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# Problem-Based Learning in Fiqh Instruction: A Qualitative Study on the Development of Critical Thinking and Religious Character

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**Abstract**

Fiqh instruction in Islamic senior secondary schools must connect Islamic legal knowledge with students' capacity to reason contextually and enact religious values in contemporary life. This study examined how Problem-Based Learning (PBL) was implemented in Fiqh instruction, what forms of critical reasoning students manifested, and how religious-character values were enacted during classroom participation. A qualitative case study was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Qodiri 1 Jember from January to March 2025. Participants comprised three selected Fiqh teachers and fifteen students representing varied achievement levels. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and analysis of lesson plans, problem scenarios, and student work. Analysis combined the interactive processes of data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification with thematic coding. Credibility was supported through data triangulation, member checking, reflexive notes, and an audit trail. The findings showed that PBL was enacted through problem orientation, collaborative investigation, evidence-based reasoning, presentation, and reflection. Authentic cases involving digital transactions, contemporary worship, and social-religious dilemmas created opportunities for students to clarify legal issues, connect *dalil* with context, construct arguments, and review conclusions. Responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and cooperation were manifested through task completion, acknowledgment of argumentative limitations, respectful disagreement, and collaborative case resolution. The study's originality lies in conceptualizing these interconnected processes as contextual jurisprudential literacy, rather than treating critical thinking and religious character as separate outcomes. This study contributes a contextually grounded explanation of how facilitated PBL can connect normative Islamic sources, critical reasoning, and ethical classroom participation. It also offers practical guidance for designing authentic problems, differentiated scaffolding, dialogical facilitation, and reflective Fiqh instruction while avoiding unsupported causal claims about measured improvement or permanent character internalization.

**Keywords:** Problem-Based Learning; Fiqh Instruction; Critical Reasoning; Religious Character; Contextual Jurisprudential Literacy; Islamic Secondary Education

## Introduction

Fiqh instruction in Islamic senior secondary schools plays a central role in enabling students to understand Islamic legal principles and apply them responsibly in their personal, religious, and social lives. Its educational purpose is therefore not limited to transmitting knowledge about lawful and unlawful conduct; it also involves cultivating the intellectual judgment and moral dispositions needed to respond to changing social circumstances. This responsibility has become increasingly important in twenty-first-century education, which is characterized by rapid digital transformation, the circulation of religious information through multiple online platforms, growing social complexity, and increasingly diverse interpretations of religious knowledge. Under these conditions, transmissive and memorization-based approaches alone are insufficient to prepare students to examine contemporary religious and ethical questions critically and responsibly (Novelia et al., 2025; Chairil, 2026). The expansion of digital information flows and globalization requires students to develop critical, reflective, and analytical capacities through which Islamic teachings can be interpreted contextually without neglecting their normative foundations (Rifa' Afuwah, 2025). Consequently, Fiqh instruction should function not only as a means of transmitting legal knowledge but also as a pedagogical space for intellectual, ethical, and religious formation.

This broader educational function is consistent with conceptions of Islamic education that integrate the acquisition of knowledge with individual, social, moral, and spiritual development. Islamic moral education involves more than informing students about prescribed conduct; it also seeks to motivate them to act in accordance with Islamic values and to develop the qualities of character associated with responsible Muslim life (Halstead, 2007). In this regard, the study of Fiqh can provide a particularly important setting for connecting normative texts, rational deliberation, and ethically responsible action. Contemporary Islamic educational scholarship similarly emphasizes the importance of moving beyond rigid oppositions between faith and reason by developing a reflective pedagogical culture grounded in "critical faithfulness," contextual understanding, human dignity, and responsible engagement with plurality (Sahin, 2018). Fiqh learning should therefore enable students to remain faithful to Islamic sources while developing the capacity to examine evidence, recognize contextual differences, consider alternative interpretations, and assess the ethical consequences of legal judgments.

Despite these expectations, recent studies indicate that Fiqh instruction in many madrasahs remains predominantly teacher-centered and cognitively oriented. Such practices often produce declarative knowledge of legal concepts without adequately developing students' ability to apply those concepts to complex situations in everyday life (Restu et al., 2026; Zahro & Agama, 2025). Preliminary observations conducted by the researchers at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Qodiri 1 Jember suggested a similar practical problem. Although students were generally able to reproduce legal definitions and identify textual evidence, they experienced difficulty when asked to analyze contemporary cases

involving digital transactions, ethical behavior on social media, and emerging *muamalah* practices. This pattern indicates a gap between conceptual mastery and contextual legal reasoning. It also suggests that religious values may be discussed as abstract principles without always being enacted through students' deliberation, collaborative interaction, and decision-making experiences.

