

Implementation of the Critical Thinking Method in Revealing Students' Reflection Abilities in Islamic Religious Education Lessons at Muhammadiyah 2 Adiewerna Tegal Middle School Level

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ABSTRACT

Critical and Reflective Thinking Skills are among the essential competencies that students must possess in facing the challenges of globalization and the rapid development of information technology. This study aims to describe the implementation of critical thinking methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at the junior high school level and to analyze their influence on students' reflective abilities. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through interviews and documentation, then analyzed using the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, with source and technique triangulation applied to ensure data validity. The results show that the application of critical thinking methods in PAI learning still faces various obstacles, such as the dominance of conventional teaching methods and the lack of teacher training. However, in educational institutions that have implemented critical thinking-based learning models such as Problem-Based Learning, Think-Talk-Write, and Project-Based Learning, a significant improvement was found in students' active participation and analytical abilities. Furthermore, these methods also had a positive impact on strengthening students' reflective abilities, particularly in internalizing religious values and moral awareness. These findings confirm that integrating critical thinking methods into PAI learning can be an effective strategy to develop students who are religious, critical, and contextually grounded in Islamic teachings.

INTRODUCTION

In today's era, critical thinking skills are soft skills that should inherently exist within every student. These skills serve as a filter amid the rapid advancement of technology and the accelerating wave of globalization. Without sufficient critical thinking ability, students are vulnerable to being swept into the negative currents of globalization and may lack the capacity to manage, process, and utilize information effectively in their daily lives (Fadillah et al., 2022; Widiastuti, W., & Kania, 2022).

According to Niswar (2021), the education sector is expected to serve as a solution for developing students' soft skills by emphasizing innovative, skillful, and creative aspects (Imin et al., 2024). This involves not only skills and understanding but also focuses on creativity, collaboration, and communication abilities. Some aspects also involve technology, behavior, and moral values (Syeriduni & Syeriduni, 2020). This notion is further reinforced by Selviani and Agis (2023), who argue that critical thinking and communication skills present greater challenges in the learning process than memorization and rote learning, while also equipping students with essential soft skills. Moreover, education serves as a medium for shaping students' religious and Islamic character, producing graduates who are not only religiously grounded but also trained in critical and innovative thinking.

According to Kurnia and Ganeswara (2021), critical thinking ability is an innate human capacity involving mental activity and problem-solving through analyzing assumptions, providing rational reasoning, and evaluating, investigating, and making decisions based on one's ability. Individuals who think critically are active in seeking, analyzing, and evaluating information to draw conclusions based on facts obtained during the thought process (Akhyar et al., 2024).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a vital role in shaping students' character, morality, and spirituality. However, in practice, PAI learning often focuses more on cognitive and memorization aspects rather than developing thinking skills and value awareness (Wahyudi, 2021). In the digital era, students must possess critical thinking skills to evaluate information rationally and contextually.

In reality, however, several recurring problems are found in the field. Islamic Religious Education often still employs conventional teaching methods. As highlighted by Fadhli et al. (2019), one of the main problems in PAI learning is the lack of student enthusiasm toward lessons due to monotonous teaching methods, leading to passive classroom participation and underdeveloped critical thinking skills. Similarly, research by Ashar (2023) found that conventional teaching methods are still widely used, not only in PAI but also in other subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. In fact, critical thinking in addressing problems is essential as a guide for determining future actions (Mustajab & Sutarni, 2024).

Based on these issues, this article aims to describe the implementation of critical thinking methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at the

junior high school level and to analyze the influence of critical thinking methods on students' reflective abilities in PAI learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Critical Thinking in Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

According to Rahardian (in Putro et al., 2023), critical thinking skills are a form of students' continuous reasoning ability that is crucial for developing 21st-century competencies. Every student needs critical thinking skills to contribute thoughtfully to problem-solving activities designed by teachers (Latifah & Utama, 2024).

Critical thinking can also be defined as a cognitive process focusing on stages of analysis, evaluation, and rational decision-making based on evidence and logic (Ennis, 2011; Paul & Elder, 2008). In the context of Islamic Religious Education, critical thinking helps students understand and interpret Islamic teachings contextually and fosters value awareness in addressing modern life challenges (Facione, 2013).

Research conducted by Nadhiroh and Anshori (2023) revealed that the implementation of critical thinking-based learning models such as Problem-Based Learning, Think-Talk-Write, and Project-Based Learning effectively enhances students' analytical and argumentative skills in PAI learning.

