

Application of Discussion Methods in Encouraging the Critical Thinking Ability of VIII Class Students in Fikih Lessons at MTs Madinah Bunder Susukan Cirebon

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ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the low level of students' critical thinking skills in the learning process, particularly in the Jurisprudence subject at MTs Madinah Bunder Susukan, Cirebon, where conventional, teacher-centered methods have resulted in passive student participation, monotonous activities, and limited problem-solving abilities. To address this issue, the research explored the application of the discussion method as a means of fostering critical thinking and active engagement among eighth-grade students, with the objectives of analyzing its implementation, identifying supporting and inhibiting factors, and examining teacher strategies in its use. Employing a qualitative approach, the study was conducted at MTs Madinah Bunder Susukan, Cirebon, using observation, interviews, and documentation for data collection, and data analysis through collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that the discussion method was effectively implemented in three stages: preparation, including lesson planning, material selection from textbooks, and creating a conducive learning environment; implementation, involving group division, task assignment, collaborative discussion, presentation, and peer feedback; and closing, where unresolved questions were addressed and conclusions were drawn. Supporting factors included teacher competence and sincerity, student readiness, relevant materials, and a conducive classroom atmosphere, while inhibiting factors were non-conducive classes and absenteeism. Teacher strategies to optimize discussions involved providing engaging materials and encouraging active participation, demonstrating that the discussion method is an effective approach to enhancing critical thinking skills and classroom engagement in Jurisprudence learning.

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1. Introduction

Education is one of the most essential aspects in today's era of globalization, which is characterized by rapid challenges and changes. Based on the paradigm of 21st-century national education, students are expected to acquire several key competencies critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication collectively referred to as "The 4C's" (Hidayat et al., 2024; Ramdani & Badriah, 2018). To meet these demands, the Indonesian government developed the 2013 Curriculum, designed to integrate 21st-century skills.

This curriculum not only emphasizes academic competence (*hard skills*) but also interpersonal competence (*soft skills*), providing students with opportunities to engage in all domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. In the cognitive domain, the 2013 Curriculum requires students to develop higher-order thinking skills, also known as complex thinking, which include critical

thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making (Ramdani & Badriah, 2018) (Dani Ramdani & Liah Badriah, 2018).

Critical thinking is the ability to logically and objectively analyze information and situations, present arguments, and propose solutions based on evidence. Such skills can be cultivated when teachers establish interactive communication and actively engage students through stimuli that encourage questioning, reasoning, and problem-solving. This ability is vital for filtering diverse information, evaluating and selecting relevant data, and applying it to address global challenges.

Preliminary observations at MTs Madinah Bunder Susukan, Cirebon, revealed that Jurisprudence (Fikih) lessons still rely on conventional, teacher-centered methods. Teachers pay little attention to varied models, strategies, or methods, resulting in passive, monotonous learning with minimal student participation and underdeveloped critical thinking skills. One effective way to address this is through the discussion method, which is derived from the Greek words “Metha” (through) and “Hodos” (way), meaning a means to achieve specific objectives (Milan Rianto, 2006).

The term “discussion” originates from the Latin “discutere,” meaning to examine or investigate, and refers to a verbal, face-to-face interaction in which two or more individuals exchange information, defend opinions, and solve problems (Syafuruddin, 2017). According to Suryosubroto, discussion is a form of material presentation that provides students with opportunities for scientific dialogue to form opinions, draw conclusions, and develop alternative solutions (Muhamad Afandi et al., 2013).

Given the importance of the discussion method in fostering critical thinking, it is highly relevant for teachers to implement it in Jurisprudence lessons, especially under the current curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning with teachers acting primarily as facilitators. This method enables students to exchange ideas, construct arguments, and debate various perspectives on Jurisprudence topics. Based on this background, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled “The Application of the Discussion Method to Encourage Critical Thinking Skills of Grade VIII Students in Jurisprudence at MTs Madinah Bunder Susukan, Cirebon.”

2. Method

The research approach employed in this study is qualitative research. Qualitative research is a methodological procedure that produces descriptive data about individuals or observed behaviors in the form of written or spoken words. The data collected are not obtained through questionnaires but rather through observation, involving field research to directly examine phenomena occurring in the real context, whether recorded in written form or expressed verbally by the individuals or behaviors being observed. The data also include interviews conducted with selected informants, providing information that reflects the actual reality regarding the analysis of the application of the discussion method in encouraging the critical thinking skills of Grade VIII students in the Jurisprudence subject at MTs Madinah Bunder, as well as documentation relevant to the research topic.

