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Controversial Issues in Contemporary Fiqh Education: Developing Students' Critical Thinking in Madrasah Tsanawiyah

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1. Introduction

Contemporary education is no longer sufficient if it is oriented solely toward the mastery and reproduction of knowledge; rather, it must equip students with the ability to understand, evaluate, and use knowledge reflectively when facing complex problems. In this sense, critical thinking is not merely the ability to find the correct answer, but rather a reflective process that enables students to examine the assumptions underlying their thinking, test the validity of a viewpoint, consider alternatives, and form more informed judgments[1], [2] . This need is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of madrasahs, especially as the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum promotes learning that positions students not merely as recipients of information, but also as active participants in constructing knowledge and reflecting on their learning process. The development of critical thinking skills in madrasahs can be supported through materials connected to everyday life situations, learning activities that actively engage students, as well as reflection and metacognition[3] . A key issue in educational development is not merely how students acquire knowledge, but how the learning process can create a pedagogical space that enables them to use that knowledge to evaluate issues, consider alternatives, and build well-reasoned understanding.

In the context of Islamic education, the development of critical thinking skills is not an agenda separate from the goals of religious education, but rather part of the effort to shape students who are capable of understanding, reflecting on, and responsibly considering religious issues. Systematic studies indicate that Islamic education has the potential to develop critical thinking skills, although its teaching practices still face challenges, including a tendency toward learning that emphasizes the reproduction of knowledge and rote memorization rather than analytical and reflective processes[4] . In the development of contemporary Islamic education studies, critical thinking has also begun to be situated within the context of Islamic intellectual traditions such as tafakkur, tadabbur, and ulul albab, which emphasize the role of rationality and reflection in understanding the self, the environment, and religious reality[5] . The development of critical thinking in Islamic education does not merely mean adopting thinking skills from the general education framework, but can also be understood as a process that brings together analytical abilities with reflection and consideration of issues that have religious dimensions. In line with this, studies on pedagogical trends in Islamic education indicate the use of various approaches—such as problem-based learning, collaborative dialogue, and reflective learning—to foster students' analytical abilities, although there remain limitations in understanding and developing pedagogical approaches suited to the institutional context and characteristics of Islamic learning[6] . These issues indicate that the next challenge is no longer merely to emphasize the importance of critical thinking in Islamic education, but to understand how specific pedagogical spaces within religious learning can enable students to develop these skills through direct engagement with issues that require reasoning, deliberation, and evaluation.

Conceptually, the development of critical thinking is related to the development of students' cognitive abilities in understanding information, connecting various ideas, considering the relationships between thoughts, and constructing reasoning based on the problems they face. The cognitive development perspective views students' mental activities as a process that evolves through active engagement in understanding and constructing knowledge; therefore, learning must provide opportunities for students to confront problems that demand thought and reasoning, rather than merely passively receiving information[7] . The development of critical thinking skills is also linked to the selection of instructional approaches that allow students to tackle problems, develop arguments, and evaluate the information they receive. A number of studies indicate that learning approaches that actively involve students in problem-solving and contextual learning processes can be linked to the development of critical thinking skills in Islamic Education and fiqh instruction[8], [9] .

Pedagogically, learning oriented toward the development of critical thinking skills requires a learning environment that provides students with opportunities to actively engage in the process of constructing understanding. In the context of Islamic Education, student-centered learning that allows for the exploration of issues can support a shift in learning from the passive reception of information toward more active cognitive engagement. The development of critical thinking skills is also related to how instruction provides students with opportunities to confront problems, connect knowledge to context, and evaluate various available sources of information[10] . This framework is relevant to the teaching of "Controversial Issues," as topics involving differing viewpoints create learning situations that allow students to engage with multiple perspectives and require them to justify their understanding. In fiqh instruction, such a space is crucial because students are not merely confronted with material as a collection of legal provisions, but also with issues that may require contextual understanding, consideration of reasoning, and the formulation of arguments. Therefore, ,

In Islamic education, the study of fiqh is a pedagogical space with great potential for developing critical thinking skills because fiqh material is not merely about mastering legal rulings but also requires an understanding of the issues, consideration of legal reasoning, and the application of these principles in concrete situations. The complexity of fiqh issues allows students not only to accept a legal ruling but also to understand

the basis for its reasoning and to compare various possible solutions to a problem. A number of studies indicate that active learning approaches, particularly Problem-Based Learning (PBL), can support the development of critical thinking skills in fiqh education[11], [12], [13] . These findings suggest that fiqh education can serve as a productive space for developing critical thinking skills. However, the focus of previous research on PBL also opens the door to exploring other pedagogical approaches that more explicitly utilize differing perspectives and controversies in fiqh issues as learning resources.

