



TEACHERS' STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE CRITICAL THINKING SKILL IN FIQH LEARNING IN THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe teacher strategies in improving students' critical thinking skills in Fiqh learning at SMP Muhammadiyah PK Kota Barat. The results of the study indicate that learning strategies such as lectures, questions and answers, and demonstrations are effective in helping students' understanding, but are lacking in encouraging critical thinking skills. Therefore, it is recommended to apply the Problem Based Learning (PBL) method involving real case studies to hone students' analytical skills. Supporting factors in implementing this strategy are teacher mastery of the material and the availability of adequate facilities, while time constraints are the main obstacles. This study concludes that more innovative, adaptive, and student-based learning strategies are needed to optimally improve critical thinking skills. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for teachers and schools in developing more effective learning strategies to improve students' critical thinking skills. Thus, students can become more analytical and ready to face challenges in the future. This study can help improve the quality of Fiqh learning better.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Facing crises and their challenges requires a comprehensive change, including in the curriculum which plays an important role in determining learning content (Nawawi et al., 2023). The purpose of national education as stated in Article 3 of Law Number 23 of 2003 is to build individuals who have faith and piety to God Almighty, have noble character, are physically healthy, have broad insight, skills, creativity, independence, and are able to become good, democratic, and responsible citizens (Mustainah, 2023). The Independent Learning Curriculum is an educational program introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia as an effort to provide more freedom in the learning process (Anggun et al., 2024). The program aims to create excellent graduates to face the challenges of the future (Mustainah, 2023). These changes reflect the global need for education that develops essential skills such as critical thinking, in addition to academic knowledge.

Critical thinking skills are important skills in all areas of life and should be introduced early on. (Raito & Dewi, 2023). Critical thinking skills allow students to better face life's challenges, and become skills that need to be developed so that they can solve problems independently (Hamidah et al., 2023). With the ability to think critically, students are able to assess various aspects and make decisions actively and logically (Kollo & Suciptaningsih, 2024). Students who have the ability to critically reason are effective in processing information, connecting various data, analyzing it, and then evaluating it to draw logical conclusions (Siswati, 2022).

According to PISA 2019, the critical thinking skills of Indonesian students are still low, with reading literacy ranking at 72 out of 77 countries, mathematics 72 out of 78, and science 70 out of 78. Although Indonesian students are able to remember the material well, they lack critical reasoning and application, as stated by Nizam in a Kompas report on December 15, 2016 (SJ, 2022). A clear example of low critical thinking skills can be seen in (PAI). There are three main problems currently faced in PAI learning. First, low student motivation because PAI is considered a secondary subject rather than a general subject; second, the lack of environmental support, especially from families who should be the foundation of religious education; third, the lack of exemplary and professionalism of PAI teachers in applying the values of faith and piety, making it difficult for students to emulate these good behaviors.

In order to increase student motivation in PAI learning, it is necessary to master various innovative and interesting learning models. A creative approach can make it easier for students to understand the material, while encouraging them to analyze information and solve problems creatively (Hansyah et al., 2021). Teachers are required to continuously improve professionalism and find teaching strategies that are relevant to the needs of students (Ahmad & Medopa, 2020). This is important, especially in the context of PAI learning, where the exemplary approach is essential, especially in fiqh. Fiqh plays a key role in integrating religious values related to worship and muamalah into daily life. With learning that emphasizes the exemplary aspect, students will be better able to understand religious teachings deeply and apply them wisely, especially if they develop critical thinking skills (Khotimah & Junanto, 2024).

Fiqh learning has a close relationship with the need to instill critical thinking values while facing the challenges of taklid in education. However, in practice, the learning system often prioritizes the delivery of material rather than honing students' critical thinking skills (Rahim, 2023). In the learning process, few actively express opinions or ask questions, and the questions asked often do not reflect critical thinking, so only a small number of students can answer the teacher's questions (Achmad Suroso et al., 2023), this process is often not accompanied by methods that strengthen critical thinking skills.