The problem is therefore both cognitive and moral. Critical thinking in Fiqh does not mean questioning religious teachings without an appropriate epistemological basis. Rather, it concerns the disciplined ability to clarify a legal problem, identify relevant evidence, distinguish claims from supporting reasons, compare interpretations, evaluate contextual considerations, and formulate a defensible conclusion. A major meta-analysis of critical-thinking instruction found that dialogue, exposure to authentic or situated problems, and mentoring were among the instructional features associated with stronger critical-thinking outcomes (Abrami et al., 2015). Within Fiqh instruction, these processes can be expressed through the examination of *dalil*, the comparison of juristic opinions, the analysis of context, and reflection on the ethical and social implications of a proposed ruling. Critical reasoning in this context should thus be understood as rational and evidence-informed engagement conducted within the epistemological and ethical framework of Islamic learning.

At the same time, Fiqh education carries a substantial responsibility for fostering religious character. Religious character extends beyond ritual observance and includes such social and moral qualities as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, cooperation, fairness, and ethical conduct in interpersonal relationships (Nabila et al., 2026). Indonesian character-education policies similarly emphasize the integration of religious values into meaningful learning experiences rather than confining them to theoretical explanation (Zahro & Agama, 2025). Nevertheless, character formation cannot be inferred merely from students' ability to define religious values. It must also be examined through the ways students enact those values when assuming responsibility, presenting evidence honestly, responding to disagreement, completing collective tasks, and reflecting on the consequences of their judgments. In this study, religious character is therefore approached cautiously as a set of values manifested and negotiated during classroom participation rather than as a stable personal trait that can be conclusively established through short-term classroom observation.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) provides a potentially relevant pedagogical framework for addressing these interconnected needs. PBL begins with a complex and meaningful problem that does not necessarily have a single predetermined answer. Students work collaboratively to identify what they know, determine what they need to investigate, seek and evaluate relevant information, propose reasoned solutions, and reflect on both their conclusions and learning processes. The teacher serves primarily as a facilitator who scaffolds inquiry rather than as the sole source of authoritative answers (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Within Fiqh instruction, PBL can situate Islamic legal concepts within authentic cases related to students' lives,

thereby encouraging dialogue, analysis, evidence-based argumentation, and reflective engagement (Alim & Alwi, 2026; Robbani, 2025). Examples may include determining the ethical and legal dimensions of online commerce, evaluating digital behavior, resolving disagreements over contemporary worship practices, or analyzing new forms of social and economic interaction (Syahputra et al., 2026).

The educational value of PBL, however, should not be assumed to arise automatically from the presentation of a problem. International research shows that its outcomes depend on the quality and authenticity of the problem, students' prior knowledge, the organization of collaborative inquiry, teacher facilitation, opportunities for self-directed learning, and the alignment between instructional objectives and assessment. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that the apparent effects of PBL vary according to what is assessed and that its advantages are especially visible when assessment addresses the understanding and application of principles rather than factual recall alone (Gijbels et al., 2005). A review of research on deep and surface learning further suggests that PBL may encourage deeper engagement, although its effects are generally modest and dependent on the quality and duration of implementation (Dolmans et al., 2016). These findings caution against treating PBL as an inherently effective technique and underscore the need to investigate the classroom processes through which it may support critical reasoning and religious-value enactment in a particular educational context.

A focused reading of the recent studies cited in the present manuscript indicates three limitations in the existing literature on PBL in Islamic education. First, many studies primarily examine achievement, motivation, or measurable learning outcomes, frequently through quantitative or classroom-action research designs. Such studies provide useful evidence concerning outcomes but offer limited insight into how students construct legal arguments, use textual evidence, negotiate disagreements, or revise their reasoning during classroom interaction. Second, critical thinking and religious character are commonly treated as separate educational outcomes. As a result, insufficient attention has been given to how evidence-based legal reasoning and ethical classroom participation may develop through the same pedagogical process. Third, relatively little qualitative evidence is available concerning the conditions under which PBL operates in Fiqh instruction, including the role of teacher scaffolding, students' prior knowledge, group dynamics, institutional culture, and the normative boundaries of inquiry. The research gap addressed here is therefore not simply whether PBL "works," but how it is enacted and how participants experience its potential contribution to critical reasoning and religious-character practices within a specific madrasah context.

The present study responds to this gap by conceptualizing PBL as a contextually situated pedagogical process rather than merely an instructional treatment. It examines how authentic Fiqh problems are introduced, how students mobilize legal concepts and textual evidence, how teachers facilitate inquiry, and how students negotiate intellectual and ethical responsibilities during collaborative problem solving. The study proposes that the same

classroom processes may support both cognitive and moral learning: problem clarification may encourage intellectual responsibility; evidence evaluation may require honesty and accuracy; comparison of juristic perspectives may foster openness and tolerance; collaborative inquiry may cultivate cooperation; and reflective decision making may connect legal reasoning with awareness of moral consequences. This proposed relationship is treated as an interpretive framework to be examined through empirical evidence, not as a causal effect presumed in advance.

