT LOs designed by ELT departments across Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions.

It is crucial to see how the poorly designed ELT LOs within the current national curriculum guideline affect the quality of ELT LOs at institutional levels. Finally, evaluating LOs for other departments from different faculties within the guideline would also be a fruitful and promising area for future work.

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