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ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING IN FIQH LEARNING: THE ROLE OF STRATEGIES AND MEDIA INTEGRATION IN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – Fiqh learning has traditionally focused on cognitive aspects, such as recalling concepts or matching problems with answers in classical texts. Consequently, it has often neglected the cultivation of learners' critical thinking skills. This study aims to analyze students' critical thinking practices in fiqh learning, explore the instructional strategies employed, and identify the types of technology used in fiqh learning activities. Additionally, it investigates the continuity between critical thinking, learning strategies, and technology in the context of fiqh education.

Methodology – A mixed methods approach was adopted, using an explanatory sequential design. The study began with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative exploration. A total of 254 students from eight universities in East Java, Indonesia, participated in the study. Quantitative data were collected through online questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and tests of difference. Qualitative data were gathered through observations and interviews and analyzed through data condensation, presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Findings – The results indicate that students' critical thinking practices in fiqh learning are generally neutral and somewhat inconsistent. Problem-based learning (PBL) and research-based learning (RBL) emerged as the most frequently applied strategies, with PBL noted as particularly effective in fostering critical thinking. The study highlights that these strategies are most effective when supported by various forms of instructional media. The integration of contextual learning strategies with multimedia use enhances students' critical thinking engagement in fiqh learning.

Significance – This study provides practical insights for lecturers in selecting appropriate learning strategies and media to promote critical thinking in fiqh education. While RBL and PBL strategies, supported by multimedia, show strong potential to enhance critical thinking, they are not definitive solutions. Effective strategies and media should be tailored to the characteristics and needs of students. Continued development of both RBL and PBL strategies and multimedia use is essential. Ultimately, fiqh learning in higher education should employ instructional approaches that enhance deeper understanding and critical engagement with the subject matter.

Keywords: Fiqh learning, critical thinking, learning strategy, learning media.

INTRODUCTION

According to ‘Alwani (1991), the study of fiqh has traditionally been limited to examining texts, their commentaries, meta-commentaries, and annotations. This observation remains relevant today. For instance, Budiman et al. (2020) argued that contemporary fiqh education remains focused on cognitive aspects, often relying on rote memorization of concepts. Similarly, Ya’cub et al. (2020) noted that learning fiqh tends to center on matching questions with answers found in classical texts. In other words, current approaches to fiqh instruction offer little in terms of strategies that develop students’ critical thinking skills.

This situation is particularly concerning in the context of the digital era, where all forms of learning—including fiqh—face new challenges (Abdullah, 2017; Cerquetti, 2023; Ghavifekr & Fung, 2022; Ishak et al., 2023). Learners today encounter a vast array of information from sources of varying reliability (Bawden & Robinson, 2009). As fiqh learning increasingly shifts into digital environments, students are expected to develop adequate digital literacy. However, even in traditional settings with structured learning materials, students often lack the tools to enhance their critical reasoning. This gap becomes more problematic when studying fiqh using digital learning resources, which are diverse in form and often of questionable validity.

As a result, the advent of the digital era has made the integration of technology in fiqh learning inevitable. In this context, “technology” refers specifically to digital tools and platforms that increasingly serve as repositories for fiqh-related resources. Hassan’zadeh (2018) emphasized the importance of managing fiqh information in digital spaces; Araniri et al. (2021) identified digital literacy as a critical skill that positively influences fiqh learning; and Widayaningsih and Helmy (2021) affirmed that contemporary fiqh learning resources have expanded into the digital domain.

Another pressing concern is that fiqh learning has largely failed to engage students in reflecting on how their knowledge applies to real-world contexts (Haryani et al., 2019; Mubin et al., 2022). Fiqh is inherently a practical science, encompassing all aspects of daily life (Jadalhaq & Russi, 2020). Therefore, fiqh students should be equipped to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. To effectively extend fiqh learning beyond the confines of the classroom and into everyday practice, instructional strategies must be grounded in real-world, contextual approaches.

This study seeks to examine how students practice critical thinking in fiqh learning, explore the types of fiqh learning strategies employed, and identify the technologies used in fiqh-related learning activities. Additionally, it investigates the interrelationship among these three components—critical thinking, learning strategies, and technology—in the context of fiqh education. Specifically, the study

asks: Are the strategies and technologies currently used in fiqh learning effective in fostering a culture of critical thinking among students? The findings on this continuity will form the basis of the study's recommendations.

Research that explores the interplay between critical thinking skills, learning methodologies, and technology in fiqh education remains relatively scarce. Most existing studies tend to address these elements in isolation—for instance, focusing solely on critical thinking (Agustia & Sulaiman, 2023; Haryani et al., 2019), learning strategies (Anwar, 2019; Muis et al., 2022; Nasution et al., 2023; Nisak et al., 2022); or technological aspects (Araniri et al., 2021; Murihah, 2022; Shofiyani & Sholihah, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fiqh Learning

Fiqh is a required subject at Islamic religious universities (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam [PTKI]) (Maimunah, 2019). The requirement is grounded in the Indonesian Qualification Framework (Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia [KKNI]), which emphasizes devotion to God Almighty as a core competency (Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia, 2012). Understanding the legal rulings of actions discussed in fiqh is considered a form of religious devotion. In addition, PTKI students are expected to have a foundational understanding of fiqh and ushul fiqh (the principles of Islamic jurisprudence), and other theological components. Therefore, it would be highly concerning if PTKI graduates lacked knowledge in these essential areas.

Based on this understanding, fiqh instruction at the university level should engage students both inside and outside the classroom to ensure that they become competent in addressing practical issues in the field of fiqh. A teaching approach that has been studied and found effective in fiqh education is Problem-Based Learning (PBL) (Maimunah, 2019). PBL is a method that enables lecturers to connect course content with real-world situations. Through this approach, students are encouraged to reflect on actual problems or phenomena and relate them to fiqh concepts. They are then expected to identify relevant legal principles and construct appropriate legal judgments based on those phenomena (Mulyono, 2016).

Lecturers must be able to actively engage students in finding solutions to fiqh-related problems during learning activities. It is important to move beyond the common perception that fiqh learning at PTKI is limited to textual analysis, commentary examination, and routine paper assignments that lack practical value. Therefore, lecturers need to recognize the broader expectations that society places on PTKI graduates (Saleh, 2013).

A study by Muslimin and Abidin (2023) offer valuable insights into fiqh instruction at an Indonesian university. The research found that fiqh learning was designed to strengthen students' critical thinking skills by incorporating content related to controversial religious issues. Based on these findings, the study recommends that lecturers use controversial topics as a pedagogical method to enhance students' critical thinking, regardless of their gender or academic semester.

In a related context, Ashari and Faizin (2023) report that fiqh education in Malaysia seeks to optimize the use of technology to keep pace with the evolving nature of fiqh issues. Given that such issues are increasingly discussed and disseminated through digital channels (Rois et al., 2023; Rosidi, 2021;

Widayaningsih & Helmy, 2021), the integration of digital technology into fiqh learning emerges as a logical and necessary approach for internalizing fiqh content in modern educational settings.

Moksin et al. (2024) conducted a study on fiqh education in Brunei Darussalam, highlighting the expectations placed on fiqh teachers to continuously update and expand their fiqh knowledge. The research emphasizes that a fiqh teacher must have sufficient breadth and depth of fiqh content knowledge to support effective and dynamic teaching practices. Such comprehensive understanding allows educators to deliver fiqh lessons that are insightful and engaging, leaving a lasting impact on students. Apart from content mastery, fiqh teachers in Brunei Darussalam are also expected to have strong pedagogical knowledge (Moksin et al., 2024). With sufficient pedagogical skills, teachers can effectively translate complex fiqh concepts into enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences.