Technological advancements and social changes have introduced various new issues that expand the scope of fiqh discussions beyond the issues directly addressed in classical contexts. Digital transactions, cryptocurrency, the use of artificial intelligence, and various contemporary social practices present issues that require consideration of Islamic legal principles as well as the context of their application[14], [15] . These issues do not always have simple answers, especially when there are differences in understanding legal foundations, weighing public interest, or applying fiqh principles to ever-changing conditions. The complex nature of these issues and their openness to diverse considerations make contemporary fiqh a relevant source of learning that encourages students to ask questions, consider various perspectives, and develop well-reasoned arguments. Thus, the study of contemporary fiqh has the potential to shift from the mere transmission of rules toward a more reflective process of inquiry and reasoning.

In an educational context, the nature of these issues—which involve differing perspectives and positions—can be leveraged as a pedagogical space to encourage students to engage in more reflective and argumentative thinking. Learning through "Controversial Issues" allows students to test assumptions, present reasons, consider alternative perspectives, and evaluate different arguments through structured interaction and discussion[16], [17] . This process does not merely place students in a debate situation but requires the teacher's active role in selecting issues, fostering a dialogic atmosphere, managing differing viewpoints, and ensuring that discussions remain focused on reasoned consideration[1] . Thus, "Controversial Issues" can be understood as a pedagogical approach that provides space for students to learn through differing perspectives, making it relevant to the nature of contemporary fiqh issues, which give rise to diverse considerations and viewpoints.

Empirically, the use of controversial issues in religious education has demonstrated potential in developing critical thinking skills. Muslimin and Abidin (2023), for example, show that learning based on *controversial religious issues* can be used to enhance students' critical thinking skills through their engagement with religious issues that involve differing viewpoints[18] . These findings reinforce the argument that religious controversies can serve as a learning resource that encourages students to consider diverse reasons, perspectives, and arguments[19] . However, this research was conducted in the context of higher education and thus does not specifically address how the "Controversial Issues" pedagogy functions in fiqh instruction at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, particularly when students encounter contemporary fiqh issues. This difference in context opens the door to expanding our understanding of how the "Controversial Issues" pedagogy can be implemented and how the process of developing critical thinking unfolds in the context of secondary-level Islamic education[20] .

Although various studies have demonstrated the importance of developing critical thinking in Islamic education and the potential of active learning in fiqh instruction, there is still room to deepen our understanding of the pedagogical processes that enable these skills to develop when addressing controversial issues in fiqh. Previous studies on fiqh instruction have largely highlighted the use of Problem-Based Learning to foster critical thinking skills[11], [12], [13] . Meanwhile, studies on Controversial Issues in a religious context have demonstrated their potential for developing critical thinking, though primarily in the context of higher education[18] . On the other hand, research on critical thinking in Islamic education still indicates a need to expand the exploration of pedagogical approaches and learning contexts that can foster these skills[4], [6] . Thus, understanding remains limited regarding how the pedagogy of "Controversial Issues" is implemented in contemporary fiqh instruction at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, how students develop critical thinking through discussions of these issues, and the factors that support and hinder this developmental process.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to understand how the "Controversial Issues" pedagogy is implemented in contemporary fiqh instruction at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, how students develop critical thinking skills through engagement in discussions of fiqh issues that involve differing perspectives, and the factors that support and hinder this process. Specifically, this study seeks to answer two questions: (1) how is the "Controversial Issues" pedagogy implemented in contemporary fiqh instruction at Madrasah Tsanawiyah; and (2) how do students develop critical thinking skills through discussions of contemporary fiqh issues; From a pedagogical perspective, this study is expected to broaden understanding of how the "Controversial Issues" approach can provide a learning space that enables students to engage in critical thinking by encountering differing perspectives and arguments regarding fiqh issues. In the context of Islamic education, this study also contributes by demonstrating the potential for fiqh instruction to move beyond the mere transmission of rules toward a learning process that enables students to understand issues, consider perspectives, evaluate reasons, construct arguments, and formulate well-reasoned conclusions.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using *a case study* design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the "Controversial Issues" pedagogy—based on contemporary fiqh issues—in the process of developing critical thinking skills among students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah. This design was chosen because the research focuses on understanding phenomena in their natural context, particularly how the learning process unfolds, how teachers and students interact, and how learning dynamics evolve during discussions of contemporary fiqh issues. The case study approach allows the researcher to examine the phenomenon contextually and comprehensively by considering the interrelationships between learning activities, participant characteristics, and the environment in which the phenomenon occurs[21], [22] . This study is not intended to measure the effectiveness of learning experimentally but rather to understand the implementation process and the development of critical thinking that occurs in the case under study.