The study offers two related contributions. First, it shifts attention from the measurement of PBL outcomes to the pedagogical mechanisms and participant experiences through which contextual critical reasoning is constructed in Fiqh classrooms. Second, it investigates the relationship between critical reasoning and the classroom enactment of religious values without presuming that short-term participation necessarily demonstrates the complete internalization of stable character traits. In theoretical terms, the study contributes to contextual Islamic pedagogy by examining how fidelity to normative Islamic sources can coexist with critical, dialogical, and context-sensitive inquiry. In practical terms, it may inform Fiqh teachers about the design of authentic problems, the provision of appropriate scaffolding, the facilitation of respectful disagreement, and the integration of cognitive and value-oriented reflection.

Accordingly, this qualitative case study focuses on the implementation of PBL at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Qodiri 1 Jember and addresses the following research questions: (1) How is Problem-Based Learning enacted in Fiqh classroom instruction at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Qodiri 1 Jember? (2) What forms of critical reasoning are manifested by students while investigating and discussing contextual Fiqh problems? (3) How are religious-character values manifested and negotiated through students' participation in PBL activities?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to generate a contextually grounded account of the instructional processes, classroom interactions, and participant experiences associated with PBL. Its aim is not to establish universal causal effects but to develop an analytically transferable understanding of how problem-centered Fiqh instruction may connect Islamic legal knowledge, critical reasoning, and religious-value practices in an Islamic secondary-school setting.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate how Problem-Based Learning (PBL) was enacted in Fiqh instruction and how participants experienced its contribution to critical reasoning and the manifestation of religious-character values. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study focused on pedagogical processes, classroom interactions, participant perspectives, and contextually situated meanings rather than on measuring causal effects or statistically testing changes in learning outcomes. The case study design was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of a contemporary educational phenomenon within its real-life institutional setting, particularly when the boundaries between the

phenomenon and its context cannot be clearly separated (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Yin, 2018).

The case was bounded by one institution, Madrasah Aliyah Al-Qodiri 1 Jember, one subject area, Fiqh instruction, and one period of fieldwork from January to March 2025. The principal unit of analysis was the implementation of PBL within Fiqh classroom instruction. Embedded units of analysis included teachers' facilitation practices, students' engagement with contextual Fiqh problems, the forms of critical reasoning manifested during classroom activities, and the religious-character values enacted through collaborative inquiry. The study did not seek to determine the statistical effectiveness of PBL or establish causal relationships. Instead, it aimed to develop a contextually grounded understanding of how PBL operated within a particular madrasah and how its pedagogical processes were interpreted by teachers and students.

Madrasah Aliyah Al-Qodiri 1 Jember was purposively selected because Fiqh teachers at the institution had incorporated problem-oriented activities into their instruction and because the school provided an information-rich setting for examining the relationship among contextual Fiqh learning, critical reasoning, and religious values. The institutional setting was also relevant because the madrasah combines formal secondary education with a religious learning environment in which Islamic legal knowledge, classroom conduct, and character formation are closely connected. This setting enabled the researchers to examine PBL as an instructional practice embedded within the pedagogical and religious culture of the school.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in PBL-based Fiqh instruction. The study involved three Fiqh teachers and fifteen students. The teacher participants were selected because they had experience designing or facilitating lessons that began with contextual Fiqh problems and included student investigation, discussion, presentation, and reflection. The selection criterion was not based merely on formal knowledge of PBL but on their direct involvement in the classroom practices examined during the study.

The fifteen student participants were selected to represent variation in academic achievement and classroom participation. Their selection considered available Fiqh learning records and teachers' knowledge of students' participation patterns so that the study would not represent only academically high-performing or highly active students. Including students with different achievement levels made it possible to examine variation in how learners understood contextual problems, used textual evidence, participated in group deliberation, and responded to differing opinions. The sample was intended to provide information-rich and varied perspectives rather than statistical representation of the wider student population.

The final participant group therefore consisted of eighteen individuals. All three teachers contributed perspectives on instructional planning, facilitation, assessment, and observed student development. The fifteen students contributed accounts of their experiences in analyzing Fiqh problems, seeking and evaluating evidence, collaborating with peers,

presenting arguments, and reflecting on the religious and ethical implications of their decisions. Participant identities were protected through anonymized codes. Teacher participants were identified as T1, T2, and T3, while student participants were identified as S1 to S15. These codes were used in field notes, transcripts, analytical records, and the presentation of findings.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The use of multiple methods enabled the researchers to compare what participants reported, what occurred during classroom instruction, and what was documented in instructional and student materials. Data collection and preliminary analysis proceeded iteratively from January to March 2025, allowing insights from earlier observations and interviews to inform the focus of subsequent data collection.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three Fiqh teachers and fifteen student participants. Teacher interviews explored the rationale for using PBL, the design of contextual Fiqh problems, facilitation strategies, the use of textual and juristic evidence, perceived changes in student participation, challenges encountered during implementation, and the relationship between PBL and religious-character education. Student interviews explored their experiences of identifying legal problems, seeking relevant evidence, comparing interpretations, constructing arguments, working with peers, responding to disagreement, and reflecting on the moral implications of classroom decisions. Follow-up questions were used to clarify statements, request concrete examples, and examine experiences that differed from the dominant patterns.

