



Dynamics of Critical Thinking Among Islamic Family Law Students: A Study at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya

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Abstract

Background: Critical thinking is an essential competency for Islamic Family Law students because they are expected to interpret legal texts, evaluate contemporary legal issues, and formulate evidence-based arguments grounded in Islamic jurisprudence. However, its development in Islamic higher education remains constrained by conventional teaching practices that limit analytical inquiry and contextual legal reasoning.

Methods: This study employed a qualitative case study at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers, classroom observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using *thematic analysis* to identify the dynamics, influencing factors, and pedagogical strategies shaping critical thinking.

Results: The findings indicate that although students possess adequate conceptual knowledge of Islamic Family Law, their analytical reasoning remains limited when addressing contemporary legal issues. Critical thinking is influenced by both internal factors, such as learning motivation and self-confidence, and external factors, including lecturer-centered instruction, limited case-based learning, and classroom learning culture.

Discussion: These findings demonstrate that critical thinking develops through the interaction between students' individual readiness and supportive pedagogical environments. Student-centered learning, authentic legal cases, collaborative discussion, and reflective learning can substantially strengthen analytical competence.

Conclusion: Enhancing critical thinking requires pedagogical innovation and institutional support that integrate active learning with contextual legal experiences to prepare graduates for contemporary Islamic legal challenges.

Novelty: This study proposes a context-sensitive pedagogical framework that integrates the perspectives of students and lecturers, offering practical guidance for curriculum development and instructional innovation in Islamic Family Law education.

Keywords: Critical Thinking; Islamic Family Law; Legal Education; Pedagogical Innovation; Qualitative Study.

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking has become one of the most essential competencies in higher education, particularly within legal education, where students are expected to interpret legal norms, evaluate competing arguments, and formulate evidence-based judgments. Rather than merely memorizing statutory provisions, law students must develop analytical reasoning capable of addressing increasingly complex legal, social, and ethical issues. In Islamic Family Law education, *critical thinking* is even more significant because legal reasoning requires the integration of classical Islamic jurisprudence with contemporary societal challenges. Previous studies have emphasized that strengthening *critical thinking* contributes to students' intellectual independence, reflective judgment, and professional readiness for legal practice (Sulaiman & Syakarofath, 2018; Danni & Tauratiya, 2020). Furthermore, curriculum reform in higher education increasingly positions *critical thinking* as a core learning outcome that should be systematically embedded in instructional design and classroom assessment (Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). This orientation is consistent with the global agenda of improving educational quality under *Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)*, which emphasizes the importance of learner-centered education, higher-order thinking skills, and institutional transformation to prepare graduates capable of responding to rapidly evolving social and professional challenges (Edwards Jr et al., 2024). Recent bibliometric evidence also demonstrates that research on *critical thinking* continues to expand across various academic disciplines, reflecting its strategic role in preparing graduates capable of solving multidimensional problems in rapidly changing societies (Dong et al., 2023). Consequently, developing *critical thinking* among Islamic Family Law students has become both an academic necessity and a professional imperative for producing graduates who are capable of responding to contemporary legal developments.

Despite this growing recognition, the cultivation of critical thinking among students of the Islamic Family Law Program at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Syariah Wal Aqidah Ash-Shofa (STISA Ash-Shofa) Manonjaya remains far from optimal. Preliminary observations and interviews with institutional leaders, lecturers, and students indicate that classroom learning is still predominantly lecturer-centered, providing relatively limited opportunities for analytical discussion, legal debate, and contextual problem-solving (Hapidin, 2024; Basiran, 2024; Ridho, 2024). Students frequently encounter difficulties in critically interpreting legal texts, evaluating alternative legal opinions, and constructing persuasive legal arguments when confronted with contemporary family law cases. These challenges become increasingly relevant as Indonesia experiences rapid legal transformation driven by technological development, changing social dynamics, and evolving legal governance, all of which demand legal professionals with stronger analytical and adaptive capacities (Suntana et al., 2023; Wijatmoko et al., 2023; Pambudi & Ulfa, 2024). Without pedagogical innovation that actively promotes critical inquiry, collaborative learning, and practical legal reasoning, Islamic legal education risks producing graduates whose competencies remain insufficient to address increasingly complex legal realities.