Reflective Ability in Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

Reflective ability refers to a deeper form of critical thinking aimed at gaining new understanding and improving future actions (Dewey, 1933). In other words, reflection is a deeper thinking process that relies on acquired information to generate new insights.

According to Al-Ghazali (in Laili & Sofa, 2025), reflective practice in the context of Islamic education serves as a means of internalizing spiritual values and strengthening moral awareness. From this perspective, reflective thinking is understood as a process of deep critical reasoning that internalizes spiritual values and enhances moral consciousness, ultimately generating new understanding based on previously acquired information.

Recent studies show that reflective practices in PAI learning—through reflective journals, value discussions, and case studies—can increase students' self-awareness regarding their religious behavior. Thus, reflection is not merely a writing activity but an internalization process of values that shape a religious personality (Syeriduni & Syeriduni, 2020).

METODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through interviews and documentation, while data analysis was conducted through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher applied source and technique triangulation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Implementation of Critical Thinking Methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning at Junior High Schools

The findings reveal that the implementation of critical thinking methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the junior high school level still faces several challenges but has begun to show positive progress in some educational institutions. Based on interviews and documentation, it was found that most PAI teachers still use conventional approaches such as lectures and memorization, resulting in low student participation and underdeveloped critical thinking skills.

However, some teachers have begun integrating critical thinking-based learning models such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Think-Talk-Write (TTW), and Project-Based Learning (PjBL). In these models, students are actively engaged in group discussions, presentations of real-life cases related to Islamic values, and reflections on socio-cultural issues connected to religious teachings. Several forms of critical thinking practices observed in the field include:

- **Religious Text Analysis:** Teachers present verses or hadiths and ask students to analyze their meanings within the context of modern life.
- **Contextual Case Studies:** Students are encouraged to examine social phenomena—such as bullying, promiscuity, or social media use—and compare them with Islamic values.
- **Debates and Value Discussions:** Debates between student groups on contemporary Islamic themes have proven effective in promoting critical thinking and argumentation grounded in logic and religious evidence.

Although not yet implemented uniformly, these methods have been found to enhance student engagement, encourage logical reasoning based on Islamic principles, and stimulate critical questioning toward the learning material.

The Influence of Critical Thinking Methods on Students' Reflective Abilities

The study also indicates that the implementation of critical thinking methods has a significant impact on improving students' **reflective thinking skills** in PAI learning. Students engaged in critical thinking-based activities demonstrated notable progress in the following aspects:

1. **Self-Awareness of Religious Values**

Students became more capable of reflecting on their daily behavior in relation to Islamic teachings after participating in discussions and case studies.

2. **Ability to Internalize Values**

The use of reflective journals, assignments such as writing Islamic short stories based on personal experiences, and value-based dialogues effectively helped students understand Islamic teachings more deeply and contextually.

3. **Changes in Attitudes and Behavior**

Several teachers stated that after applying critical thinking approaches, students became wiser in making daily decisions and demonstrated stronger religious attitudes.

For instance, in one case study, students were given the topic "Islamic Ethics in Social Media." Through content analysis, group discussions, and reflective

assignments, students not only learned the concepts of *ghibah*, *fitnah*, and *tabayyun* but were also able to apply these values in their digital lives.

The Islamic Education (PAI) teacher revealed that the transformation of this learning method did not happen instantly. Initially, students were still accustomed to rote memorization and tended to be reluctant to speak. However, after several applications, they began to open up, become more active, and show deeper thinking abilities. Some forms of critical thinking application found in the field include teachers beginning lessons by presenting actual cases.

Interviews with PAI teachers showed that the use of the critical thinking method had a positive impact on students' motivation and mindset. The teacher stated that before using this method, Islamic Education learning was often one-way and monotonous. Students only listened to the teacher's explanations, took notes, and memorized the material without truly understanding the meaning behind Islamic teachings.

"In the past, students tended to be passive – they only memorized verses or hadiths without knowing their meanings. Now they are more enthusiastic because I encourage them to think and discuss real issues. They have started to express their opinions, even relating them to personal experiences."
(Interview with PAI Teacher, October 14, 2025)

The teacher also explained that applying the critical thinking method fosters a sense of intellectual responsibility among students. They become more cautious in receiving information and more open to differing opinions.