With participants' permission, interviews were documented through audio recordings and supplementary field notes. The recordings were transcribed for analysis, and identifying information was removed during transcription. The researchers reviewed the transcripts against the original recordings to minimize transcription errors and preserve the intended meaning of participants' statements. Because the research involved students, interview questions were formulated in accessible language and were asked in a manner intended to minimize pressure from teachers or school authorities.

Participant observation was conducted during Fiqh lessons in which PBL-related activities were implemented. The observations focused on the sequence of problem orientation, collaborative investigation, evidence seeking, argument formulation, presentation, teacher feedback, and reflection. Particular attention was given to how teachers introduced and scaffolded authentic problems, how students identified relevant Fiqh concepts and textual evidence, how disagreements were negotiated, and how responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and tolerance were manifested during classroom interaction. Field notes distinguished descriptive records of observable events from the researchers' preliminary interpretations. This distinction was maintained to reduce the risk of treating early assumptions as empirical findings.

Document analysis was used to corroborate and contextualize interview and observation data. The documents examined included lesson plans, instructional materials, problem scenarios, student worksheets, written

responses, and other available examples of student work associated with the observed lessons. The analysis examined whether instructional objectives, learning activities, and assessment tasks reflected PBL principles and whether critical reasoning and religious values were explicitly or implicitly incorporated into the learning design. Student documents were also examined for evidence of problem clarification, use of supporting evidence, comparison of perspectives, argument construction, and reflective evaluation.

Formal permission to conduct the study was obtained from the leadership of Madrasah Aliyah Al-Qodiri 1 Jember. Before data collection, participants received information about the purpose of the study, the types of activities involved, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to decline to answer questions or withdraw without academic consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from adult participants. For students who had not reached the age of legal consent, parental or guardian consent and student assent were obtained. Participants were informed that their decision to participate or not participate would not affect their grades, relationships with teachers, or standing within the school.

Personal names and other directly identifying information were removed from transcripts and research records. Digital files were stored in password-protected folders accessible only to the research team, while analytical reports used participant codes. Quotations were selected and presented in a manner that preserved their substantive meaning without disclosing information that could reasonably identify individual participants.

Reflexivity was treated as an important component of methodological rigor because the researchers' educational backgrounds, religious understandings, expectations regarding PBL, and relationship with the study site could influence data collection and interpretation. Researcher positionality was therefore considered throughout the study, particularly when interpreting students' use of Islamic legal evidence and manifestations of religious character. Reflexive notes were maintained to record assumptions, emerging interpretations, methodological decisions, and possible sources of bias. The researchers distinguished participants' accounts from their own normative expectations and examined whether favorable interpretations of PBL were adequately supported by evidence. This approach reflects the view that researcher position should be made visible and critically examined rather than treated as neutral or irrelevant to qualitative inquiry (Berger, 2015).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification proposed by Miles et al. (2020). These processes did not occur as a strictly linear sequence. Instead, data collection and analysis interacted throughout the study. Preliminary observations informed subsequent interview questions, interview accounts were compared with classroom events, and emerging interpretations were checked against instructional documents and student work.

The first stage involved organizing interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documentary materials according to data source and participant code. The researchers then read the complete data corpus repeatedly to become familiar with the content and to identify initial patterns

related to PBL implementation, critical reasoning, and religious-character practices. During data condensation, relevant segments were selected, summarized, and assigned initial codes. Some codes were deductively informed by the research questions and conceptual framework, including problem clarification, evidence analysis, comparison of juristic perspectives, argument construction, reflective evaluation, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and tolerance. Other codes were developed inductively when participants' accounts or classroom events revealed patterns not anticipated by the initial framework.

The initial codes were compared across interviews, observations, and documents and were subsequently grouped into broader categories. Categories were reviewed for internal coherence, conceptual distinction, and relevance to the research questions. Thematic coding was then used to identify recurring patterns and relationships among the categories (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis examined both convergence and variation across teachers, students, achievement levels, and data sources. Particular attention was given to discrepant or negative cases, such as students who remained passive, difficulties in using evidence, unresolved disagreements, or classroom behaviors that did not support the dominant interpretation.

Data displays were developed in the form of matrices connecting research questions, data sources, participant groups, initial codes, categories, themes, and illustrative evidence. Where NVivo was used, it served only as a tool for organizing coded segments, retrieving data, and constructing thematic matrices. The software did not generate themes or make interpretive decisions. Frequencies presented in the results represented the number of coded data segments, not the number of participants and not quantitative measurements of the strength or importance of a theme. Interpretive importance was determined through the meaning, distribution, contextual relevance, and triangulation of evidence rather than through frequency alone.