Critical Thinking

The development of students' critical thinking skills is widely regarded as a fundamental educational goal across many societies, as it is believed to support democratic values and foster personal growth (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011). Numerous studies on critical thinking have emerged, reflecting its growing importance. Kuhn and Dean (2004), for instance, described critical thinking as one of the "major unsolved pedagogical problems". Similarly, Behar-Horenstein and Niu (2011), urged students to critically engage with the content of empirical studies, emphasizing the need for deeper analysis.

An important perspective of critical thinking is posited by McPeck (2016), who argues that critical thinking is inherently specific to the subject. In this view, the nature of critical thinking is shaped by the subject matter itself, suggesting that each academic discipline must formulate its own understanding of what it means to think critically. Ennis (1989), defines critical thinking as a thoughtful and sensible process aimed at making informed decisions about what to believe or how to act. Expanding on this, Scriven and Paul (1987), in a statement at the 8th Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform, described critical thinking as an intellectually disciplined process. It involves the active and skillful conceptualization, application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation of information gathered from or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, which then guides belief and action (Uribe-Enciso et al., 2017).

Some assumptions about critical thinking have been proposed by some researchers. For instance, Halpern (1992) describes critical thinking as a set of "*thinking and learning skills*," while Zohar and Tamir (Zohar & Tamir, 1993) refer to it as a "*reasoning skill*." Despite the variety of definitions, critical thinking is generally interpreted in one of two ways: either as a mental process or as a series of procedural steps. However, both interpretations present certain challenges. One issue of viewing critical thinking as a mental process is that, unlike physical actions, mental processes are not directly observable. They can only be inferred after someone has completed a task that appears to involve thought. Smith (1990) further argues that terms such as observing, analyzing, or interpreting do not describe mental operations per se, but rather different types of tasks that require thinking.

As indicators of critical thinking, Uribe-Enciso et al. (2017), referencing Ennis (1989), identify two key components: (1) cognitive skills - including interpreting, adding, inferring, analyzing, evaluating, making suggestions and decisions based on content; searching for relevant and reliable information; adapting flexibly to change. (2) Values - such as prudence, humility, intellectual integrity, and empathy. Taken together, critical thinking is an integrated whole composed of both cognitive activities and value-based dispositions.

Numerous studies from various countries have emphasized the importance of strengthening critical thinking skills. In Indonesia, Chusni et al. (2020) introduced the FRISCO model—Focus, Reason, Inference, Situation, Clarity, and Overview—as a structured set of learning steps aimed at strengthening critical thinking skills. In Malaysia, efforts to cultivate critical thinking are guided by an official blueprint published by the Ministry of Education (2013), providing educators with clear instructional frameworks. Singapore adopts a more pragmatic approach to developing critical thinking, with teachers employing both infusion and discipline-specific approaches to balance and support students' cognitive development in critical thinking (Tan, 2018). Beyond Southeast Asia, similar initiatives have been implemented in countries such as Hong Kong (Zhu, 2020), several European countries (Caena & Redecker, 2019), the United States (Park et al., 2021), and others.

Therefore, it is both feasible and timely to promote critical thinking in fiqh learning which aligns with broader educational trends and enhances their ability to apply fiqh principles in real-world contexts.

Critical Thinking Concept in Islamic Education

In the context of Islamic education, critical thinking refers to an intellectual process based on the exploration, analysis, and evaluation of primary Islamic sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and Fiqh (Islamic law) (Herlina et al., 2023). This process is not only aimed at achieving a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings but also at assessing their relevance and applicability in contemporary life (Rofdli & Suyadi, 2020). Critical thinking in Islamic education serves as an essential foundation that encourages students to engage in active inquiry and dialogue with the teachings, rather than passively accepting information (Zuhro et al., 2023).

This form of intellectual engagement, grounded in specific religious sources, distinguishes critical thinking in Islamic education from general conceptualizations of critical thinking. It begins with the fundamental belief that revelation—namely the Qur'an and Hadith—is the ultimate source of truth and guidance. This belief shapes the framework in which intellectual inquiry is conducted, directing it toward understanding the wisdom and enduring relevance of revelation across various aspects of life (Saihu, 2022). Revelation is viewed not only as a source of answers to humanity's fundamental concerns but also as a provider of universal principles that remain relevant across changing times and contexts (Junoh et al., 2021). Therefore, critical thinking in Islamic education does not stem from skepticism about the authority of revelation. Rather, it arises from a sincere desire to delve deeper into its meanings and explore how its teachings can be applied meaningfully in today's world.

In general conceptions of critical thinking, there is no absolute foundation such as revelation serving as the ultimate point of reference. Instead, the process often begins with skepticism—questioning assumptions until sufficient rational or empirical evidence is obtained (Yusuf, 2020). Authority in this framework typically stems from empirical observation, logical reasoning, or human experience, without reliance on metaphysical premises or belief in absolute truth (Altinyelken, 2021). While this approach allows for broader intellectual exploration, it may lack explicit spiritual guidance.

The key distinction between critical thinking in Islamic and non-Islamic educational context lies in the role and limits of reason. In Islam, reason is directed and limited by revelation. It functions as a means to understand, interpret, and apply divine teachings rather than as an independent source of absolute truth (Karimi & Harandi, 2021). This perspective positions reason as complementary to revelation—used to uncover wisdom, clarify abstract concepts, and translate them into real-world applications. If a perceived contradiction arises between reason and revelation, the discrepancy is attributed to the

limitations of human intellect, not to the infallibility of divine revelation, which is upheld as the source of divine truth (Fakhrurrazi et al., 2024).

In contrast, general critical thinking often positions reason as the highest authority in the search for truth, unbounded by external constraints and free to explore any subject independently (Arıcı, 2022). This approach is rooted in rationalism and empiricism, which prioritize reason and experience as the primary sources of knowledge (Gertler, 2018), without reference to any particular spiritual authority. This fundamental difference highlights a key distinction: while Islamic critical thinking integrates reason within a spiritual framework, general critical thinking tends to separate reason from the transcendental dimension.

Within the context of Islamic education, *Maqasid Syariah* plays an important role in shaping critical thinking. Here, critical thinking is always oriented towards a higher purpose—namely, the welfare of the ummah (community). *Maqasid Syariah* emphasizes five key elements that must be preserved and protected in human life: religion, intellect, life, progeny, and wealth (Ahmad & Hanapi, 2018). Thus, critical thinking within the context of Islam is not merely an individual pursuit of truth or problem-solving exercise. It is an ethical and communal endeavor ensuring that actions or decisions taken will benefit the wider community and do not harm the fundamental aspects protected by Shariah (Ni'ami & Bustamin, 2021). Any intellectual analysis not only assesses whether an action is logically right or wrong but also whether it aligns with Islamic moral and ethical values and contributes to the well-being of society.

In contrast, the general approach to critical thinking often centers on achieving individual goals or the pursuit of universal truths, frequently without considering the moral implications or collective values. In many Western philosophical traditions, critical thinking is primarily aimed at analyzing and uncovering truth through objective rational methods. However, this approach does not always address the social or ethical consequences of its conclusions (Haron et al., 2020). The emphasis tends to be on individual reasoning and outcomes, with less concern for whether the findings benefit society or conflict with collective norms (Halstead, 2007).