In its implementation, students often only accept the laws of fiqh without understanding the differences of views (khilafiyah) between the schools, so that the tendency to passively follow taklid can limit their ability to think critically. If teachers provide opportunities for students to discuss the differences of views of the four main schools, then students will be encouraged to think more openly and critically (Das & Wahab, 2021).

Yensi Tuhadhiah Research (Tuhadhiah, 2022) Regarding the Discovery Learning Strategies in Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills revealed that this teaching strategy that involves interaction is able to encourage students to ask in-depth questions related to worship and muamalah. In contrast, traditional approaches that focus on delivering material often override the development of critical thinking, make students more passive in responding to the laws of fiqh taught. Therefore, to achieve effectiveness in fiqh learning, teachers should use methods that encourage students to think critically, prevent them from being taklid, and facilitate the critical exploration of diverse scholars' views. An interactive and reflective learning process can also help students develop independent thinking (Das & Wahab, 2021).

Research by Rizal Ramdhani Aldi (Aldi, 2023) regarding the Application of Critical Thinking Skills Through the Discussion Method revealed that although the discussion method is applied to improve students' critical thinking skills in Fiqh learning, there are still several challenges faced. Some of them are the incompatibility of learning methods with existing learning needs and the lack of student readiness that has not been maximized in following the learning process. To increase learning effectiveness, it is necessary to choose a more appropriate strategy as well as efforts to increase student readiness before starting the learning process.

Realizing that the learning strategies applied are not fully optimal in improving critical thinking skills, the researcher conducted a study at Muhammadiyah PK Kotta Barat Junior High School. This school is known as one of the leading institutions in the city of Surakarta, with various achievements in the academic and non-academic fields. In addition to focusing on academic achievement, this school also attaches great importance to the formation of students' character through various school cultures.

This study aims to describe the strategies applied by teachers at Muhammadiyah PK Junior High School in West Kota in improving students' critical thinking skills in Fiqh subjects in accordance with the Independent Curriculum. In addition, this study also aims to describe the factors that support and hinder the development of students' critical thinking skills in the school.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation analysis. This study was carried out as a field research at Muhammadiyah PK Junior High School in West Kota, especially in grade 8 of ICP. The main data was collected from PAI teachers and 8th grade ICP students, while supporting data was obtained from literature such as books, journals, documentation, and related official archives. The phenomenological method is applied to understand how the learning process takes place and how students and teachers experience the development of critical thinking skills in the context of Fiqh learning.

Data collection in this study was carried out using three main methods: interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and 8 ICP students to obtain information about the learning strategies implemented. Observation is carried out by directly observing the learning process to understand how teachers apply strategies that aim to improve students' critical thinking skills in fiqh learning. In addition, documentation is carried out by collecting teaching materials, books, and supporting documents relevant to the research.

Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman model which consists of three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses triangulation techniques which include source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Strategies to Improve Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Fiqh Subjects According to the Independent Curriculum

A strategy is a series of steps and efforts designed to achieve the expected goals. In this case, the strategy in question focuses on its application in the field of education or the learning process (Harmita et al., 2022). Learning strategies have a crucial role in learning activities that are effective and relevant to the needs of students. The application of the right strategy is able to encourage students to develop critical thinking skills. In the Independent Curriculum, the principle of flexibility provides opportunities for teachers and schools to design innovative learning models tailored to student characteristics (Rosa et al., 2024).

At SMP PK Kota Barat, the application of learning strategies by PAI teachers is a concrete example of how the principle of flexibility is applied. In Fiqh learning, teachers combine lecture, question and answer, and demonstration methods. Fiqh, as one of the branches of Islamic Religious Education, discusses the guidelines for the implementation of the pillars of Islam. The material taught includes various rules, such as taharah, prayer, fasting, zakat, hajj, as well as other provisions related to buying and selling, food, drinks, qurbani, circumcision, and borrowing activities (Ghifari & Achadi, 2024).