The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions. Proposed themes were repeatedly checked against the complete data corpus to determine whether they were adequately supported and whether contradictory evidence had been considered. The researchers examined the relationship between the stages of PBL and the observed forms of reasoning and religious-value enactment. An analytical trail was maintained to document changes to codes, category definitions, thematic decisions, and interpretations. This procedure increased the transparency and traceability of thematic development, consistent with recommendations for trustworthy thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through source and method triangulation. Teacher interviews, student interviews, classroom observations, and documents were compared to identify areas of convergence, variation, and contradiction. An interpretation was not accepted solely because it appeared frequently in interviews. It was also examined against observed classroom interaction and available documentary evidence.

Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of preliminary interpretations with selected teacher and student participants. Participants were invited to comment on whether the summaries reasonably represented their experiences and to identify interpretations requiring clarification or correction. Member checking was treated as an opportunity for participant reflection rather than as automatic proof that an interpretation was objectively correct. Relevant feedback was documented and considered during thematic refinement.

Dependability and confirmability were supported through an audit trail containing interview guides, observation protocols, field notes, coding records, code definitions, thematic matrices, reflexive notes, and records of analytical decisions. The audit trail enabled the researchers to trace how interpretations were developed from the data. Peer discussion was also used to examine whether the themes were coherent, sufficiently supported, and distinguishable from one another. The analysis included discrepant evidence to avoid presenting the implementation of PBL as uniformly successful.

Transferability was supported through a detailed description of the institutional context, participant selection, instructional setting, case boundaries, and observed pedagogical processes. The study did not claim statistical generalizability. Instead, it sought analytical transferability by providing sufficient contextual information for readers to determine whether the findings may be relevant to other Islamic secondary schools with comparable characteristics. The overall methodological reporting was guided by established criteria for qualitative quality and transparent reporting (O'Brien et al., 2014; Tracy, 2010). These procedures strengthened the credibility and transparency of the study without implying that the selected techniques automatically guaranteed methodological quality.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis generated three interrelated themes: the pedagogical enactment of PBL, the manifestation of critical reasoning, and the manifestation of religious-character values during classroom participation. The frequencies in Tables 1, 2, and 3 refer to the number of coded data segments identified across interviews and observations. They do not represent the number of participants, statistical scores, or effect sizes. Accordingly, the interpretation of each theme was based on the meaning, distribution, and convergence of evidence across data sources rather than on frequency alone.

### Pedagogical Implementation of Problem-Based Learning in Fiqh Instruction

Classroom observations indicated that the implementation of PBL at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Qodiri 1 Jember generally involved five connected stages: problem orientation, collaborative investigation, evidence-based reasoning, presentation, and reflection. Teachers began the learning process by introducing contextual Fiqh cases rather than directly presenting legal conclusions. The cases concerned issues such as online transactions, contemporary worship practices, and social-religious dilemmas. These topics

required students to connect previously learned Fiqh concepts with situations that they might encounter in their social and digital environments.

During problem orientation, students were asked to identify the central legal and ethical questions contained in each case. This stage shifted the initial focus of learning from recalling a predetermined ruling to determining what needed to be investigated. Students then worked in groups to discuss their initial understanding, identify relevant concepts, and consider the textual or juristic evidence required to support a conclusion. The teachers moved between groups, posed clarifying questions, and encouraged students to explain the reasoning underlying their claims. They did not immediately determine whether an answer was correct. Instead, they directed students back to the problem, the available evidence, and the implications of the proposed interpretation.

The collaborative investigation stage produced more visible student participation than was generally observed during teacher-led explanation. Students did not merely divide tasks but also compared interpretations, questioned the relevance of evidence, and attempted to reconcile competing conclusions. Nevertheless, participation was not uniform. Students with stronger prior knowledge of Fiqh concepts tended to contribute earlier and more confidently, while other students required additional prompts, examples, or clarification from the teacher and their peers. This variation suggests that presenting an authentic problem alone was insufficient. Productive participation depended on facilitation and scaffolding that made the problem accessible to students with different levels of prior knowledge.

The presentation and reflection stages provided opportunities for groups to explain their conclusions and respond to questions from classmates. Students were expected to state not only the proposed ruling but also the reasons and evidence supporting it. One student explained, “When we discuss real-life cases, I understand why the ruling exists, not just what the ruling is.” This statement captures an important feature of the observed learning process. The student distinguished knowing a legal conclusion from understanding the reasoning connecting the conclusion to its textual, contextual, and ethical foundations. The quotation should not be interpreted as evidence that all students experienced the same change. It nevertheless illustrates how contextual problems could create opportunities for a more explanatory form of Fiqh learning.