"When discussing differences of opinion in Islam, they learn not to immediately judge what's right or wrong, but to seek the reasoning behind each view. This makes them wiser and more appreciative of differences."
(Interview with PAI Teacher, October 14, 2025)

Interview results with students show significant changes in how they understand and interpret Islamic Education lessons. Most students admitted that this new method made religious studies more relevant to daily life and not merely about memorization.

"I like religious studies more now because there's a lot of discussion. We can think and share our opinions instead of just memorizing verses – the lessons aren't boring anymore." (Student A, Grade VIII)

"When the teacher discussed hoaxes on social media, I realized that spreading unverified news can have big consequences. Now I'm more careful."
(Student B, Grade VIII)

"With lessons like this, we're happier because we're not afraid to ask questions anymore. We understand why Islam regulates certain things – not just what's forbidden, but also the reasons behind it." (Student C, Grade IX)

From these student statements, it is evident that the application of the critical thinking method successfully fostered contextual understanding of Islamic teachings and enhanced students' reflective awareness of their behavior and attitudes. Meanwhile, interviews with learners showed changes in mindset and reflective attitudes after engaging in critical thinking-based learning. One student admitted that before using this method, Islamic Education lessons felt boring because they only involved memorizing verses and hadiths without contextual explanation.

"Before, in Islamic Education class, we just copied verses and memorized their meanings. Now we're asked to think and discuss problems we often face, like social media or friendships. It's more interesting and relevant to our lives."
(Student A, Grade VIII)

The Islamic Education teacher stated that the transformation of this learning method did not happen instantly. At first, students were used to memorization and were reluctant to speak. However, after several implementations, they began to open up, become active, and show deeper thinking abilities.

"When I first asked them to discuss the issue of religious hoaxes, many stayed silent because they were afraid of being wrong. But after I gave examples of how to think and discuss, they began to speak up. Now they often share good and rational opinions."
(Interview with PAI Teacher, October 14, 2025)

Interviews with Islamic Education teachers showed that applying critical thinking methods in learning brought real changes to students' activeness and courage in expressing opinions. At the beginning, most students were still passive and hesitant to speak when asked to discuss sensitive or complex topics, such as religious hoaxes that often appear on social media.

The teacher explained that when this topic was first discussed in class, the atmosphere was quite awkward. Many students just stayed silent and looked at each other. They seemed hesitant and afraid of making mistakes in expressing their opinions, perhaps because the topic felt heavy or because they were not used to open and argumentative thinking. Some students also admitted they were worried their opinions would be considered wrong or different from their peers'.

Furthermore, critical thinking skills trained through discussion fostered mutual respect and empathy among students. They learned that differences of opinion are not something wrong, but part of the thinking and learning process together. The teacher mentioned that now the classroom atmosphere is more open and interactive, where students respond to each other's ideas with logical arguments and real-life examples.

Figure 1. Learning Atmosphere



The documentation in Figure 1 shows the learning atmosphere of Islamic Education (PAI) in a Grade VIII classroom where the research was conducted. The teacher is seen guiding students in group discussions on the issue of religious hoaxes. In this activity, the teacher acts as a facilitator who encourages students to think critically, express opinions, and respond politely and argumentatively to their peers' views. The classroom appears active and conducive, indicating that the critical thinking method significantly enhances student participation.

The Effect of the Critical Thinking Method on Students' Reflective Abilities

The implementation of the critical thinking method in Islamic Education (PAI) learning has proven to greatly influence how students think, behave, and understand religious values. Based on observations and interviews, after teachers applied the critical thinking method, students became more active, more courageous in expressing opinions, and more capable of understanding the meaning of religious lessons in daily life.

Previously, Islamic Education learning in this school tended to be one-way: the teacher explained while students listened and took notes. They memorized verses and hadiths but did not understand their deeper meanings. After the critical thinking method was applied, the classroom became more lively and interactive. The teacher presented real-life problems related to students' experiences and encouraged them to think, discuss, and express opinions based on Islamic values.

After implementing the critical thinking method, students demonstrated improvement in understanding Islamic values more logically and rationally. They not only knew what was right or wrong but also understood the reasons behind those teachings.