Although lecture methods are often considered traditional, teachers can integrate them with question-and-answer and demonstration methods to make learning more interactive and applicative. Siti Muslimah's research on *Efforts to Improve Fiqh Learning Outcomes of Corpse Care Materials Through the Demonstration Method* examines the use of the demonstration method that can increase students' understanding of corpse care materials. The results of the study prove that the application of the demonstration method in Fiqh learning is effective in increasing student learning achievement (Muslimah, 2020). The results of the observation carried out in grade 8 of ICP learning the care of the corpse involved direct practice through the demonstration method. The teacher guides students to understand theory and practice, including the process of shrouding the body, thus creating an interactive learning atmosphere. This approach increases students' enthusiasm while helping them understand the relationship of the material to their daily lives. According to Moch Yusril Rahmatillah Amin's research, the use of the demonstration learning method also has a positive influence on students, increases their interest and involvement in the learning process, and helps them to understand the material more effectively (Moch Yusril Rahmatillah Amin, 2023).

This strategy is in line with the goals of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes deep understanding, not just memorization. Fiqh learning in the Independent Curriculum is designed to instill Islamic values that govern various aspects of life, including in terms of care of the body (Ghifari & Achadi, 2024). Using the question and answer method, teachers also facilitate students to ask critical questions, explore the meaning of each step taught, and understand the reasons behind the rules.

Ahmad Shiddiq, in his research on the *Influence of the Problem Based Learning (PBL) Model on Student Learning Outcomes in Mortuary Care Materials*, concluded that the use of this learning model significantly contributes positively to improving student learning outcomes (Shiddiq, 2020). To further improve the quality of learning, it can be considered to integrate elements of PBL, for example by providing more complex real-life cases or challenges that require students to go deeper in analyzing the steps of the care of the corpse. This will encourage students to think critically, evaluate each step taught, as well as explore the reasons behind each action in accordance with Islamic teachings. This problem-based learning helps improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Thus encouraging students to be more active, dare to express opinions, and communicate both individually and in groups (Saleha & Hasanah, 2024). This approach not only improves the understanding of theory, but also the student's skills in solving more practical and applicable problems.

In addition, the use of simple technology, such as students being given assignments in the form of collaborative projects in groups to make video tutorials or simulations at home, can help students understand more clearly and make students more aware of the stages of funeral care. Thus, even though the method used is in accordance with the principle of flexibility in the Independent Curriculum, there is

room to develop learning with innovations that are more in accordance with the context of the material, so that it can enrich the learning experience of students.

Ivana Maulia Rahmah's research on the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in the Development of Critical Thinking Skills in Banyumas shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can significantly help improve students' critical thinking skills. However, this implementation is also faced with several challenges, such as time constraints and diverse student needs (Rahmah, 2022). This research is in line with field data where teachers have to balance diverse student needs, time constraints, and fairly complex material. This provides an overview of how flexibility in the curriculum can be optimally utilized to create meaningful and immersive learning. Although these challenges exist, the application of deeper learning can open up opportunities for students to develop their critical thinking skills more optimally.

Robert Ennis, an expert in the field of critical thinking, describes critical thinking as a logical and reflective thought process with the aim of determining what needs to be believed or done (Ennis, 2015). Critical thinking (critical thinking) requires students to show creativity, argue well, and evaluate existing ideas, ideas, and theories (Intan Nuraini, 2022). In practice, at PK Kota Barat Junior High School, I observed that students were actively involved in discussions, asking each other questions and answering questions from their friends. However, their creativity has not been seen to its fullest, due to the limited time available for material exposure as well as practice, which reduces the opportunity for more in-depth discussions. Through discussion, students can share opinions, critique other views, and support arguments with evidence. Teachers act as facilitators to guide their critical thinking.

However, when conducting interviews with students, they were able to reinterpret the material well, showing that their understanding was good enough despite the limited time for evaluation and creativity development. This shows that even if critical thinking is implemented, there is still an opportunity to increase student engagement through more time and a more in-depth learning approach.