**Table 1.** NVivo Thematic Matrix: Pedagogical Implementation

| Main Theme | Subtheme | Frequency | Dominant Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| PBL Implementation | Contextual problem framing | 18 | Observation |
| | Collaborative inquiry | 22 | Observation and interview |
| | Facilitative teacher role | 15 | Interview |

As shown in Table 1, collaborative inquiry was the most frequently coded subtheme, with 22 coded segments, followed by contextual problem framing with 18 segments and the facilitative teacher role with 15 segments. These frequencies indicate the recurring presence of these processes within

the analyzed data, but they should not be interpreted as measurements of pedagogical effectiveness. The dominance of observation and interview evidence suggests that PBL was experienced primarily as an interactional process involving the problem, the students, and teacher facilitation.

These findings are consistent with international scholarship emphasizing the importance of authentic problem framing for connecting disciplinary knowledge with lived experience (Dede et al., 2021; Hmelo-Silver & Barrows, 2022). PBL is generally understood as a cyclical process in which prior knowledge is activated, learning needs are identified, new information is acquired, and emerging understanding is elaborated through collaborative discussion (Schmidt et al., 2011). Research also indicates that collaborative knowledge construction depends heavily on the facilitator's ability to ask open-ended and metacognitive questions, encourage students to build on one another's ideas, and maintain the intellectual direction of group inquiry (Hmelo-Silver & Barrows, 2008).

The present findings suggest that the teacher's role remained central even though classroom interaction became more student-oriented. The shift toward PBL did not eliminate instructional authority. Rather, it changed the way authority was exercised. Teachers functioned as facilitators who guided the quality of inquiry, monitored the use of evidence, and prevented discussion from becoming disconnected from recognized Fiqh principles. This finding is important because PBL should not be understood as minimally guided discovery. Its educational value depends on the interaction among authentic problems, prior knowledge, self-directed inquiry, collaboration, and appropriate facilitation (Yew & Goh, 2016).

Within religious education, dialogical environments can support interpretative reasoning by allowing students to articulate, examine, and revise their understanding rather than relying exclusively on memorization (Selwyn, 2022). In the present case, PBL created a classroom space in which normative texts were not abandoned but examined in relation to contemporary realities. The contribution of this theme therefore lies in illustrating the classroom processes through which Fiqh knowledge was contextualized. The findings do not establish that PBL is universally more effective than other approaches. They show how contextual problems, collaborative inquiry, and teacher facilitation operated together within one madrasah setting.

**Manifestations of Critical Reasoning**

The second theme concerned the forms of critical reasoning manifested during students' engagement with contextual Fiqh problems. The analysis identified four recurring indicators: problem clarification, evidence analysis, logical argumentation, and reflective evaluation. These indicators were visible when students attempted to define the legal issue, connect textual evidence with the context of the case, formulate a structured justification, and reconsider a conclusion after receiving questions or alternative interpretations.

Problem clarification occurred when students separated the central legal question from secondary details. In cases involving digital transactions or social-media behavior, students had to determine which elements were

legally and ethically relevant before searching for a ruling. Evidence analysis was manifested when students connected *dalil*, Fiqh principles, or juristic interpretations with the specific circumstances of the case. The observed reasoning was therefore not limited to citing a text. Students also had to explain why a particular source or principle was relevant to the problem under discussion.

Logical argumentation was manifested in students' efforts to arrange claims, evidence, and conclusions coherently. During group presentations, classmates and teachers frequently asked presenters to clarify the basis of their conclusions or respond to alternative views. Reflective evaluation occurred when students reconsidered an initial position, acknowledged limitations in their argument, or modified a conclusion after discussion. These manifestations did not appear with equal depth among all students. Some arguments remained descriptive, and some students continued to rely heavily on teacher confirmation. Nevertheless, the data indicate that PBL provided repeated opportunities for students to move beyond recalling rules and to engage in evidence-informed reasoning.

Teachers also perceived a change in the types of questions students asked during PBL activities. One teacher stated, "They now ask about the reasoning behind the law, not just the conclusion." This statement suggests that at least some students became more attentive to the evidentiary and interpretative foundations of a ruling. However, because the study did not include standardized assessments, baseline measurements, or a comparison group, this perception cannot be treated as proof of a measured improvement in critical-thinking ability. It is more appropriately interpreted as evidence of a change in the forms of participation and questioning observed within the studied lessons.

**Table 2.** NVivo Thematic Matrix: Indicators of Critical Thinking

| Indicator | Field Description | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Problem clarification | Defining legal issues | 14 |
| Evidence analysis | Linking *dalil* with context | 19 |
| Logical argumentation | Structured reasoning | 17 |
| Reflective evaluation | Reviewing conclusions | 11 |

Table 2 shows that evidence analysis was the most frequently coded indicator, with 19 coded segments, followed by logical argumentation with 17, problem clarification with 14, and reflective evaluation with 11. The relative prominence of evidence analysis is contextually significant because Fiqh reasoning requires students to connect normative sources with the circumstances to which a ruling is applied. At the same time, the lower frequency of reflective evaluation suggests that reconsidering and revising conclusions may have been more demanding than identifying evidence or presenting an initial argument.