The research was conducted at MTsN 3 Rembang, which has implemented fiqh instruction by utilizing contemporary fiqh issues as discussion material. Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement and relevance to the research focus. Informants consisted of the fiqh teacher (GF), the madrasah principal (KM), and eighth-grade students participating in the learning process (S01, S02, S03, and so on). The teacher was selected due to their direct experience in designing and implementing instruction, while the madrasah principal was chosen to provide information regarding the context and institutional support. Students served as the primary data source for understanding their learning experiences, engagement in discussions, the process of considering various perspectives, and the development of critical thinking skills. The selection of informants was based on the consideration that they possessed experiences and information relevant to the research phenomenon[23] .

Research data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted during the learning process to identify the implementation of the "Controversial Issues" pedagogy, teacher and student activities, interaction patterns, forms of perspective exchange, and the students' processes in understanding issues, presenting reasons, considering different viewpoints, and drawing conclusions. In-depth interviews were conducted with GF, KM, and selected students to explore their experiences, perceptions, learning strategies, as well as factors that support and hinder the learning process. Each informant was assigned a code to maintain anonymity. Documentation was used as supporting data, including teaching modules, lesson plans, assessment tools, student discussion outcomes, photos of learning activities, and other relevant documents. These three techniques were used complementarily to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon[24] .

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from the GF, KM, and students, while methodological triangulation was performed by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation. Member checking was carried out by confirming the data and interpretations with the informants to ensure their consistency with the experiences they described. Data analysis utilized the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions[25] . Data from observations, interviews, and documentation were read repeatedly, coded, grouped, and compared to identify patterns and themes related to the implementation of Controversial Issues, the process of developing critical thinking, and supporting and inhibiting factors. The analysis was conducted simultaneously throughout the research process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Implementation of Controversial Issues in Contemporary Fiqh Instruction

This study reveals that contemporary fiqh education is positioned not merely as a process of conveying legal provisions, but as a pedagogical space for understanding fiqh issues that arise in real life and involve diverse legal perspectives. The nature of these issues requires students not only to know a legal provision but also to understand the reasoning behind a particular viewpoint, recognize differences in arguments, and consider the legal sources used in formulating an opinion. Within this framework, the "Controversial Issues" approach is used to present fiqh issues that allow for more than one perspective, so that the learning process moves from the reception of information toward exploration, the exchange of views, and reasoning regarding the relevant legal foundations.

The implementation of this approach demonstrates that controversy is positioned as a structured part of the learning process, not merely as a debate activity among students. Contextual issues are introduced as a starting point; students are then guided to explore legal sources, scholars' viewpoints, and differing arguments before presenting and defending their opinions in the learning forum. At the same time, the teacher acts as a facilitator and moderator to ensure that every student has the opportunity to express their views, to keep differing perspectives within the bounds of academic discourse and proper discussion

etiquette, and to provide clarification when misunderstandings arise. The results of observations, interviews, and documentation show that this sequence forms a systematic implementation pattern, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 : The Implementation Process of *Controversial Issues* in Contemporary Fiqh Education

Pedagogical Components	Empirical Implementation	Pedagogical Implications/Objectives	Data Sources
Planning and Selection of Issues	Teachers develop lesson plans or teaching modules that include contemporary fiqh issues and design discussion guidelines to ensure the learning process remains conducive.	Provide a structured learning framework and ensure that controversial issues are addressed within the learning objectives and clear discussion boundaries.	Interviews, documentation
Contextualizing Contemporary Fiqh Issues	Learning begins with an introduction to the issues through news stories or real-life cases relevant to students' lives, such as digital financial transactions, professional zakat, and organ transplants.	Connecting fiqh concepts to real-life issues so that students have a concrete context for understanding the emergence of differing legal perspectives.	Interviews, observation
Collaborative Exploration	Students are divided into groups to explore issues, examine sources, discuss cases, and formulate their own perspectives.	Encouraging students' active engagement in understanding issues, analyzing information, and forming perspectives through interaction with group members.	Observation, interviews
Evidence-Based Discussion and Exchange of Perspectives	Students compare legal arguments, fiqh references, and the views of scholars, then present their reasoning when defending, responding to, or comparing a particular viewpoint.	Guide students not merely to state opinions, but to connect those opinions to legal grounds, compare arguments, and weigh the strength of different reasons.	Observation, interviews, documentation
Teacher Facilitation and Moderation	The teacher acts as a facilitator and moderator who maintains balance in the space for expressing opinions, guides the flow of the discussion, and provides clarification on complex or potentially misleading points.	Creating a focused space for dialogue, ensuring balanced student participation, and preventing differences in perspective from escalating into conceptual misunderstandings or interpersonal conflicts.	Interviews, observation
Managing Differences and Closing the Lesson	Differences of opinion are guided to remain within the bounds of academic discourse and proper discussion etiquette. The learning session concludes with an evaluation of students' active participation, discussion etiquette, and work outcomes.	Strengthening students' ability to respond to differences in a reasoned and civil manner while providing an opportunity to evaluate the learning process and outcomes.	Interviews, observations, documentation

Research findings indicate that the implementation of "Controversial Issues" in contemporary fiqh instruction begins with planning that intentionally incorporates current issues into the instructional design. Controversial issues do not arise spontaneously during discussions but are considered from the outset during the development of lesson plans or teaching modules and the selection of topics. Fiqh teachers explained that planning involves incorporating contemporary fiqh topics while providing guidance on how to conduct discussions to ensure the learning process remains conducive. The selected issues include the legal rulings on digital financial transactions, professional zakat, and organ transplantation. The next stage begins with problem orientation by presenting news articles or real-life cases, before students are guided to explore various legal arguments and the views of Islamic scholars.