In Islamic education, by contrast, critical thinking is not limited to logical analysis or factual evaluation; it is closely linked to character and moral development as emphasized in Islamic teachings (Sahin, 2018). Students are guided not only to hone their intellectual skills but also to cultivate personal virtues rooted in Islamic values—such as humility, empathy, honesty, and patience (Tambak et al., 2021). Ultimately, Islamic education emphasizes the importance of integrating noble character into the critical thinking process. This integration ensures that critical analysis leads to solutions that uphold Islamic principles, reflecting the holistic balance between this world and the hereafter.

While general critical thinking tends to emphasize logic and rational analysis, critical thinking within the Islamic tradition incorporates a deeper dimension grounded in morality and ethics (Haron et al., 2020). In Western or secular traditions, critical thinking often involves the objective evaluation of information without considering the moral or ethical implications of outcomes for individuals or society. In contrast, Islamic education emphasizes the integration of moral and ethical considerations to ensure that reasoning and decision-making are not only intellectually rigorous but also consistent with Islamic teachings, which prioritize virtuous character in daily life. The following table presents a comparative overview of critical thinking in Islamic and general (non-Islamic) educational contexts.

Table 1

Identification of Critical Thinking in Islamic and General (Non-Islamic) Educational Contexts

Aspect	Critical Thinking with an Islamic Nuance	General (Non-Islamic) Critical Thinking
Foundation of Thought	Begins with the belief that revelation (the Qur'an and Hadith) is the ultimate unquestionable source of truth.	Does not rely on revelation or transcendental authority; typically starts with scepticism and relies on rational or empirical evidence.
Balance between Reason and Revelation	Reason is a tool to understand and interpret revelation, which is considered the ultimate source of truth and guidance.	Reason is regarded as the highest authority, unrestricted by external frameworks; guided solely by logic or empiricism.
Oriented towards *Maqasid Shariah*	The goal of critical thinking is to promote the well-being of the community by upholding five fundamental elements: religion, intellect, life, lineage, and wealth.	The primary goal is to achieve individual goals or pursue universal truths, often without consideration of social or moral consequences.
Oriented toward Islamic Moral and Ethical Values	Critical thinking fosters character development in line with Islamic principles—such as humility, empathy, honesty, and patience—by emphasizing moral considerations in every decision.	Critical thinking emphasizes logic and rationality, often without regard for moral or ethical dimensions, and tends to adopt a more individualistic focus.

Media and Learning Strategies

The media offers an overwhelming volume of information but is also highly susceptible to the spread of misinformation and hoaxes. This vulnerability arises from the open nature of media platforms, which allows anyone to access and disseminate information freely, often without adherence to standards of accuracy or truth. The rapid development of technology and media underscores the need for individuals to possess media literacy—the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create content across various contexts. This skill is essential for navigating and minimizing exposure to false or misleading information (Rusydiyah, 2021).

In response to this challenge, educational institutions must take proactive steps to address the spread of hoaxes by equipping students with the tools to critically assess media content. Therefore, teachers in particular, have a significant influence in shaping students' media literacy (Rusydiyah, 2021).

Nugraha and Sastromiharjo (2018) emphasized that teachers have a professional and social responsibility to guide students in critically navigating media content. Educative interactions between teachers and students, particularly through the use of media, are essential. Teachers must be able to manage the learning process by consistently incorporating media as a learning resource. The aim is to help students understand the value, utility, and function of media within the educational context (Wahidin, 2018).

According to Gumilar et al. (2017) today's media—especially social media—has created a new cultural environment that enables individuals to express themselves through interaction, collaboration, sharing, communication and the formation of virtual social bonds. With features such as sharing, liking, hashtags, and trending topics, media platforms require teachers to be familiar with these dynamics in order to anticipate where and how misinformation may appear. Research by Gumilar et al. (2017) further recommend that schools engage in collaboration with community outreach programs. One such initiative involves organizing regular forums where students are invited to discuss media developments, learn how to distinguish between accurate and false information, and develop basic media literacy skills. In these forums, teachers play a mentoring role, providing assistance to help students build a deeper understanding of effective and responsible media use.

As a result, teachers must carefully evaluate the use of learning materials in relation to media. Rahmi (2013) outlines several key considerations that teachers should take into account to ensure students engage meaningfully with media in the learning process. These include: (1) clarifying the purpose of media use, (2) selecting appropriate media content, (3) understanding student characteristics, (4) recognizing teachers' own abilities, (5) assessing classroom conditions, and (6) ensuring the availability of adequate facilities.

Equally important alongside media use is the implementation of effective learning strategies. Learning strategies and media are interdependent elements that together promote meaningful and effective learning. Puspitarini and Hanif (2019) argue that a strong learning strategy inherently involves selecting and utilizing appropriate media. As Gumilar et al. (2017) noted, today's advanced media technologies offer features that support interaction among students, teacher-student engagement, collaboration, sharing, and creative expression. However, the potential of these media tools cannot be optimized unless they are supported by well-aligned and purposeful learning strategies.

In the Indonesian context, PBL strategies are widely used in fiqh instruction to enhance students' critical thinking skills (Fahri, 2022; Haryani et al., 2019). Furthermore, Aldossari & Aldajani (2021) present noteworthy findings on the use of a self-questioning strategy as a follow-up activity after students or teachers complete the review of fiqh rulings.

Bahatheg (2019) offers a focused analysis of fiqh learning strategies adopted in various countries across the Arabian Peninsula to support the development of critical thinking skills. In Saudi Arabia, instructional practices tend to favor inductive learning strategies. In contrast, Kuwait emphasizes observational learning strategies. Similarly, countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia also predominantly implement observational approaches to strengthen students' critical thinking skills in fiqh learning.

It is important to note that learning strategies must be supported by appropriate learning media and vice versa. An effective learning strategy will have little impact if the media used is not aligned or support the intended learning approach. On the other hand, even the most sophisticated or advanced media will not function optimally if it is not accompanied by a coherent and well-matched learning strategy.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed methods approach to investigate how students engage in critical thinking within fiqh learning. More specifically, it adopted an explanatory sequential design, where the research

process began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by qualitative analysis. The qualitative phase was used to elaborate and explain the findings derived from the quantitative phase (Toyon, 2021; Wipulanusat et al., 2020). Several advantages support the use of a mixed methods approach. It allows researchers to better understand complex phenomena by enabling corroboration and triangulation of data (Waysman & Savaya, 1997), facilitates data collection using different techniques that converge on a common objective (Almalki, 2016), and enhances the overall validity and comprehensiveness of the findings (Dunning et al., 2007).

For the quantitative component, data were collected through an online questionnaire. The key constructs examined—critical thinking, learning strategies, and technology use—were aligned with the study's research objectives. In designing the instrument to assess critical thinking, this study adopted the framework proposed by Zulmaulida et al. (2018), which outlines the development of critical thinking in several core components: making assumptions, analyzing arguments, applying deductive reasoning, tracking and processing information, and drawing conclusions. The resulting instrument used to measure students' critical thinking in fiqh learning is detailed in the following table.