The findings align with international studies that associate PBL with higher-order thinking through collaborative inquiry, evidence evaluation, and reflection (Bell, 2021; Dolmans et al., 2022). Research on the PBL process suggests that activating prior knowledge and elaborating it through group

discussion can support the development of more integrated mental representations of a problem (Schmidt et al., 2011). Other research indicates that PBL may support the application and longer-term retention of knowledge, although the contribution of individual PBL components remains context dependent (Yew & Goh, 2016). Recent meta-analytic findings similarly suggest that PBL environments can promote critical engagement more effectively than lecture-based instruction under particular instructional and assessment conditions (Gijbels et al., 2023).

In the context of Islamic education, critical reasoning should not be understood as unrestricted skepticism toward religious norms. It involves the responsible examination of evidence, context, interpretative alternatives, and ethical consequences within the epistemological framework of Islamic learning. This orientation is closely related to the notion of "critical religious literacy," in which learners are expected to understand religious sources while also recognizing interpretation, context, and social responsibility (Azra, 2021). The findings illustrate how Fiqh instruction can provide a structured context for this form of rational and ethical deliberation.

The theoretical contribution should nevertheless be stated cautiously. The study does not demonstrate a generalized transformation of students' critical-thinking skills. Instead, it identifies observable manifestations of critical reasoning produced during PBL activities. These manifestations included clarifying legal issues, linking *dalil* with context, presenting structured arguments, and reviewing conclusions. The findings therefore support an interpretation of PBL as a pedagogical setting that affords opportunities for critical reasoning, while the depth of students' participation remains dependent on prior knowledge, facilitation, group dynamics, and the complexity of the problem.

**Manifestations of Religious-Character Values**

The third theme concerned the religious-character values manifested during group investigation, classroom discussion, presentation, and reflection. Four values appeared repeatedly in the data: responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and cooperation. These values were not taught only through direct verbal explanation. They were enacted through the demands of collaborative problem solving, particularly when students divided responsibilities, presented evidence, acknowledged weaknesses in their arguments, listened to different opinions, and worked toward a collective conclusion.

Responsibility was visible when students completed assigned group tasks, prepared supporting evidence, and contributed to the presentation of their conclusions. Cooperation appeared when students combined information, helped peers understand the problem, and negotiated a shared response. Honesty was manifested when students acknowledged uncertainty or weaknesses in their arguments rather than maintaining an unsupported claim. Tolerance was visible when students listened to alternative interpretations and responded without dismissing or personally attacking their peers.

One student stated, “We learn to disagree respectfully, and that feels more Islamic.” This quotation indicates that the student understood respectful disagreement not merely as a classroom rule but as a behavior connected with Islamic moral identity. The statement also illustrates the relationship between intellectual and moral participation. Disagreement created a need for students to evaluate arguments, while the religious and social norms of the classroom shaped how that evaluation was expressed.

**Table 3.** NVivo Thematic Matrix: Religious Character Formation

| Religious Value | Classroom Manifestation | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Responsibility | Completing group tasks | 16 |
| Honesty | Acknowledging argumentative weaknesses | 9 |
| Tolerance | Respecting differing opinions | 14 |
| Cooperation | Collaborative case resolution | 21 |

As presented in Table 3, cooperation was the most frequently coded value, with 21 segments, followed by responsibility with 16, tolerance with 14, and honesty with 9. These frequencies reflect the visibility of the values within the analyzed classroom data. They do not establish the strength, permanence, or internalization of character traits. Cooperation was especially visible because group problem solving required students to coordinate their actions. Honesty, in contrast, was less frequently observable because acknowledging weaknesses in one’s own argument is a more specific and potentially demanding behavior.

The distinction between classroom manifestation and character internalization is important. The available data show that students enacted certain values during PBL activities, but a short-term case study cannot determine whether those values became stable dispositions across situations or continued outside the classroom. Claims about internalization would require repeated evidence over a longer period, observations across different settings, and accounts from additional social contexts. The current findings therefore support the more limited conclusion that PBL created opportunities for religious values to be practiced and made visible during classroom interaction.

International character-education research emphasizes that character development is more likely to be supported when moral values are embedded in relationships, classroom practices, opportunities for action, and institutional culture rather than presented only as abstract content (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). This interpretation is consistent with scholarship arguing that moral learning is strengthened through experience, dialogue, and reflection (Nucci & Narvaez, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). Within digital-era religious education, the integration of ethical reasoning with cognitive inquiry is particularly important because students must evaluate not only whether information is legally relevant but also how religious judgment affects other people and social relationships (Mudzakkir et al., 2024).