"Previously, students could only answer memorization questions, but now they can provide opinions and reasoning. For example, when I ask about honesty, they can explain why honesty is important – not just because it's commanded by religion, but because it affects others' trust." (*Interview with PAI Teacher, October 12, 2025*)

Students also admitted that this method made religious studies easier to understand. One student said:

“Learning like this sticks better, Ma’am, because we’re asked to think, not just memorize. So I understand why something is prohibited or encouraged.”
(Grade VIII Student)

Based on interviews and classroom observations, the application of the critical thinking method significantly enhanced students’ reflective abilities in Islamic Education learning. Before its application, most students tended to only memorize verses, hadiths, or moral rules without engaging in a meaningful understanding process. However, after teachers implemented critical thinking approaches through case analysis, discussions, and value reflections, students began shifting from memorizing to understanding, from listening to thinking, and from receiving to evaluating.

Students involved in critical thinking-based activities tended to show deeper progress. They became more capable of reflecting on their daily behavior in light of Islamic teachings after participating in discussions and case studies. From observation and data analysis, several indicators of improvement in students’ reflective abilities were identified as a result of applying the critical thinking method:

Table 1. Improvement of Students’ Reflective Abilities

Reflective Aspect	Before Applying the Critical Thinking Method	After Applying the Critical Thinking Method	Field Evidence
Awareness of Religious Values	Knowing Islamic teachings only through memorized verses and hadiths	Understanding and applying the meanings of Islamic teachings in behavior	Student discussion notes & reflections
Self-Introspection	Unable to deeply self-assess	Beginning to correct personal behavior based on religious values	Student reflective journals
Contextual Connection	Islamic teachings seen as separate from modern life	Able to connect Islamic values with current social issues	Interviews & classroom observations
Argumentation Ability	Merely repeating the teacher’s explanations	Expressing opinions with logical reasoning and religious evidence	Group discussion documentation

This data shows that the critical thinking method positively influences students’ cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects in a comprehensive way.

Table 2. Research Aspects and Findings

Research Aspect	Findings
Teaching Methods Used	Lectures, Discussions, PBL, TTW, PjBL
Student Response to Innovative Methods	More enthusiastic, active, critical, and reflective
Changes in Reflective Thinking Ability	Deeper and more contextual understanding of religious values
Supporting Factors	Creative teachers, school support, contextual materials
Inhibiting Factors	Limited teacher training, lack of time and learning media

DISCUSSION

Implementation of Critical Thinking Methods in Islamic Education Learning

Based on the research findings, it can be seen that although some Islamic Education (PAI) teachers still apply conventional learning approaches such as lecturing and memorization, there have been emerging initiatives among several educators to adopt critical thinking-based methods such as *Problem-Based Learning (PBL)*, *Think-Talk-Write (TTW)*, and *Project-Based Learning (PjBL)*.

This finding aligns with the views of Ennis (2011) and Paul & Elder (2008), who state that critical thinking is a cognitive process involving analysis, evaluation, and logical decision-making based on evidence. In the context of Islamic Education, critical thinking not only enhances students' intellectual abilities but also helps them interpret Islamic teachings contextually and in accordance with contemporary challenges.

Furthermore, this finding supports Rahardian's statement (Putro et al., 2023) that critical thinking is an essential skill students must possess to solve problems and make independent, logical decisions. Therefore, implementing critical thinking methods in Islamic Education is crucial as a pedagogical strategy to develop learners who are not only intellectually capable but also spiritually and morally mature.

However, the obstacles found, such as the lack of teacher training and limited instructional time, indicate that systemic support from schools and the government is still needed to prepare competent teachers capable of applying this approach. As stated by Fadhli et al. (2019), monotonous and non-interactive teaching methods cause students to become passive, hindering the optimal development of critical thinking skills. This further emphasizes the importance of updating instructional methods in Islamic Education.

The Influence of Critical Thinking Methods on Students' Reflective Abilities

The study also revealed that the application of critical thinking methods in Islamic Education positively influences students' reflective abilities. Students involved in discussions, case studies, and reflective assignments showed improvement in self-awareness, contextual understanding of religious values, and positive changes in religious attitudes.

This finding is consistent with Dewey's (1933) concept of reflective ability, which he describes as a deep thinking process aimed at gaining new understanding and improving future actions. In the context of Islamic education, reflection serves not only as a process of rethinking but also as an internalization of spiritual and moral values, as emphasized by Al-Ghazali (in Laili & Sofa, 2025).

Furthermore, this research supports the findings of Syeriduni & Syeriduni (2020), who discovered that reflective practices through journals, value discussions, and case studies can strengthen students' moral and religious awareness. In other words, critical thinking in Islamic Education is not merely a tool to enhance logical reasoning but also a means to deepen students' religious understanding—enabling them to think, believe, and act wisely in their daily lives.