According to Robert Ennis, critical thinking can be measured through five main indicators. First, give a simple explanation (elementary clarification), which involves the ability to convey ideas clearly and easily understandable. Second, build basic skills (basic support), i.e. the ability to provide reasons or evidence that support a claim. Third, make a conclusion (inference), which includes the ability to draw conclusions based on existing information. Fourth, make further explanations (advanced clarification), which is the ability to deepen understanding and provide additional explanations. Finally, determine strategies and tactics (strategy tactics), which deals with the ability to plan and choose the right way to solve a problem or deal with a particular situation (Intan Nuraini, 2022).

The questions asked by students, although simple, indicate the beginning of the development of students' critical thinking. Referring to Robert Ennis' first indicator, which is to provide a simple explanation. Includes skills in analyzing arguments,

crafting directed questions, and asking and responding to questions related to an explanation. Critical thinking skills in students develop gradually through trained habituation, such as identifying problems and providing answers that require further elaboration (Hamidah et al., 2023).

The questions asked by the students, such as "How do I know if someone can pronounce talqin?" or "Is the sacrament of death better or not?", do reflect their curiosity about phenomena related to the topic of learning. However, to be analyzed from the perspective of the first critical thinking indicator, this question may still be classified as a basic question that requires a direct explanation from the teacher, rather than further elaboration or analysis. Nonetheless, this question suggests that students are already beginning to touch on deeper understandings, such as their desire to understand real-life situations and religious phenomena that occur.

On the other hand, questions given by teachers, such as "When we see our brother in a state of death, what should we do?" and "Why should we try to make a person who is in a state of death be able to say talqin?" are more likely to lead to the development of students' critical thinking skills. These questions force students to think further, analyze certain conditions, as well as relate the knowledge they have to real practice in everyday life. This can encourage students to look beyond just answers that are factual and force them to consider the reasons or basis for action to be taken, which is at the heart of the first critical thinking indicator.

Rasyidin Wamin's research shows that humor in learning increases students' comfort, motivation, and activeness and critical thinking, while reducing learning anxiety (Wamin, 2020). With an interactive and humorous learning atmosphere like the one created by this teacher, the critical thinking process can also be encouraged. When students feel comfortable and enthusiastic, they are more likely to ask questions and think more deeply, opening up space for more critical and analytical discussions.

The second indicator of critical thinking is building basic skills (basic support), which includes the ability to provide reasons or evidence in support of a claim (Intan Nuraini, 2022). This category reflects that students have been able to find the right information, understand basic concepts, and determine facts or data that strengthen an argument (Amininingsih et al., 2024).

Based on the field data, students were able to reinterpret the material they had learned in their own language when interviewed. In addition, when the teacher reviews the material the following week, many students can answer questions such as "After death what is done to the corpse?" or "There are 4 stages when taking care of a corpse, what are they?" Students are also given the task to memorize how to pray the body as a whole. The ability to explain in one's own language indicates an understanding of the material, but this reflects more of a recall or repetition of information than a building of evidence or reason. The teacher's questions answered by students also tend to be factual, examining their memory of the procedure, rather than encouraging students to provide in-depth justifications or reasons.

Thus, although field data show that students have a good understanding of the material, the activity does not fully reflect the second indicator of critical thinking.

To meet these indicators, an assignment is required that asks students to provide an argument for why each stage in caring for a body is important or explain the religious basis underlying the procedure. This will help students not only understand, but also build critical thinking skills through proof and argumentation. Strengthened by the research of Era Fasira et al., it proves that the Argument Driven Inquiry (ADI) Toulmin's argumentation-based argument effectively improves students' critical thinking and argumentation. This supports the idea that tasks that demand the reason and basis of a process can hone critical thinking skills (Fasira et al., 2024).