Table 2

Instrument for Assessing Critical Thinking Skills in Fiqh Learning

No.	Indicator	Question
1	Assumptions (Recognition)	1. I provide comments based on accurate information during learning fiqh. 2. I respond to and question assumptions in discussions on fiqh issues. 3. I express my opinions supported by relevant empirical evidence when discussing fiqh issues.
2	Analyzing Arguments	1. I regularly identify the relevance of arguments presented in fiqh learning discussions. 2. I assess the strengths and weaknesses of each argument discussed. 3. I question the quality of supporting evidence for every argument presented in fiqh learning discussions.
3	Deduction	1. I regularly define each problem discussed in fiqh learning sessions. 2. I develop criteria as a basis for solving problems in fiqh discussions. 3. I formulate alternative solutions to address problems encountered in fiqh learning.
4	Information Tracking and Processing	1. I am able to identify missing information needed to form a conclusion in fiqh learning discussions. 2. I am able to interpret available information to draw conclusions. 3. I am able to investigate relevant information to produce specific findings in fiqh discussions.
5	Drawing Conclusions	1. I am able to interpret each statement presented in fiqh learning discussions. 2. I am able to make generalizations based on the statements discussed. 3. I am able to draw conclusions and formulate further hypotheses from statements in fiqh learning discussions.

The research instrument was validated using Aiken's V content validity method. This validation method is employed to measure the validity ranking of each item (V value), which ranges from 0 to 1, where values closer to 1 indicate higher validity (Aiken, 1985). This method also simultaneously calculates the content validity coefficient (V) and reliability consistency (R). An advantage of this validation is

that Aiken's V can be used to assess the probability distribution for both small and large samples (Aiken, 1980). In this study, five expert validators were engaged to assess the instrument before its distribution. Each expert assessed the instrument based on four criteria: clarity of language, relevance, comprehensiveness, and appropriateness for measuring critical thinking in fiqh learning. The results were analyzed using the Aiken's V formula, which showed that all items were valid (V = > 0,80).

This research instrument was designed using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates "highly irrelevant" and 5 indicates "highly relevant." Therefore, the lowest validation assessment score (*lo*) is 1, and the highest validation assessment score (*c*) is 5. The number of validators involved was five (n = 5).

Based on the validation results (see Appendix), the Aiken's V values for items 1 to 15—all of which comprise the instrument—ranged from 0.80 to 0.85. Each item was assessed by five raters using a 5-point Likert scale. According to Aiken (Aiken, 1985), the minimum acceptable V value is 0,80, indicating that all items in this research instrument are considered valid.

To support the mapping of students' critical thinking skills in fiqh learning, this study presents a descriptive-quantitative analysis of the relationships across each component of critical thinking. Additionally, various statistical tests were carried to examine differences in critical thinking performance between students from public and private universities.

The qualitative component of this study explores deeper insights into the perspectives of respondents (students and lecturers) regarding the strategies commonly used in learning fiqh and the types of media employed. Two key domains—learning strategies and media—serve as the primary lenses for analyzing the qualitative data. This phase aims to uncover respondents' reasons for choosing particular strategies and media, the rationale behind these choices, and whether these choices contribute to enhancing students' critical thinking skills. Additionally, the study investigates the types of strategies most frequently used by lecturers in fiqh instruction.

The qualitative data analysis follows the Miles and Huberman (2014) model, which consists of three main components: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. From the outset of the research process, data tabulation was used to categorize information into relevant and less relevant themes. The relevant data were then organized and synthesized to identify emerging patterns. These patterns formed the basis for data presentation and ultimately, served as the foundation for drawing the study's conclusions.

In addition, this study employed two key strategies to ensure the validity of the qualitative data: the use of multiple methodologies and diverse data sources (Natow, 2020). Validation through multiple methodologies involves a cyclical synchronization of findings between quantitative and qualitative data. Meanwhile, validation through multiple data resources refers to the integration and triangulation of various data types, including quantitative survey results, qualitative interviews, and observations.

The sample for this study consisted of 254 students drawn from several Islamic universities across East Java. The distribution of research participants is presented in the following table:

Table 3

Distribution of Research Samples (n = 254)

No.	University	Public/Private	District	Percentage
1	STAI Al-Azhar	Private	Gresik	4.39%
2	Institut Dirasat Islamiyah Al-Amien Prenduan	Private	Sumenep	2.80%
3	Institut Agama Islam Nahdhatul Ulama’	Private	Tuban	4.33%
4	UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah	Public	Tulungagung	25.98%
5	UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim	Public	Malang	1.87%
6	UIN Sunan Ampel	Public	Surabaya	24.02%
7	IAIN Kediri	Public	Kediri	14.17%
8	IAI Tarbiyatut Tholabah	Private	Lamongan	22.44%
	Total			100.00%

RESULTS

This study aimed to analyze students’ critical thinking practices in fiqh learning, examine the types of learning strategies used, and identify the technological tools and media used by both students and teachers in the fiqh learning process. Furthermore, the research explored the interrelationship between critical thinking, instructional strategies, and the use technology, positioning them as key elements that influence learning outcomes in fiqh education.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative findings indicate that students in higher education institutions in East Java generally demonstrate a stance in relation to engaging in critical thinking during fiqh learning. This neutrality suggests that students’ experiences with critical thinking in fiqh classes are neither particularly strong nor weak. While students do engage in critical thinking, their practice tends to be inconsistent.

Figure 1

Distribution of Students’ Critical Thinking Practice Scores in Fiqh Learning

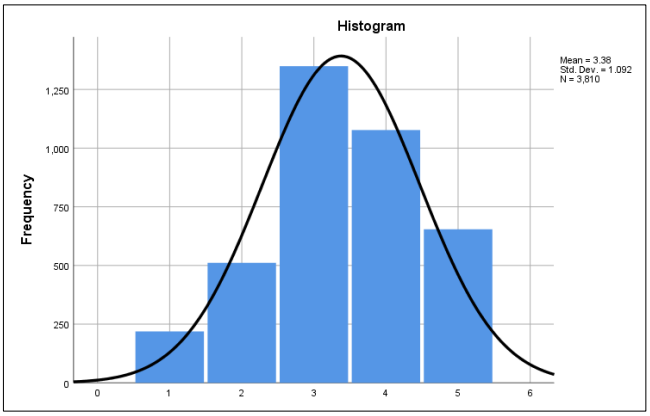


Figure 1 illustrates the symmetrical distribution of students' critical thinking practice scores across various Islamic higher education institutions in East Java. However, the histogram shows a slight right skew, indicating that a marginally higher number of students fall into the category of 'often' or 'consistently' practicing critical thinking, compared to those who engage in critical thinking less frequently or only indirectly.

To provide further details, the average scores for students' critical thinking practices in fiqh learning are presented in the following table:

Table 4

Average Scores of Students' Critical Thinking Practices in Fiqh Learning

No.	Critical Thinking Component	Indicator	Score	Average
1	Recognition/Assumptions	Leaving comments	3.72	3.58
		Questioning assumptions	3.56	
		Expressing opinions	3.44	
2	Argument analysis	Identifying the relevance of arguments	3.39	3.35
		Identifying the strength of arguments	3.28	
		Questioning supporting evidence	3.39	
3	Deduction	Defining the problem	3.48	3.37
		Creating problem criteria	3.27	
		Formulating alternative solutions	3.38	
4	Information Analysis	Identifying information deficiencies	3.35	3.31
		Interpreting information	3.36	
		Investigating relevant information	3.21	
5	Draw a Conclusion	Interpreting statements	3.30	3.27
		Making generalizations	3.22	
		Draw conclusions	3.30	
		Average		3.38

An interesting finding from the average scores of critical thinking practices in fiqh learning is that the recognition/assumption component recorded the highest average score (3.58) compared to the other components. In contrast, the drawing conclusions component yielded the lowest average (3.27). This suggests that fiqh students in higher education institutions in East Java are relatively more proficient at making remarks (3.72) and expressing ideas (3.44) than in synthesizing information to reach conclusions.

To gain deeper insight into students' critical thinking practices, a correlation analysis was conducted between the various critical thinking components. The results of this correlation are presented in the following figure.