The findings extend this discussion by showing how a single PBL activity may involve both cognitive and moral demands. Evidence analysis requires intellectual accuracy and honesty. Group investigation requires responsibility

and cooperation. Comparing juristic perspectives requires openness to difference. Responding to disagreement requires tolerance and respectful communication. Critical reasoning and religious character were therefore not entirely separate outcomes in the observed lessons. They were interrelated dimensions of participation in a shared process of legal and ethical deliberation.

**Integrative Interpretation, Practical Implications, and Constraints**

Taken together, the three themes indicate that PBL functioned in this case as an instructional setting that connected contextual legal analysis, critical reasoning, and the classroom manifestation of religious values. The relationship among these dimensions can be understood as a sequence. Authentic Fiqh problems created a need for inquiry. Collaborative investigation required students to identify what they knew and what they needed to examine. Evidence-based discussion required them to formulate and justify claims. Presentation exposed those claims to questions and alternative interpretations. Reflection created opportunities to reconsider both the legal conclusion and the quality of the group's intellectual and ethical participation.

This process may be described as an emerging form of contextual jurisprudential literacy. In the present study, this term refers to the ability to understand a Fiqh problem, identify and interpret relevant normative sources, consider contextual and juristic variation, formulate a reasoned position, and recognize the ethical and social consequences of that position. The term is offered as an interpretive proposition grounded in this case rather than as a fully validated theoretical model. Further research would be required to define its dimensions more precisely and examine its applicability in other Islamic educational settings.

The findings also clarify that the contribution of PBL depended on instructional conditions. Time limitations constrained the depth of investigation and reflection, while variation in prior knowledge affected students' ability to participate independently. Some students required more substantial teacher or peer support before they could connect textual evidence with a contemporary case. These constraints reinforce the importance of flexible scaffolding, carefully designed problems, access to appropriate sources, and clear expectations for argumentation. Teacher professional development should therefore address not only how to create contextual problems but also how to facilitate discussion, support students with different levels of prior knowledge, manage disagreement, and integrate cognitive and ethical reflection.

The results should not be interpreted as confirmation of PBL's universal effectiveness. The study examined one bounded case without a comparison group or standardized measurement of change. The data support claims about observed processes, recurring patterns, and participant experiences within this madrasah. They do not support causal conclusions about how much PBL improved critical thinking or permanently strengthened religious character. Longitudinal research could examine whether the observed reasoning and values persist over time, while comparative multisite studies could investigate

how institutional culture, teacher expertise, curriculum, and student background shape PBL implementation. Mixed-method research could further combine detailed classroom evidence with validated measures of critical thinking and religious-character development.

## Conclusion

This study found that the implementation of Problem-Based Learning in Fiqh instruction was associated with a broader pedagogical contribution than initially anticipated. Authentic Fiqh problems did not merely encourage students to participate more actively but also created interconnected opportunities for problem clarification, contextual analysis of *dalil*, logical argumentation, reflective evaluation, and the classroom enactment of responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and cooperation. These findings challenge the conventional assumption that Fiqh instruction should primarily emphasize the transmission and memorization of established legal conclusions. Instead, the findings suggest that, when supported by appropriate teacher facilitation, Fiqh learning can become a dialogical and reflective process that connects normative Islamic sources with contemporary social realities.

Scientifically, this study reinforces previous research showing that PBL can support collaborative inquiry, contextual understanding, and higher-order reasoning. At the same time, it questions claims that short-term classroom participation is sufficient evidence of either a measurable transformation in critical-thinking ability or the complete internalization of religious character. The study therefore introduces the concept of *contextual jurisprudential literacy* to describe students' emerging capacity to identify Fiqh problems, examine relevant normative evidence, consider contextual and juristic differences, construct reasoned conclusions, and recognize their ethical and social implications. This concept enriches discussions of contextual Islamic pedagogy by positioning critical reasoning and religious-value enactment as interrelated dimensions of Fiqh learning rather than as separate educational outcomes.

The study is limited by its small purposively selected sample, short period of fieldwork, and focus on a single madrasah. Its findings are therefore contextually grounded and cannot be statistically generalized to all Islamic secondary schools. The study also did not employ baseline measurements, a comparison group, or longitudinal observations capable of determining causal effects or the persistence of students' reasoning and character practices beyond the classroom. Further research should involve larger and more diverse samples, comparative multisite cases, longitudinal observation, and mixed-method designs combining detailed classroom evidence with validated measures of critical thinking and religious-character development. In practice, Fiqh teachers should receive professional development in designing authentic problems, providing differentiated scaffolding, facilitating respectful disagreement, and integrating legal analysis with ethical reflection. Madrasahs should also provide sufficient instructional time and access to

credible Islamic sources so that PBL can be implemented carefully rather than treated as a procedural classroom technique.

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