The data sources for this study consist of two types: primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained directly from original sources, which in this research include Jurisprudence teachers and Grade VIII students as the key informants. Secondary data, on the other hand, are obtained indirectly or through other parties, such as documents or files relevant to the research. Data collection techniques refer to the methods used to gather data for the study. In this research, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique applied is interactive data analysis, which consists of four interrelated stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Sugiyono, 2014).

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the findings obtained in the field from May 13 to June 13, 2024, through observation, interviews, and documentation, the researcher collected data on the application of the discussion method in fostering the critical thinking skills of Grade VIII students in the Jurisprudence subject at MTs Madinah Bunder Susukan, Cirebon.

The implementation of the discussion method in enhancing students' critical thinking skills has been applied in Jurisprudence lessons. However, it is only used for certain subtopics or subject matter

deemed suitable for discussion-based learning. Specifically, in the Jurisprudence topic on “The Provisions of Halal and Haram Food,” the discussion method was applied effectively and in accordance with the established procedural steps. The application process consists of several stages: (1) Preparation Stage, the teacher prepares the lesson plan (RPP), selects discussion materials from the prescribed textbook, and creates a conducive classroom environment; (2) Implementation Stage, the teacher divides students into four groups of four members each, assigns a task or problem to each group, students begin discussions by referring to the textbook, present their group findings to the class, and receive responses from other groups in the form of questions and answers, followed by students formulating conclusions from the discussion results; and (3) Closing Stage, the teacher addresses and answers unresolved questions from each group and formulates a final conclusion summarizing the material discussed.

The findings of this study are consistent with the explanation provided by Muhamad Afandi et al. (2013) regarding the implementation of the discussion method, which consists of three main stages. (a) Preparation Stage: (1) the objectives of the discussion must be clearly defined; (2) participants must meet certain requirements, and their number should be adjusted to the nature of the discussion; (3) the topic and formulation of the problems to be discussed must be clear; and (4) the time and place for the discussion should be appropriate to avoid unnecessary delays. (b) Implementation Stage: (1) establish a group structure consisting of a leader, secretary, and members; (2) assign tasks to each group for discussion; (3) encourage all participants to actively engage in the discussion; (4) record important ideas or suggestions; (5) appoint a spokesperson in each group to present the discussion results to the class; (6) respect all opinions expressed by participants; and (7) create a pleasant and conducive atmosphere. (c) Closing Stage: (1) draw conclusions from the class discussion results; (2) review the outcomes for corrections; and (3) evaluate the discussion process to inform improvements in future sessions.

The type of discussion method implemented was a small group discussion, defined as dividing students into groups of three to five members. Each group was led by a chairperson and assisted by a secretary, while all members were given the opportunity to speak and present their opinions in problem-solving (Muhamad Afandi et al., 2013).

During the application of the discussion method to enhance the critical thinking skills of Grade VIII students in the Jurisprudence topic “The Provisions of Halal and Haram Food” at MTs Madinah Bunder Susukan, Cirebon, several influencing factors were identified—both supporting and inhibiting. The supporting factors included the teacher’s competence and sincerity in teaching, student readiness, availability of relevant materials from textbooks, and a conducive classroom environment. These factors directly influenced learning outcomes and students’ motivation to participate in lessons conducted through discussion. Learning outcomes refer to observable and measurable changes in a person’s behavior or traits resulting from the learning process (Oemar Hamalik, 2004).

Teacher competence emerged as the primary factor in achieving successful learning. This aligns with Fitri Mulyani’s (2009) statement that teacher competence is closely related to student learning outcomes. According to Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, Article 10 Paragraph (1), teacher competencies include pedagogical competence, personal competence, social competence, and professional competence, all of which are obtained through professional education. One key competency is professional competence, which is essential for being an effective teacher. Professional teachers possess specialized skills grounded in a deep understanding of educational foundations, and this competence directly relates to classroom instruction. For example, teachers at MTs Madinah Bunder prepare lesson plans (RPP) as a reference to ensure teaching and learning activities are well-organized, select appropriate learning methods—such as the discussion method—and conduct evaluations to measure the achievement of learning objectives.

This practice aligns with the expectations outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 16 of 2007 on Teacher Competency Standards, which include: (1) mastering the subject matter, structure, concepts, and scientific thinking patterns relevant to the subject taught; (2) mastering the standard competencies and basic competencies of the subject taught; (3) creatively developing the subject matter; (4) engaging in continuous professional development through reflective practice; and (5) utilizing information and communication technology for self-development (Feralys Novauli, 2015).