Figure 2

Correlation between Critical Thinking Components

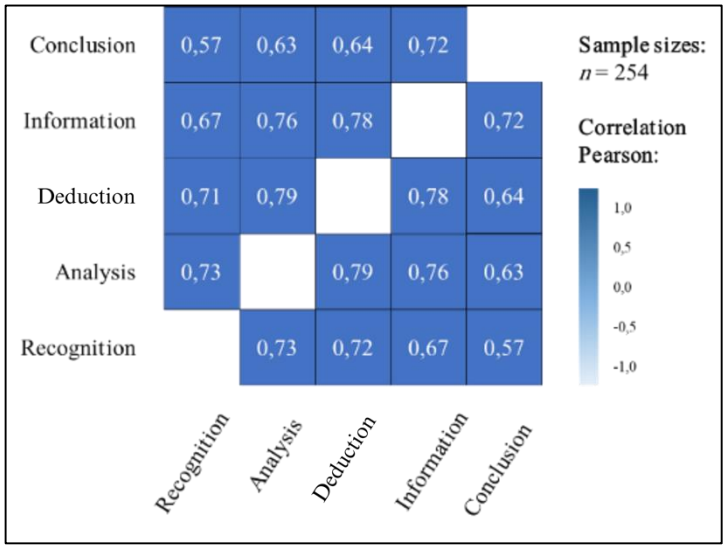


Figure 2 illustrates a strong interrelationship among the components of critical thinking— namely recognition, argument analysis, deduction, information processing, and drawing conclusions. This suggests that individuals who demonstrate competence in one aspect of critical thinking abilities are likely to engage with other components simultaneously. The study's findings further indicate that students in East Java predominantly operate at the recognition level, implying that there remains significant potential for advancing their critical thinking skills. This progression can be fostered through a strategic shift in teaching approaches—from predominantly quantitative methods to more qualitative, inquiry-based learning strategies, as previously discussed.

In addition, this study also explored the learning strategies students employed in studying fiqh. The results of this exploration are presented in the following table.

Table 5

Results of Identification of Fiqh Learning Strategies (n = 254)

No.	Learning Strategy	Percentage
1	Problem Based Learning	32%
2	Group–Individual Learning	31%
3	Research Based Learning	15%
4	Case Based Learning	12%
5	Lecture	10%
	Total	100%

According to Table 5, the most commonly employed strategies in fiqh learning among students in East Java are problem-based learning (PBL) and group-individual learning. Among these, PBL is identified as the most effective strategy for fostering critical thinking skills. Interview data further support this conclusion, highlighting that PBL effectively nurtures higher-order thinking in higher education

students. This is because PBL aligns closely with the fundamental components of critical thinking, incorporating student-centered activities such as questioning, analyzing, synthesizing, interpreting, concluding, reasoning, applying knowledge, and exercising creativity.

Meanwhile, the group-individual learning strategy is another frequently used approach in fiqh classes across East Java. According to student interviews, this strategy is widely implemented: lecturers typically divide the class into smaller groups or assign individual tasks. Although straightforward to adopt, this method can still promote aspects of critical thinking such as evaluating, identifying connections between ideas, and formulating conclusions through the completion of assigned tasks.

However, the effectiveness of these learning strategies in cultivating critical thinking varies. The following table presents further details on this distribution.

Table 6

Distribution of Students' Critical Thinking Abilities Based on Learning Strategies

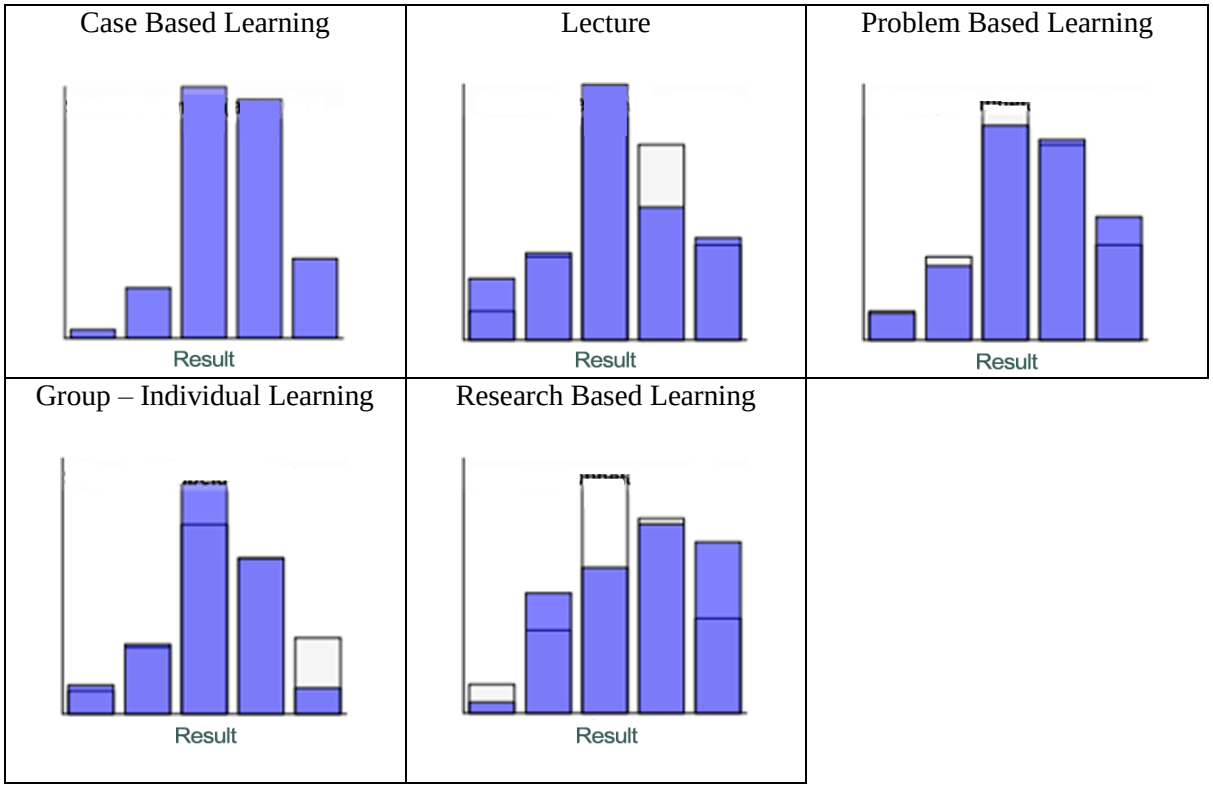


Table 6 depicts a bar graph showing the distribution of students' critical thinking abilities, with ability levels scaled from 1 (far left) to 5 (far right). On this scale, a score of 1 represents "not at all capable", while 5 signifies "highly capable." According to the data, the highest proportion of "highly capable" critical thinking responses is found among students who experienced Research-Based Learning (RBL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) methods. These findings indicate that both RBL and PBL have been effective in enhancing students' critical thinking skills within the context of fiqh learning.