"Planning involves developing lesson plans or teaching modules that include contemporary fiqh topics, as well as providing guidance on how to conduct discussions to ensure a conducive classroom atmosphere. The issues discussed include the legal rulings on digital financial transactions, professional zakat, and organ transplants. The lesson then begins with a problem-based orientation through news segments or real-life cases. Afterward, students are divided into several groups to explore various religious arguments and the views of Islamic scholars." (T)

This quote demonstrates that contemporary issues are not treated as supplementary material but are constructed as the starting point for problems that students must consider. This is important because the defining characteristic of "Controversial Issues" in this study lies in the shift in the nature of the material

from *"something that must be explained"* to *"an issue that must be examined."* News reports or real-life cases serve as catalysts that bring fiqh issues out of the abstract context of textbooks and connect them to situations students can recognize. The madrasah principal's statement reinforces this pattern:

> *"Issues such as digital transactions and zakat are considered relevant to students' lives, while organ transplantation illustrates that societal developments can give rise to new issues requiring fiqh analysis. When issues are viewed as real-world, students' questions also tend to stem from experiences they observe or hear about in their surroundings."* (P).

The pedagogical significance of this pattern becomes clearer through the students' experiences. One S10 student stated that this learning experience *"changed my mindset—I realized that fiqh is actually very broad."* This statement can be interpreted not merely as a positive response to the instruction, but as an indication that exposure to contemporary issues and differing perspectives broadens the way students interpret the subject matter of fiqh. The perception that fiqh has a broad scope emerged alongside their experiences of listening to and responding to their peers' opinions, as well as when they encountered issues such as "paylater," which, according to J, made him more cautious in understanding financial matters.

> *"This learning experience changed my mindset—I realized that fiqh is actually very broad. We also learned to listen to and respond to our peers' opinions. One thing that particularly interested me was the ruling on 'paylater,' because it made me more cautious about financial matters. So, the fiqh we study isn't just about the material in the textbook, but also about real-life issues we actually encounter."* (S10)

The "Controversial Issues" module positions contemporary fiqh topics as catalysts for exploration and the exchange of perspectives. Students are not merely guided to understand legal rulings but are encouraged to compare legal arguments, scholars' viewpoints, and the reasoning behind each opinion. This approach ensures that controversy serves as a structured component of the learning process, rather than merely a debate among students.

The madrasah principal explained that discussions are managed in stages so that all students have the opportunity to participate:

> *"It's usually done in stages. Not all students have to speak in front of the class right away. They can start with group discussions first. From small groups, students then become more confident in expressing their opinions. Groups must be organized so that active students don't just end up with other active students. Teachers need to consider students' personalities so that those who are usually passive also get a chance."* (P).

These findings show that group structure and teacher facilitation play a crucial role in creating a space for dialogue. Students also begin to view differences of opinion as a natural part of fiqh learning, rather than as a conflict that must result in one side being wrong. The madrasah principal emphasized:

> *"At first, some assumed that if opinions differed, one of them must be wrong. But through discussion, they began to understand that in certain fiqh issues, there are indeed differing opinions and reasons behind them. They learned that not all issues must be viewed in black-and-white terms. They need to examine the evidence, the methods of interpreting that evidence, and the reasoning behind the opinions. That is part of critical thinking."* (P).

These changes are reflected in the students' experiences. S3 stated, *"Well, we're learning to listen to and respond to our classmates' opinions"* (S3), and that the learning process has helped them get used to *"weighing which arguments have valid reasoning"* (S3). These statements indicate that engagement with controversial issues has begun to shift students' responses from simply accepting opinions outright to listening, considering, and examining the basis of the arguments.

The teacher's role is also a crucial element in maintaining the quality of this process. Teachers do not merely present material but guide students toward relevant sources, pose questions, and steer the course of the discussion . This was emphasized in the interviews:

> *"Teachers, as neutral facilitators and moderators, ensure that every student has the opportunity to express their views. Teachers do not merely present material; they must prepare issues, sources, and questions that can stimulate students' thinking."* (T).

Overall, the implementation of "Controversial Issues" shapes fiqh learning that connects real-world issues, diversity of legal perspectives, exploration of sources, and guided dialogue. The key finding at this stage is that controversy is used as a pedagogical structure to train students to understand differences while justifying their opinions based on legal grounds and relevant reasoning.