The Effect of the Critical Thinking Method on Students' Reflective Abilities

This study also found that the application of the critical thinking method had a positive impact on the development of students' reflective abilities in Islamic Education learning. Students who engaged in group discussions, case study analyses, and reflective assignments showed significant improvement in self-awareness, contextual understanding of Islamic values, and behavioral changes toward more internalized religious attitudes. This process indicates that critical thinking can serve as an entry point for the formation of spiritual reflective awareness.

In line with Dewey's (1933) concept, reflective ability represents a form of deep thinking aimed at revisiting experiences, understanding the meaning behind actions, and improving future behavior. In the context of Islamic education, reflection is not only intellectual but also spiritual—it involves the heart, moral awareness, and one's relationship with God. Al-Ghazali (as cited in Laili & Sofa, 2025) emphasized that reflection serves as a means of purifying the soul and drawing closer to Allah through contemplation of one's life experiences and actions.

This finding is supported by Syeriduni & Syeriduni (2020), who found that reflective activities such as value journaling, religious discussions, and moral case studies can strengthen students' moral and religious awareness. Therefore, the application of the critical thinking method in PAI learning not only develops students' rational and cognitive aspects but also assists them in forming mature spiritual consciousness. This process nurtures Muslim individuals who are capable of logical reasoning, understanding the meaning of worship deeply, and acting with moral wisdom in everyday life.

The Relationship Between Critical Thinking and Reflection in Islamic Education Learning

Overall, the findings of this study confirm a strong and complementary relationship between critical thinking skills and reflective abilities in Islamic Education (PAI) learning. Critical thinking functions as a logical framework that enables students to analyze, assess, and understand Islamic teachings in depth, while reflection serves to internalize those values into one's moral and spiritual

consciousness. When both are combined within learning strategies, PAI education becomes more meaningful, humanistic, and transformative.

Hence, a learning approach that integrates critical thinking and reflection enables the realization of Islamic education that is not only oriented toward knowledge transmission but also toward self-transformation. This aligns with the perspectives of Fadillah et al. (2022) and Widiastuti & Kania (2022), who argue that modern education should emphasize the development of soft skills such as creativity, innovation, and critical thinking so that students can adapt to the complexities of global life.

The transformation of PAI learning—from a textual and memorization-based approach to one that is contextual, reflective, and critical—represents an essential step toward realizing Islamic education that is both relevant and empowering in today's world. By integrating the rational and spiritual dimensions in balance, Islamic Education will be able to cultivate a generation that is not only knowledgeable and faithful but also ethical, open-minded, and capable of becoming positive agents of change in society.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate a strong interconnection between critical and reflective thinking abilities. In Islamic Education, critical thinking enables students to analyze and evaluate Islamic teachings deeply, while reflective ability helps them internalize those values in real life.

Both skills complement each other: critical thinking provides a logical and analytical framework, whereas reflection offers spiritual and moral depth. A learning approach that integrates both abilities makes Islamic Education more meaningful and transformative.

Thus, Islamic Education—once considered monotonous and focused primarily on memorization—can now be transformed into a medium for developing soft skills that are highly needed in the era of globalization. As emphasized by Fadillah et al. (2022) and Widiastuti & Kania (2022), education must promote innovation, creativity, and critical thinking to develop learners who are adaptive to the changing times.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of critical thinking methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at Muhammadiyah 2 Adiwerna Junior High School has not been fully optimal, as teachers still use conventional methods. However, some teachers have begun to utilize PBL, TTW, PjBL, and reflective learning models. Based on data obtained by the researchers, models such as PBL, TTW, PjBL, and reflective learning have successfully increased student learning activities, analytical skills, and engagement in the learning process. These methods have a direct impact on strengthening students' reflective abilities, marked by increased awareness of religious values, self-introspection, logical argumentation, and the courage to connect Islamic teachings with real-life phenomena.

These findings confirm that critical thinking methods play a crucial role in transforming PAI learning from rote memorization to dialogic, contextual, and meaningful learning. However, the effectiveness of implementation is still

hampered by limited teacher training, inadequate learning time, and a lack of supporting media and equipment. Therefore, institutional support, professional teacher development, and improvement of the quality of learning resources are needed so that the integration of critical thinking methods can be applied consistently and sustainably in Islamic Education learning.

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