However, an effective learning strategy cannot stand alone; it must be supported by appropriate learning media to maximize its impact. In this study, respondents were also asked to identify the types of media they have used in fiqh learning. The results of this identification are summarized in the following table:

Table 7

Results of Media Identification in Fiqh Learning (N = 254)

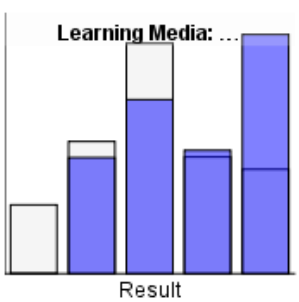
No.	Media	Percentage
1	WhatsApp	75%
2	YouTube, TikTok and other social media	13%
3	Books, journals and other references	6%
4	PowerPoint and videos	6%
	Total	100%

Table 7 shows that WhatsApp is the most commonly used learning medium among students in East Java. Research suggests that WhatsApp is widely recognized and user friendly, making it easily accessible even for younger users. However, lecturers who incorporate this application into their fiqh instruction must also investigate whether its features effectively support the development of critical thinking skills.

In addition to WhatsApp, platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and other comparable social media platforms are also frequently utilized in fiqh learning. Compared to WhatsApp, these applications offer more dynamic visual interactions through video content. This raises an interesting question: Could the preference for WhatsApp reflect a trend where students are hesitant to share images or videos of themselves on social media? Instead, they may prefer to remain as passive participants or silent readers, a behavior more readily supported by WhatsApp's program. The results of the distribution of students' critical thinking skills based on the use of various learning media are shown in the following table:

Table 8

Distribution of Students' Critical Thinking Abilities Based on Learning Media Use

<table>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp
 
</td>
<td>Books, journals and references
 
</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube, Tiktok, and other social media
 
</td>
<td>PowerPoint/Videos
 
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The graph in Table 8 illustrates the average distribution of students classified as "highly capable" in terms of critical thinking, based on the media used in fiqh learning. Notably, PowerPoint and video-based media are associated with higher levels of critical thinking ability. According to observations and interview findings, the use of PowerPoint is typically focused on presenting data related to fiqh topics, often complemented by video inserts that enrich the learning experience. In essence, the use of PowerPoint or video media in fiqh learning supports instructional approaches aligned with RBL and PBL. These methods emphasize key critical thinking processes such as evaluating information, identifying relationships between concepts, and forming well-reasoned conclusions.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest a continuity between critical thinking, learning strategies, and learning technologies utilized in fiqh education. This observed alignment not only serves as an important research insight but also offers a valuable framework for designing future fiqh learning models that intentionally foster critical thinking development.

Figure 3

Illustration of the Continuity Between Critical Thinking, Learning Strategies, and Media

Figure 3 presents the study's findings on learning strategies and media that hold strong potential for enhancing critical thinking in fiqh education. While the results highlight the effectiveness of RBL and PBL, these findings are not definitive or prescriptive. Instead, combinations of RBL and PBL can be strategically employed to further strengthen students' critical thinking skills. Similarly, other critical thinking components and various forms of media can still be developed and optimized.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes the need to pay greater attention to contextual and environmental factors in fiqh learning—particularly those that support and enrich students' critical thinking. Notably, the findings reveal significant differences in critical thinking abilities between students at public and private universities, indicating that institutional context plays a role in shaping learning outcomes.

According to Tables 9 and 10, there are significant differences in the development of critical thinking skills in fiqh learning between public and private university students. Although the number of students from public universities in this study is larger, their average critical thinking score (3.5) is notably higher than that of students from private universities (3.0). Furthermore, the Equal Variances Assumed section of the Independent Sample Test reveals a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000, which is less than the threshold of 0.05. This result indicates a statistically significant difference in critical thinking achievement between students from public and private universities.

Table 9

Statistical Description of Differences in The Critical Thinking of Public and Private University Students

	Institution Status	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Result of Critical Thinking	Public	2340	3.56	0.98	0.02
	Private	1470	3.09	1.20	0.03

Table 10

The Results of the Different Test (T-Test) On The Critical Thinking Achievements of State and Private University Students

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Result of Critical Thinking	Equal variances assumed	32.91	0.00	13.38	3808	0.00	0.48	0.036	0.41	0.54
	Equal variances not assumed			12.78	2656.38	0.00	0.48	0.037	0.40	0.55

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis in this study aims to provide deeper insights from respondents regarding the learning strategies commonly used in fiqh instruction and the types of media employed. Accordingly, this section is organized around two key sub-themes: learning strategies and learning media.

Learning Strategies

Capturing an accurate picture of learning practices that incorporate critical thinking presents a challenge, particularly because students are often unaware of their actual level of critical thinking. Therefore, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enhances the reliability of the study's findings. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with several lecturers and students to explore their practical experiences.

The earlier quantitative data indicated that PBL was the most frequently employed instructional strategy. These findings were further substantiated by follow-up interviews with a fiqh lecturer, as detailed in the following statement:

> "The reason I use PBL is not directly related to the goal of enhancing students' critical thinking skills. The selection of the PBL strategy is more due to its compatibility with the structure of fiqh learning, which often presents case studies to be solved through fiqh methods."

Another lecturer stated:

> "I often use case-based learning as a strategy in fiqh instruction. I do not explicitly aim for my students to develop a critical stance with this approach. However, case-based learning is more appropriate for fiqh instruction, as much of the material is oriented towards case studies that require resolution through the fiqh discipline. I believe that critical thinking is inherent in this case-based learning strategy. This is because I directly observe students' reasoning in each case until they arrive at a conclusion."

From the interviews, it becomes clear that critical thinking is not a central or deliberate focus in the selection of learning strategies. In other words, the development of critical thinking skills is not a specifically targeted goal, nor is there a conscious effort to adopt strategies that are explicitly designed to optimize such skills. This aligns with the earlier findings that students' critical thinking experiences in fiqh learning tend to be neutral—neither particularly strong nor weak. Although students do engage in critical thinking, their efforts are inconsistent. This inconsistency appears to stem from the absence of a formal instructional emphasis on cultivating critical thinking.

Quantitative data findings indicate that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is the most frequently used strategy in fiqh learning, followed by group-individual learning and others. However, this ranking does not suggest a hierarchy of instructional quality. PBL is not inherently superior to other methods, just as Case-Based Learning is not necessarily less effective than Research-Based Learning. Rather, the order reflects the frequency with which these strategies are used by lecturers in fiqh instruction.

Interview findings further clarify that the choice of learning strategies is primarily influenced by the nature of the fiqh material itself. For instance, when the content is centered on case studies, lecturers

tend to apply Case-Based Learning. Conversely, when the focus is on understanding fiqh rules or theories supported by empirical evidence, Research-Based Learning becomes a more suitable approach.

Interestingly, quantitative data also reveal that some lecturers still rely on traditional lecture-based methods, which is somewhat unexpected given their declining prominence in contemporary education. Nevertheless, fiqh learning appears to retain this approach due to certain contextual or content-specific considerations. As one instructor explained:

> "I still use the lecture method in my fiqh learning, although not exclusively. I integrate lectures with other methods such as discussion. The reason I continue using this method is due to the nature of fiqh material, which is based on sacred texts and hadith. Interpretations of these sources can vary, and reasoning about these interpretations can also differ. Therefore, I use the lecture method to guide reasoning along the correct path."

One student expressed that:

> "In one semester, our lecturer does not lean towards or promote a specific learning strategy to be consistently used in learning fiqh. The lecturer tends to encourage students to engage in correct fiqh reasoning. Emphasis is placed on the logic of fiqh itself, which tends to focus on how to analyze texts or reference sources, provide critical comments on these references and cases, and how to derive fiqh principles to serve as a basis in addressing a particular issue."