The research findings indicate that "Controversial Issues" is not merely a discussion method but functions as a pedagogical framework because the learning process is designed through issue selection, source presentation, exchange of perspectives, argumentation, and teacher moderation. This pattern aligns with Shi et al., who demonstrated that teaching controversial issues requires teachers to engage in dialogic interactions to guide students in considering, negotiating, and debating opposing perspectives, including through questions, rebuttals, and critiques of students' arguments[26] . Research by Wansink et al. also shows that the quality of the classroom environment and teacher behavior characterized by agency and support are associated with students' readiness to participate in discussions of controversial issues[27] . In the context of this study, these characteristics are evident when the teacher does not provide a

single answer from the outset but instead guides students to compare the arguments and views of religious scholars while ensuring that differences remain within the bounds of respectful discussion. In other words, the key feature of the "Controversial Issues" pedagogy lies in the structure for managing differing perspectives, not merely in the existence of discussion itself.

Contemporary fiqh issues provide a context that allows students' thinking processes to evolve from engagement with real-world problems toward an appreciation of the plurality of viewpoints, the examination of evidence, the comparison of arguments, and the formation of reasoned judgments. This finding expands upon studies of problem-based fiqh learning, which generally position contextual problems as triggers for analysis and critical thinking; research by Listrianti et al. shows that PBL in fiqh learning encourages students to connect fiqh concepts with real-life situations, participate in discussions, and develop critical thinking[28] . More recent studies also show that strategies such as PBL and research-based learning are widely used to foster critical thinking in fiqh instruction, although their implementation remains dependent on the specific strategies and learning context[29] . The findings of this study reveal a distinct characteristic: issues function not merely as problems to be solved, but as spaces where students confront a plurality of legal opinions and must assess the strength of the underlying reasoning. This aligns with Jarmer's findings that religious education that exposes students to diverse interpretations can develop their ability to understand plurality, evaluate sources, and form judgments through deliberative reflection[30] . This perspective clarifies that the contribution of "Controversial Issues" in fiqh is not to replace PBL, but rather to expand learning from problem-solving toward reasoned judgment regarding differing legal viewpoints.

Research findings indicate that controversy does not automatically lead to critical thinking; controversy becomes productive when teachers provide issue framing, verifiable sources, a structure for interaction, and mediation of differing opinions. This is reinforced by research on the teaching of controversial issues, which shows that teachers need to create a safe space for discussion while guiding the exchange of perspectives so that students can participate constructively[26], [27] . Recent studies on the teaching of controversial issues also emphasize that teachers face the need to balance open discussion with managing the quality and direction of learning[31] . In this study, these functions are evident through teachers acting as facilitators and moderators, directing students to religious sources, posing probing questions, correcting misconceptions, and ensuring that differences of opinion remain academic in nature. Therefore, the pedagogical mechanisms identified cannot be understood merely as a simple relationship between discussion and critical thinking. This process unfolds through structured controversial issues, the exchange of perspectives, evidence-based reasoning, and teacher mediation that keeps differing opinions academically productive. This mechanism constitutes the analytical contribution of the study, as it positions teacher mediation as a pedagogical condition that enables controversy to transform from a mere difference of opinion into a directed reasoning process.

The implementation of "Controversial Issues" in contemporary fiqh instruction forms a structured pedagogical process, beginning with the selection of real-world issues, group exploration, and the exchange of perspectives, and then directed toward argumentation based on textual evidence and the views of scholars. The teacher acts as a facilitator, moderator, and mediator when clarification is needed. These findings confirm that the defining characteristic of this pedagogy is not merely the use of discussion, but rather the organization of fiqh controversies as a structured space for testing arguments, bringing perspectives together, and managing differences in an academic and civilized manner.

3.2. Development of Students' Critical Thinking Skills through Contemporary Fiqh Issues

The research findings show that the development of students' critical thinking skills is primarily evident in changes in how they understand and respond to differing opinions on fiqh issues. Students are no longer merely guided to determine which opinion is considered correct but are beginning to recognize that a fiqh issue can have more than one perspective, each based on different lines of reasoning. In this process, students are guided to understand the issue, identify differing perspectives, examine legal sources, consider the reasoning, and draw conclusions based on the information obtained. This pattern aligns with the observation indicators showing the development of skills in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, self-regulation, argumentation, and responding to others' opinions.

The earliest change is evident in how students view differences of opinion. The madrasah principal explained that some students initially tended to view differences as a conflict between right and wrong. Through discussion, students were introduced to the reality that certain fiqh issues do indeed have differing viewpoints, and each viewpoint has reasons that need to be understood.