Based on the third indicator of critical thinking, namely Draw conclusions (inference) (Intan Nuraini, 2022), students demonstrate the ability to draw conclusions, although they still require deepening. For example, when the teacher asks, "When we see our brother about to die, what should we do?", the student replied, "Guiding the talqin." This answer shows their basic understanding that talqin is important to remember Allah before death, but it does not include profound reasons such as his postulates or spiritual wisdom. When students ask, "If it has been confirmed what time of death, do you pray immediately?", they try to connect the time of death with prayer, hoping that the time of death has a special meaning. The teacher straightened out by saying, "Death cannot be ascertained even if there is a diagnosis, because it is a secret of God." This response helps students realize that their conclusions need to be based on a deep understanding of divine provisions, not just practical assumptions. This shows that even though students are already trying to draw conclusions, many of them are still in the early stages.

In line with Meylin's research in compiling logical conclusions and according to Islamic values, teachers play a role in guiding students not only to memorize, but to understand the meaning of religious teachings (Wardhani, 2023). Teachers play an important role in guiding them to connect information with broader concepts, so that their conclusions are not only logical but also in accordance with religious values.

Based on the fourth indicator of critical thinking, namely making further explanations (advanced clarification) (Intan Nuraini, 2022), the interaction between students and teachers at the time of observation shows that there is a process of deepening concepts through questions and answers. When students ask, "The chest came in, Tadz?", this question opens up space for teachers to provide a more detailed explanation. The teacher replied by referring to Islamic principles, "In Islam there is no chest, use a shroud, except during emergency conditions such as Covid-19." The teacher continued by providing additional explanations about the reasons for using the shroud in Islam, the values contained in it, and the context of exceptions during the pandemic. The teacher also added information related to funeral procedures, such as giving simple marks on the grave without building a *kijing*, in accordance with the Prophet's *sunnah*.

This explanation is not optimal because there is no comparison of postulates. In addition, teachers can discuss the context of scholars' differing opinions regarding emergency conditions, such as the use of coffins in outbreak situations, and how this is regulated in contemporary fiqh. Explanations by comparing postulates or madhhab views will help students understand the basis of Islamic law more critically and comprehensively. Thus, the learning process does not only stop at practical clarifications, but also hone students' ability to analyze and evaluate arguments based on Islamic sources. This is in line with the goal of the fourth indicator, which is to deepen understanding and provide additional explanations that are more structured and weighty.

Based on the fifth indicator of critical thinking, namely determining strategies and tactics (strategy and tactics) (Intan Nuraini, 2022), teachers have chosen lecture, question and answer methods, and demonstrations to teach the procedure of shrouding the body, which is effective because it increases student enthusiasm and engagement. However, when the teacher mentions that the use of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) did not go well, this highlights the importance of adjusting strategies to the context and needs of students. In this case, FGD is considered less effective because teachers feel that the existing references are too limited to textbooks and do not facilitate more open learning.

To choose Right tactics, an educator should consider flexibility in the methods used. This method is useful for gathering more information as well as providing additional benefits (Harmita et al., 2022). FGDs can indeed be a powerful method of encouraging critical discussion, but if resources are limited or learning materials are too rigid, they can fail. This shows the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of the chosen tactics and the readiness of students in dealing with them.

The use of Kahoot in learning not only helps overcome boredom and increases student interaction in the classroom, but also reflects teachers' ability to utilize technology in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes the importance of digital technology in learning, but its use needs to be balanced with clear rules to keep students focused. Proper evaluation and flexibility in choosing adaptive strategies based on student needs will support the achievement of optimal learning objectives. This was strengthened by the Kahoot training which received a positive response from teachers, with the results of the questionnaire showing that its application in learning evaluation was effective in improving student learning outcomes (Sefirindiyani et al., 2023).

Students' overall critical thinking skills are still at the basic stage and have not met the five critical indicators according to Robert Ennis. Most learning activities focus on mastery of factual information and repetition of material, so students have not been trained to provide in-depth analysis, justification, or evidence-based conclusions. Interaction between teachers and students has opened up space for deepening of concepts, but it is more practical and less encouraging of analytical exploration.