These interview insights point to a noteworthy distinction between fiqh logic and general critical thinking skills. It suggests that fiqh logic may operate within its own unique framework of critical thinking. As a result, fiqh lecturers tend to prioritize the logic of fiqh as the primary lens through which students are taught to reason, with critical thinking elements integrated implicitly rather than as an explicit pedagogical objective. This orientation helps explain why fiqh instructors may not overtly focus on formal critical thinking frameworks. Instead, they concentrate on guiding students to critically engage with fiqh texts and sources and basing their arguments on these sources according to the fiqh thinking process itself.

Moreover, the presence of lecture-based instruction in fiqh learning presents an anomaly, despite it being the least frequently employed approach. In general, educational practices aimed at fostering critical thinking tends to move away from unidirectional teaching methods or didactic instruction. This raises an important question: Does fiqh instruction in East Java universities occasionally neglect critical pedagogical practices, or does fiqh learning inherently follow a distinct instructional logic? As previously discussed, the answer may lie in the tension between fiqh logic and general critical thinking frameworks. In this regard, the study assumes that fiqh operates according to its own internal logic, therefore critical thinking within fiqh learning may not be entirely analogous to general conceptions of critical thinking.

This study does not specifically investigate whether fiqh logic constitutes a distinct discipline of critical thinking. Rather, it focuses on analyzing students' critical thinking practices within fiqh learning, examining the instructional strategies employed, and identifying the types of technology employed by students in fiqh learning. In essence, the study seeks to map the interrelationship between critical thinking skills, instructional strategies, and the media employed in fiqh education. Thus far, the findings

suggest that the teaching strategies used by lecturers tend to be neutral in their impact on maximizing students' critical thinking skills.

Learning Media

The selection of instructional media in fiqh learning appears to align with the approach used in selecting instructional strategies. That is, lecturers do not intentionally choose specific instructional media with the explicit goal of enhancing students' critical thinking skills. Rather, the choice of media tends to serve practical and logistical purposes. As one lecturer explained in an interview:

> "The selection of instructional media does not directly aim at improving students' critical thinking skills. The choice of instructional media tends to be based on whether the media can facilitate the learning process itself, such as ease of providing instructions, information, collaboration between students, or between students and the lecturer. Additionally, technical reasons like using media that all students have access to also influence the selection."

Given that social media is the most commonly used medium in fiqh lectures, a pertinent question arises: Does this type of media contribute to the enhancement of students' critical thinking skills? WhatsApp, for instance, can indeed facilitate effective communication. However, it does not necessarily ensure that all students are attentive to the information shared or actively engaged in discussions. The platform's structure may limit the depth of discourse, as messages can get lost in the feed or overlap with one another. While WhatsApp is useful for sharing information or teaching materials, its potential to support more complex educational objectives—such as the cultivation of critical thinking—may be limited. Based on this explanation, the aspect of critical thinking skills can be overshadowed when an instructor's choice of media prioritizes practical ease over the richness of benefits for specific skill areas.

This concern is further illustrated by a student's remark:

> "My teacher used WhatsApp as a medium of communication and share material, including discussions. He did this because the application was already popular among students. In addition, this social media is equipped with various advantages and most importantly this application is free."

The use of media in fiqh instruction by lecturers, which still leans heavily toward practicality, reflects a prioritization of ease of use over educational value. This emphasis on practicality highlights an important area for development among lecturers at universities in East Java. The use of media in learning should not merely support efficient information delivery processes but should also contribute to deeper learning outcomes—particularly the enhancement of critical thinking skills. A paradigm shift from practicality to pedagogical usability in media selection is therefore urgently needed. Quantitative findings from Table 8, which examines the distribution of students' critical thinking skills based on learning media, reveal that media grounded in content clarity—such as books and academic journals—tend to yield higher critical thinking skills scores. In contrast, practical tools like WhatsApp and social media, while convenient, appear less effective in fostering these higher-order thinking skills.

An insightful perspective on this issue was shared by a fiqh lecturer during an interview:

> "Considering the essence of this research through the questions posed to me, the ideal expectation is that both the learning strategies and media selected by lecturers should take critical thinking skills into account. However, this is challenging. In my opinion, it creates ambiguity for lecturers in determining what to prioritize. Should they (lecturers) focus on optimizing critical thinking skills through the selection of learning strategies and media, thereby equipping students with these skills during the process? Or should they prioritize the optimization of fiqh content itself, enabling students to critically engage with the subject matter? Achieving both simultaneously is possible, but it is not an easy task."

Based on the interview findings, two key insights emerge. First, learning strategies and media can be intentionally designed to engage students in activities that cultivate critical thinking skills throughout the learning process. Second, fiqh content itself can be structured in ways that encourage students to critically engage with the material. Accordingly, lecturers may consider either adapting instructional strategies and media to align with the nature of fiqh content, or adapt fiqh content to fit predetermined learning strategies and media aimed at cultivating critical thinking skills.

Logically, the more prudent option is the first: designing instructional strategies and selecting media that support critical thinking development while remaining faithful to the characteristics of fiqh content. The second option, while possible, carries significant risks. As previously discussed, fiqh content follows a distinct logic and methodological structure. Forcing fiqh content to conform to externally imposed strategies or media formats may distort its underlying logic and pedagogical coherence. Thus, the recommendation for instructional media as outlined in Figure 3, is to focus on developing integrated multimedia resources that can accommodate and complement the structure of fiqh. Similarly, the recommendation for instructional strategies is to adopt a blended approach—integrating multiple methods to address the unique demands of fiqh content while fostering critical thinking. The overarching conclusion from this qualitative analysis is clear: instructional strategies and media should be carefully aligned with the logical and structural characteristics of fiqh content, rather than reshaping the content to fit predetermined pedagogical tools.

DISCUSSION

The critical thinking components examined in this study align with McPeck's (2016) assertion that critical thinking is inherently subject-specific—its nature and application depend largely on the content to be analyzed. Therefore, each academic discipline, including fiqh, must develop its own definition and framework of critical thinking tailored to its unique characteristics. The findings from this study suggests that the current state of critical thinking among students at Islamic higher education institutions calls for deliberate and continuous interventions to stimulate and enhance their critical thinking capacities.

Based on the findings (Table 4), 'Alwani's (1991) observation that learning fiqh tends to revolve around the study of texts, commentary on texts, and layered annotations appears to be validated. According to the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) Taxonomy, the actualization of students' critical thinking in fiqh learning in East Java appears to remain at the pre-structural or uni-structural level. The pre-structural level represents an understanding that is fragmented or uninformed, while the uni-structural level reflects a basic grasp of individual concepts without integrated or relational comprehension (Claudia et al., 2020). Furthermore, this condition demonstrates that students in East

Java remain largely within the quantitative phase of learning—characterized by surface-level engagement and additive knowledge acquisition (Mystakidis, 2021).

This condition is certainly improvable. Students' level of critical thinking can be enhanced through intentional pedagogical acknowledgement and intervention. The key lies in shifting the learning paradigm in fiqh from quantitative approach to a more qualitative one. As Biggs and Collis (1982) assert, qualitative learning emphasizes reflective abstraction and transfer. The findings of this study further reinforce that the components of critical thinking are interconnected, implying that critical thinking is not static but can be progressively developed over time. As evidenced in the current research, students at Islamic higher education institutions in East Java have generally reached the recognition level of critical thinking. This recognition can serve as a springboard for advancing towards higher-order critical thinking skills.

Qualitative learning aims to equip students with the ability to make meaningful connections across various knowledge domains, which then serve as a basis for informed problem solving. As Patterson (2021) notes, qualitative learning encourages learners to be responsive and reflective when encountering complex problems. The study's findings suggest that adopting a qualitative learning approach enables students to: develop sensitivity to public discourse related to fiqh (recognition); conduct critical analysis of this discourse (analysis); identify main issues and break them down into criteria-based sub-issues (deductive); collect and synthesize relevant information in order to propose alternative solutions (information processing) and adopt well-reasoned positions based on earlier stages of analysis (drawing conclusions).