> *"At first, some thought that if opinions differed, one of them must be wrong. But through discussion, they began to understand that in certain fiqh issues, there are indeed differing opinions, and there are reasons behind them. They learned that not all issues must be viewed in black-and-white terms. They need to examine the evidence, the way the evidence is interpreted, and the reasoning behind the opinion. That is part of critical thinking."* (P).

These findings indicate that the development of critical thinking is not only related to students' ability to produce

answers but also to a shift in how they view an issue. Students began moving away from a dichotomous, acceptance-based mindset toward an effort to understand the reasoning underlying a particular viewpoint. This shift forms the foundation for analytical skills, as students began to consider the relationship between the textual evidence, the methods of interpreting it, and the resulting legal conclusions.

Further development is evident in students' willingness to question the reasoning behind an opinion. The madrasah principal noted that some students who previously tended to follow their peers' opinions are now demonstrating more reflective responses in discussions. They are beginning to question the basis of an opinion before accepting it, although this ability has not yet developed uniformly among all students.

"There has been a change, particularly among some students who previously tended to simply follow their friends' opinions. In discussions, they have begun to dare to present their reasons and do not immediately accept the information provided. They have started asking, 'What is the basis for that?' or 'Why do you hold that opinion?' When discussing issues of fiqh, students are also being guided to examine the sources and legal basis, although their abilities vary and some still require teacher guidance." (P).

This statement indicates a shift from passively accepting information to questioning its basis. Questions about the basis and reasoning show that students are beginning to engage in an evaluative process before accepting a particular viewpoint. However, the data also show that this process is still developing and has not yet become a uniformly developed skill among all students.

The ability to evaluate arguments is also evident in how students use legal principles and references when forming their views. S3 described how the learning process has led him not only to listen to opinions expressed in discussions but also to begin considering the strength of the legal grounds used. He also mentioned searching for legal principles or references as a new habit in his learning.

"In this learning process, I've become more confident in expressing my opinions because we're not just asked to answer but also have to think about the reasons behind them. If there are differing opinions, I try to weigh which one has stronger evidence. I've also started getting used to looking for evidence or references before expressing my opinion. So now, I don't easily follow others' opinions before understanding the basis they're using." (S3).

This experience demonstrates that engagement with controversial issues is beginning to foster the habit of examining the basis of an argument before accepting or expressing an opinion. In the context of critical thinking, this behavior relates to the ability to evaluate, as students not only compare the content of opinions but also consider the sources and the strength of the evidence supporting them. Observational data also show that students' decision-making during discussions is accompanied by references to legal principles or evidence.

This ability is also evident in other students who more explicitly describe the process of analyzing the opinions of religious scholars. When faced with differing viewpoints, students do not immediately choose one opinion but try to examine the reasons used by each scholar. This process demonstrates that the learning process provides students with the space to compare arguments before determining their stance.

"When I encounter differing opinions, I don't immediately choose one. I try to analyze the reasoning of each scholar and see which opinion has a stronger legal basis. When presenting arguments, I've also gotten used to using legal principles or data as a foundation, rather than just my personal opinion. This way of learning makes me more confident because the opinions I express have references that can be explained." (S4).

This statement highlights the interconnection between analysis, evaluation, and argumentation. Students not only recognize the existence of differences but also strive to explain why a particular opinion is chosen based on the strength of its legal basis. Observational findings reinforce this pattern, indicating that students are able to draw conclusions about issues based on evidence and arguments and to articulate their thoughts in a more structured manner.

Further development of critical thinking is evident in students' ability to draw conclusions following the discussion process. The madrasah principal explained that students are given the opportunity to present the results of their discussions, then select key information and compare opinions before formulating conclusions. Teachers continue to provide guidance to ensure that the conclusions drawn remain within the scope of the subject matter and the basis of the discussion.

"In discussions, it is not enough for students to simply repeat the material presented by the teacher. They must select information they deem important, compare the opinions that emerge, and then present conclusions based on the discussion. Teachers provide guidance to ensure that the conclusions drawn remain consistent with the material and do not deviate from the basis of the discussion. This process demonstrates that students are beginning to learn how to process information before reaching a conclusion." (P).

These data indicate that discussions provide students with the opportunity to engage in the process of inference—that is, processing the information they have obtained before reaching a conclusion. Conclusions are not treated as mere repetitions of the teacher's material but as the result of a process involving selecting information, comparing perspectives, and organizing reasoning. This pattern aligns with observational findings showing that students are able to formulate conclusions based on evidence they deem reasonable.

In addition to analytical aspects, the development of critical

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Vol. 4, No. 1, July (2026): start page–end page

thinking is also related to students' ability to address differences through dialogue. S3 stated that the learning process taught her to listen to and respond to classmates' opinions and to understand that differing viewpoints do not necessarily warrant rejection. This experience is linked to the development of tolerance for differing opinions within the learning process.