The personal competence observed at MTs Madinah Bunder reflects an essential attribute that every teacher must deeply internalize within their conscience when teaching. Teaching is greatly influenced by a teacher's heartfelt dedication and love for their profession, as expressed in the Arabic proverb: "Ruuhul Mudarris Ahammu min Al-Thariqah wa Al-Maaddah" ("The teacher's spirit is more important than the method and the material"). Regardless of a teacher's mastery of subject matter or the sophistication of the teaching method employed, without the genuine spirit of teaching, such knowledge and methods become ineffective. It is this sincerity—rooted in a teacher's conscience—that forms the foundation of their practice. (Dina Maslahah, 2024).

One supporting factor in the implementation of the discussion method is the motivation that teachers provide to their students. This motivation stimulates students' enthusiasm and engagement in the learning process, enabling them to achieve desired learning outcomes. In line with Winkel's definition, motivation is the driving force within an individual that initiates learning activities, sustains them, and directs them toward the attainment of set objectives. Winkel further identifies two types of motivation: (1) intrinsic motivation, which originates from within the individual, such as curiosity, interest, and the desire to achieve; and (2) extrinsic motivation, which comes from external factors, such as rewards, praise, or pressure from parents or teachers. (Winkel, 2004).

Conversely, certain factors hinder the implementation of the discussion method in fostering critical thinking among Grade VIII students in the Fiqh subject on the topic of Regulations on Halal and Haram Food at MTs Madinah Bunder Susukan Cirebon. These include an uncondusive classroom environment and student absenteeism. Such obstacles can lead to negative consequences for both students and the teaching-learning process, such as a decline in academic performance, reduced learning interest, diminished motivation, and decreased teaching effectiveness. A key hindrance is the lack of motivation among students. According to Winkel, low student motivation can arise from: (1) internal factors, such as lack of interest or ability, incompatible learning styles, low self-confidence, anxiety, fear, and personal problems; and (2) external factors, such as ineffective teaching methods, an uncondusive learning environment, lack of parental support, and insufficient facilities. (Winkel, 2004).

Similarly, Astin, as cited by Siti Aisyah Puji Astuti (2023), notes that students' lack of confidence in expressing opinions, asking questions, and responding to others, as well as their generally low classroom participation, also serve as barriers to the effective use of the discussion method.

To address these hindrances in the application of the discussion method to enhance critical thinking, several changes are necessary, including:

- a. Establishing classroom rules;
- b. Using engaging learning strategies;
- c. Providing rewards for students who actively participate in lessons and attend regularly;
- d. Offering motivational support from both parents and teachers.

In the learning process, teachers must adopt strategies that ensure learning is effective and that objectives are met. Syaiful Bahri Djamarah (2006) defines a teaching strategy as a general pattern of teacher-student interaction in the form of learning activities designed to achieve predetermined goals.

In applying the discussion method to foster critical thinking in Grade VIII Fiqh classes on Regulations on Halal and Haram Food, teachers at MTs Madinah Bunder implement strategies such as presenting engaging material and providing opportunities for students to participate actively. This approach encourages students to take an active role in their own learning, construct knowledge and understanding, develop critical and creative thinking skills, enhance communication and collaboration abilities, and create a more effective and enjoyable learning environment.

This aligns with Arends' (Hasanahumi, 2024) view that teacher strategies for implementing the discussion method include: (1) formulating clear discussion objectives; (2) selecting appropriate and relevant topics; and (3) preparing stimulating questions to encourage critical thinking. Nana Sudjana (2004) also identifies several active learning strategies teachers can employ:

- a. Creating an open and condusive classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable expressing opinions;

- b. Asking stimulating questions that provoke critical thinking;
- c. Encouraging respectful exchange of ideas and arguments among students;
- d. Providing opportunities for active student participation in classroom activities;
- e. Offering constructive feedback on student contributions to the learning process.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of the discussion method to enhance the critical thinking skills of Grade VIII students in the Fiqh subject, specifically on the topic of Regulations on Halal and Haram Food at MTs Madinah Bunder Susukan Cirebon, has been carried out effectively. The process involves three main stages: (1) Preparation, in which the teacher develops lesson plans, prepares discussion materials from the textbook, and establishes a conducive classroom environment; (2) Implementation, where students are divided into four groups of four members each, assigned tasks or problems, engage in discussions by consulting the textbook, present their findings to the class, and participate in question-and-answer sessions with other groups before drawing conclusions from the discussion; and (3) Closure, where the teacher addresses unresolved questions from each group and summarizes the key points of the lesson. The factors influencing the success of this method are categorized into supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors include the teacher's competence and sincerity in teaching, student readiness, the availability of relevant textbook material, and a conducive classroom atmosphere, while inhibiting factors consist of an unconducive classroom environment and student absenteeism. To address these challenges, teachers employ strategies such as presenting engaging material and providing opportunities for active student participation, thereby fostering an interactive and collaborative learning environment that supports the development of students' critical thinking skills.

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