Strengthening learning techniques is one of the key strategies to improve students' critical thinking abilities. According to existing literature, a number of instructional approaches—such as problem-based learning (Seibert, 2021), project-based learning (Yustina et al., 2020), research-based learning (Arifin et al., 2022), and case-based learning (Zhao et al., 2020)—have proven to be effective in cultivating critical thinking skills. Among these, Case Based Learning (CBL) has emerged as a particularly relevant strategy in the context of fiqh education, accounting for 12% of the learning strategies identified in this study. Srinivasan et al. (2007) offers an insightful comparison between CBL and PBL, based on research involving medical students. Although the context differs, the findings offer compelling parallels for application in fiqh learning. The study revealed that students tend to prefer CBL over PBL due to its more structured approach. CBL allows for less freedom in determining answers to specific problems, thus guiding students more efficiently towards practical and solution-oriented thinking. While PBL often begins by revisiting the problem space and allows for more open-ended exploration, CBL is perceived as more goal-directed and pragmatic. Importantly, supporters of CBL argue that it still enables investigation of open-ended questions and promotes discussion, debate and exploration of ambiguity—core elements of critical thinking. However, it does so within a structured and focused framework that many students find more manageable. Given these strengths, CBL merits further consideration as a complementary strategy alongside PBL and RBL to enhance students' critical thinking skills in fiqh education.

Several studies have highlighted that RBL and PBL are interrelated methodologies that can be integrated into a hybrid model known as Problem and Research-Based Learning (PRBL) (Birzina et al., 2021; Suyatman et al., 2021). According to Estuhono et al. (2019), RBL is inherently flexible and can incorporate a variety of learning modalities—including constructive, behavioral, and cognitive approaches. This aligns with the pedagogical expectations of fiqh education, which should aim to broaden its scope. In this regard, fiqh learning should not only focus on cognitive aspects (Budiman et

al., 2020), but also emphasize constructivist understanding grounded in social realities (Haryani et al., 2019; Mubin et al., 2022), and foster behavioral constructs that emerge from prior cognitive processes contextualized within students' lived experiences (Jadalhaq & Russi, 2020).

Furthermore, with regard to instructional media, findings from this study reveal a notable concern: only 6% of fiqh learning in East Java employs PowerPoint or video media. The predominant learning tool remains WhatsApp, which is primarily used for communication and content distribution. However, research shows that combining WhatsApp with other social media platforms can significantly enhance students' critical thinking abilities (Baguma et al., 2019; Pacholek et al., 2021). Moreover, a number of studies have demonstrated that the effective use of PowerPoint presentations and video-based content can also maximize the development of critical thinking skills (Scheibe, 2004; Sumarni & Feranita, 2018; Wanner, 2015).

Based on these findings, the effectiveness of instructional media in optimizing specific learning outcomes does not depend solely on the type of media used. Rather, certain forms of media can be considered ideal if they align well with the features of teaching materials, the needs of the students, and the instructional requirements (Marpanaji et al., 2018; Puspitarini & Hanif, 2019; Widyastuti & Susiana, 2019). Thus, even simple or basic learning media can be deemed appropriate for fiqh instruction, provided they meet these pedagogical criteria.

Consequently, it is recommended that students and lecturers integrate multiple forms of media—that is, adopt multimedia approaches—to enhance critical thinking activities in fiqh learning. Multimedia involves the combination of various media formats—such as text, audio, video, and graphics—in the learning process (Abdulrahaman et al., 2020; Djamas et al., 2021; Mayer, 2019). Nonetheless, as noted by Abdulrahaman et al. (2020), the effective application of multimedia in education requires a well-structured and sophisticated design process. Therefore, further research is necessary to explore how multimedia can be optimally developed and applied to maximize students' engagement and critical thinking in fiqh learning.

A significant consideration regarding the use of learning media is its potential to equip students with digital literacy skills, enabling them to navigate and analyze fiqh material in digital environments effectively (Hassan'zadeh, 2018), while also cultivating a critical awareness of contemporary fiqh issues (Araniri et al., 2021). Therefore, this study recommends that learning media be integrated with complementary tools, such as real-time web-based platforms, to form a more comprehensive multimedia approach, as previously discussed.

Additionally, this study examined differences in students' critical thinking skills in fiqh learning between public and private universities. The findings reveal significant disparities, with students at public institutions exhibiting higher levels of critical thinking development. Several factors may explain this gap. Based on observations and interviews, students at public universities reportedly have better access to high-quality references and learning resources in fiqh, pointing to a notable infrastructure advantage. This is consistent with prior studies highlighting that public institutions tend to be better in terms of facilities (Muzni & Nurlaila, 2018). Interestingly, interviews with instructors from both private and public institutions revealed that the learning materials and methodologies used across these institutions were relatively similar. However, one notable difference lies in student motivation. Students at private institutions were observed to be less motivated to engage deeply in their studies compared to their students at public institutions. This finding is consistent with research by Ibáñez et al. (2020) who

also noted that the learning environment at public institutions tend to be more conducive to fostering academic engagement and critical thinking than those in private institutions.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. It presents a snapshot of how students engage in critical thinking within the context of fiqh learning, focusing on identifying the learning strategies and media currently employed. While the research provides a descriptive analysis of the continuity between critical thinking, instructional strategies, and learning media, it stops short of testing the effectiveness of these relationships empirically. Specifically, although the study highlights the potential strategies such as Research-Based Learning (RBL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and identifies commonly used media such as WhatsApp and video platforms, it does not evaluate whether these combinations effectively enhance students' critical thinking skills. Therefore, future research is needed to empirically examine the effectiveness of these recommended approaches.

CONCLUSION

This study examined students' critical thinking practices in fiqh learning, identified the instructional strategies employed, and explored the use of technology in supporting fiqh learning activities. Additionally, the research analyzed the continuity between three key components: critical thinking, learning strategies, and learning media within the context of fiqh instruction in Islamic higher education. The findings indicate that students at tertiary institutions in East Java demonstrate a generally neutral engagement with critical thinking during fiqh learning. Their critical thinking experiences are neither particularly strong nor deficient, but rather inconsistent.

Problem-based learning (PBL) and group-individual learning emerged as the most frequently used strategies. PBL, in particular, was identified as highly effective in fostering critical thinking skills due to its alignment with analytical and inquiry-based learning processes. In terms of learning media, the use of multimedia—such as a combination of PowerPoint, videos, and communication platforms like WhatsApp—is recommended to enhance the depth and interactivity of fiqh learning.

Appropriate learning strategies and media work synergistically to enhance students' critical thinking abilities in fiqh learning. Based on the findings, RBL and PBL are identified as effective strategies for consistently cultivating critical thinking in the context of fiqh instruction. However, these strategies cannot operate effectively in isolation; therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of optimizing multimedia integration to support and strengthen these instructional approaches.

Several recommendations emerged from this study: First, the development of collaborative RBL and PBL strategies is encouraged to promote more active and reflective critical thinking processes in fiqh learning; second, there is a need to formulate and apply appropriate multimedia tools that align with the nature of fiqh content and further stimulate critical thinking; and third, future research should conduct a more detailed factor analysis to explore variations in fiqh learning between public and private institutions, particularly concerning the influence of infrastructure, motivation, and instructional quality on students' critical thinking development.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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