"I've noticed that in fiqh classes, classmates' opinions can differ, but that doesn't mean one must be immediately blamed. During discussions, we learn to listen to and respond to our classmates' opinions based on the reasoning they provide. From this, I've come to better understand that differences of opinion in fiqh do have a basis. Therefore, the skill I've felt develop the most is tolerance toward differing opinions." (S3).

These findings indicate that critical thinking in fiqh learning is not merely a cognitive skill. The ability to evaluate opinions goes hand in hand with the ability to listen, respond, and respect others' arguments. Observations also show that students do not interrupt their peers and use polite language when refuting arguments, while their tolerance for differences is assessed as having developed very well.

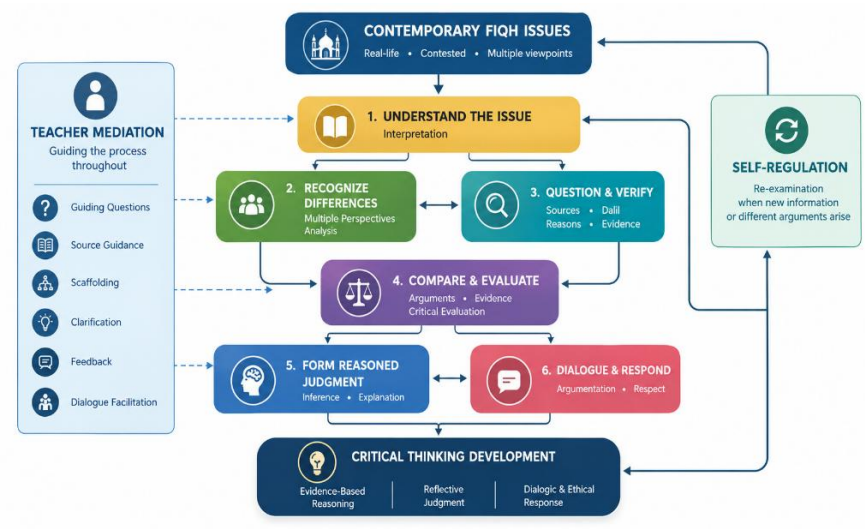


Figure 1 Relational-reflective supervisory learning model at MA Khozinatul Ulum Blora

Overall, the development of critical thinking skills in this study can be understood as a process that moves from understanding issues and recognizing differences, toward questioning the basis of opinions, comparing arguments, evaluating evidence, drawing conclusions, and responding to differences openly and politely. This development has not yet been entirely uniform, as some students still require teacher guidance, particularly in presenting reasons and developing arguments independently. However, the series of interview and observation data indicates that controversial fiqh issues provide learning experiences that enable students to practice critical thinking in real, argumentative, and dialogic situations.

This visualization illustrates the framework for the development of critical thinking in contemporary fiqh learning, which draws on "Contemporary Fiqh Issues" as a context of real-world, controversial problems with diverse perspectives. The process begins with "Understand the Issue" as the stage for interpreting the problem, then progresses through the reciprocal relationship between "Recognize Differences" and "Question & Verify." Students not only recognize the existence of differing perspectives but also examine the sources, arguments, reasons, and evidence underlying each viewpoint. The results of these two processes are then directed toward "Compare & Evaluate," which involves comparing arguments and critically evaluating the strength of the evidence.

The next stage highlights the reciprocal relationship between "Form Reasoned Judgment" and "Dialogue & Respond." These findings reinforce the study's conclusion that students' ability to present arguments and respond to differences cannot be understood solely as a cognitive skill; it also requires an ethical disposition that allows differing viewpoints to be managed respectfully. Students formulate judgments based on the results of their reasoning and then communicate their views through arguments that continue to respect differences. The entire process culminates in Critical Thinking Development, which in the research findings is represented through three dimensions: Evidence-Based Reasoning, Reflective Judgment, and Dialogic & Ethical Response. On the other hand, Teacher Mediation serves as a guide throughout the process through guiding questions, source guidance, scaffolding, clarification, feedback, and dialogue facilitation, while Self-Regulation indicates that the thinking process does not stop at a single conclusion; new

information or arguments can prompt students to reexamine sources, evaluate arguments, and revise their judgments.

The resulting conceptual model shows that the development of critical thinking in contemporary fiqh education is a process of reasoning that evolves through students' engagement with issues featuring a plurality of perspectives, rather than merely as a result of discussion activities. Contemporary Fiqh Issues serves as a context that exposes students to real-world problems, differing viewpoints, and the need to construct justifiable arguments. This aligns with Vandecandelaere, Savenije, and Stoel (2025), who identify multiperspectivity as a key principle in teaching controversial issues, as students need to understand, evaluate, and synthesize different perspectives[32] . The "Understand the Issue" stage in the model thus serves as the interpretive foundation before students make judgments, while the relationship between "Recognize Differences" and "Question & Verify" indicates that recognizing the diversity of opinions must be accompanied by an examination of sources, premises, reasons, and evidence. This interpretation aligns with Jarmer (2025), who demonstrates that religious education that presents diverse interpretations can develop the ability to understand plurality, evaluate claims, and form judgments through reflection[30] , as well as Abdullah et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of structured critical reasoning in the study of Usul al-Fiqh[33] .