The learning approach needs to be improved with more targeted and in-depth strategies, such as critical discussions, analytical tasks, and exploration of religious postulates. This is important to encourage students to develop critical thinking skills that include analysis, evaluation, and comprehensive application of concepts in various contexts. Without a change in approach, students' critical thinking skills development will remain limited.

Overall, although there have been good efforts in implementing the principles of the Independent Curriculum, there is still a huge room for further development in learning strategies. To truly improve students' critical thinking skills, teachers need to optimize the time available for more in-depth discussions, as well as adapt a more flexible and evidence-based approach, both in theory and practice. Adjustments to the methods used, deepening learning with evidence-based arguments, as well as involving more collaborative and analytical approaches, will make a greater contribution to developing more significant critical thinking skills in students.

3.2 Supporting Factors and Inhibiting Factors in Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills at Muhammadiyah PK Kotta Barat Junior High School

The Critical thinking skills are the main skills that need to be honed throughout the learning process. At Muhammadiyah PK Kotta Barat Junior High School, the development of this ability is influenced by various factors, both from within and outside. Supporting internal factors, such as mastery of the material by teachers and well-structured learning planning, play an important role. Teachers who master the material and plan learning well can answer students' questions appropriately, thus encouraging critical thinking skills (Shah & Jaeni, 2023).

Mastery of the material alone is not enough, teachers also need to master pedagogical skills and innovative teaching methods to stimulate students' critical thinking. Although the teacher does not use the teaching module, he or she overcomes this by underlining the important points that he wants to teach. This method makes it easier for teachers to answer students' questions appropriately and relevantly.

One of the supporting factors is the creation of a harmonious communication relationship between teachers and students. With effective communication, the learning atmosphere becomes more conducive, making students more confident and motivated to play an active role in learning activities. Several studies have also proven that good communication can encourage increased student participation during the learning process (Risandy et al., 2024). If communication runs smoothly, students will feel more comfortable and understand the subject matter more easily. This harmonious relationship plays an important role in creating a supportive learning environment.

From the external side, the facilities from the school are also very supportive of the learning process. Adequate facilities, such as visual learning media, can support the learning process and improve student understanding. According to research, the

availability of adequate facilities can be a supporting factor in improving students' critical thinking skills (Syahputri, 2024). The provision of facilities alone is not enough, there is a need for integration between facilities and the right learning methods to optimize the development of students' critical thinking skills. This is relevant to this school which provides facilities such as shrouds for learning practices, as well as TVs in the classroom to support visual learning. If these facilities are not available, teachers sometimes buy the equipment themselves and then replace it through the school. However, there are also inhibiting factors, one of which is time constraints.

Sometimes, the time available is not enough to deliver the material to the maximum due to unpredictable factors. Limited time in the learning process can be an obstacle in the development of students' critical thinking skills. This statement is in accordance with the view that limited time is one of the factors that interfere with the smooth learning process (Syahputri, 2024). Teachers need to design efficient and effective learning strategies, such as the use of blended learning methods, to overcome time constraints and ensure that material can be delivered well. However, overall, the existing facilities have greatly supported the learning process and are able to facilitate efforts to improve critical thinking skills.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that the learning strategies applied by teachers at Muhammadiyah PK Junior High School in the subject of Fiqh have shown effectiveness in improving students' understanding, but are still limited in developing critical thinking skills. The use of lectures, questions and answers, and demonstrations is quite helpful, but it does not fully encourage students to think analytically and reflectively. Therefore, more innovative strategies such as Problem-Based Learning and the utilization of interactive technologies such as Kahoot are recommended to improve students' participation and critical thinking skills. Despite supporting factors such as mastery of materials by teachers and adequate facilities, time constraints remain a major challenge. Thus, flexibility in learning strategies is needed to suit the needs of students and the demands of the Independent Curriculum.

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