The "Compare & Evaluate" stage thus represents the evaluative core of this process, as students do not stop at recognizing differences but begin to compare the strength of arguments based on available evidence, reasoning, and proof. These findings suggest that the development of critical thinking is best understood as a change in how students process and evaluate information, rather than merely an increase in their willingness to speak up. A study by Jazil et al. (2025) shows that strategies and media integration in fiqh instruction can provide space for critical engagement through contextual understanding and examination of issues[29] , while Jegstad et al. (2025) emphasize that the development of critical thinking in the classroom occurs through dialogic practices, questioning, argumentation, and discussions of issues that do not have a single answer[34] .

Furthermore, the relationship between "Form of Reasoned Judgment" and "Dialogue & Response" indicates that formed judgments do not remain mere individual conclusions but are tested through explanation, argumentation, responses to other perspectives, and respect for differences. This dialogical dimension in Islamic education is also inseparable from the ethical quality of the relationship between teachers and students. Learning from the perspective of Islamic education must be built through teacher–student relationships grounded in etiquette, respect, *humility*, and moral character[35] . These findings align with those of Ortega-Sánchez et al. (2025) regarding the importance of perspective and reasoning in learning about controversial issues[36] , as well as the findings of Xie and Lin (2025), which demonstrate the relevance of dialogic learning to the quality of the learning process[37] .

The Teacher Mediation and Self-Regulation layers demonstrate that these processes do not occur automatically simply because students are confronted with controversial issues. Changes in learning within Islamic education require a shift in interactions that positions the teacher as a facilitator and students as active participants in the learning process[38], [39] . Teachers provide guiding questions, source guidance, scaffolding, clarification, feedback, and dialogue facilitation to ensure that differing viewpoints remain an academic process rather than a personal conflict; this condition aligns with Karousiou, Vrikki, and Evagorou (2025), who highlight the importance of teachers' preparedness and strategies in managing sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom[40] .

Self-regulation further lends a recursive nature to the model, as new information or arguments can prompt students to reexamine sources, reevaluate arguments, and revise their judgments. The formation of the *ideal human* character occurs through systematic and repeated practice in educational life[41] . These findings provide context that the process of self-regulation in fiqh learning is not only related to re-examining knowledge but also to the formation of habits to consider, respond to, and improve attitudes during the learning process.Based on these overall findings, this model can be understood as an empirical synthesis of the mechanisms underlying the development of critical thinking in contemporary fiqh learning: pluralistic issues give rise to the need to understand and examine perspectives; evaluation yields reasoned judgments; dialogue tests and communicates these judgments; while teacher mediation and self-regulation keep the process on track. Therefore, "Critical Thinking Development" in this study is not reduced to analytical ability alone but encompasses evidence-based reasoning, reflective judgment, and dialogic and ethical responses as forms of reasoning consistent with the nature of fiqh learning.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the "Controversial Issues" pedagogy in contemporary fiqh education is implemented through the selection of real-world and controversial issues, the exploration of legal sources, the exchange of perspectives, argumentation, and the guided management of differences. Teachers serve as facilitators, moderators, and mediators through probing questions, guidance on sources, clarification, and providing students with opportunities to participate. This process transforms fiqh issues into a space for understanding problems, recognizing differing viewpoints, examining legal foundations, comparing arguments, evaluating evidence and

reasoning, and formulating well-reasoned judgments. The development of students' critical thinking is evident in the shift from passively accepting opinions to a reasoning process that is more evidence-based, reflective, and open to other perspectives, although this development is not yet entirely uniform. Teacher readiness, the availability of learning resources, classroom atmosphere, and student participation serve as supporting conditions, while passive students and environmental distractions pose challenges that are addressed through group structures, probing questions, and teacher encouragement.

The main finding of this study is that critical thinking in fiqh education is not merely the ability to judge whether an opinion is right or wrong, but rather a process of weighing viewpoints based on evidence and reasoning, forming justifiable judgments, and responding to differences through dialogue and civility. In this context, "Controversial Issues" serve as a pedagogical framework that brings together evidence-based reasoning, reflective consideration, and ethical responsibility in the application of religious knowledge. These findings can serve as a foundation for future research to examine the application of similar approaches in madrasahs and a wider range of educational levels, as well as to use longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to explore the development of critical thinking skills in greater depth—particularly the relationship between teacher mediation, self-regulation, the quality of argumentation, and students' ability to revise their views after receiving new information or perspectives.

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