Previous studies have consistently acknowledged the importance of cultivating critical thinking within Islamic and legal education, yet several limitations remain. Sulaiman and Syakarofath (2018) conceptualized critical thinking from the perspective of Islamic psychology, emphasizing cognitive reform and reflective reasoning as essential components of intellectual development. Subsequently, Danni and Tauratiya (2020) quantitatively assessed the critical thinking abilities of Islamic Family Law students and demonstrated that both internal factors, such as learning motivation, and external factors, including curriculum design and teaching strategies, significantly influence students' analytical capacity. More recent studies have explored broader educational perspectives, including curriculum integration (Ayçiçek, 2021), instructional practices in higher education (Bellaera et al., 2021), and the effectiveness of critical thinking courses (Zhang et al., 2022). Recent legal studies have further highlighted the growing need for graduates capable of responding to increasingly dynamic legal environments (Suntana et al., 2023; Wijatmoko et al., 2023), while contemporary research has introduced innovative learning media, including popular culture, to stimulate legal reasoning among students (Utami & Sugitanata, 2024). Nevertheless, existing studies primarily examine critical thinking from theoretical, quantitative, or media-based perspectives, with limited attention to the institutional dynamics that shape students' critical thinking within Islamic Family Law programs. Moreover, few studies integrate the experiences of institutional leaders, lecturers, and students simultaneously to produce context-specific pedagogical recommendations for Islamic legal education.

Based on these limitations, this study seeks to investigate the dynamics of critical thinking among students of the Islamic Family Law Program at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya by examining the interaction between instructional practices, institutional learning environments, and students' learning experiences. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) describe the current dynamics of critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students; (2) identify the principal academic, pedagogical, and institutional barriers affecting its development; and (3) formulate practical recommendations for strengthening critical thinking through more participatory and context-oriented learning strategies. Addressing these objectives is increasingly important because contemporary Islamic legal education requires graduates who are not only capable of understanding normative legal doctrines but are also able to analyze contemporary legal problems, evaluate competing legal arguments, and formulate reasoned solutions within diverse socio-legal contexts. Consequently, strengthening critical thinking represents an important strategy for improving both educational quality and professional competence in Islamic legal studies.

The contribution of this research extends beyond describing students' learning experiences by providing a comprehensive institutional analysis of critical thinking development within an Islamic higher education setting. Unlike previous studies that generally focus on students' cognitive abilities or curriculum implementation separately, this research integrates perspectives from academic leaders, lecturers, and students to construct a more holistic

understanding of how institutional culture, teaching practices, and classroom interaction collectively influence critical thinking development. The novelty of this study lies in its context-based analytical model, which synthesizes institutional, pedagogical, and learner perspectives to explain the dynamics of critical thinking within an Islamic Family Law program. By offering evidence-based recommendations for strengthening participatory legal education at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya, this study contributes not only to the literature on critical thinking and Islamic legal education but also provides practical insights for curriculum development and pedagogical innovation in Islamic higher education institutions facing increasingly complex legal and societal challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical thinking has become one of the principal indicators of educational quality in higher education because it enables students to evaluate information systematically, construct logical arguments, and formulate evidence-based decisions in increasingly complex academic and professional environments. Rather than emphasizing the acquisition of factual knowledge alone, contemporary higher education encourages students to develop analytical reasoning, reflective judgment, and problem-solving abilities as essential competencies for lifelong learning. This perspective is consistent with *Bloom's Taxonomy*, which positions analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as higher-order cognitive processes that enable learners to move beyond memorization toward critical judgment and independent reasoning (Bloom, 1969). Within legal education, these competencies are particularly significant because students are continuously required to interpret legal norms, compare competing legal opinions, evaluate evidence, and formulate arguments capable of addressing dynamic legal disputes. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that integrating critical thinking into curriculum design and classroom instruction improves students' analytical performance, learning autonomy, and academic engagement (Danni & Tauratiya, 2020; Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Furthermore, a recent bibliometric analysis confirms that critical thinking has become one of the fastest-growing research themes in higher education because it is increasingly recognized as a prerequisite for preparing graduates capable of responding to technological, legal, and societal transformation (Dong et al., 2023). These developments indicate that critical thinking should no longer be considered merely an additional learning outcome but rather an integral component of educational quality assurance, particularly within disciplines that demand complex legal reasoning.

Within Islamic Family Law education, critical thinking possesses distinctive characteristics because legal reasoning extends beyond the interpretation of statutory provisions toward understanding Islamic jurisprudence, contemporary legal reform, and changing social realities. Students are expected not only to master classical legal doctrines but also to evaluate how these doctrines can be interpreted and applied in addressing contemporary issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, child protection, and family justice. Consequently, Islamic legal education requires learning environments that encourage inquiry, interpretation, legal comparison, and

contextual analysis rather than memorization of legal texts alone. Contemporary studies further suggest that Indonesia's evolving legal system demands legal graduates who possess analytical flexibility capable of responding to legal pluralism, institutional reform, and rapid social transformation (Suntana et al., 2023; Wijatmoko et al., 2023). In parallel, technological advancement and digital transformation continue to reshape legal practice and higher education, requiring universities to strengthen adaptive learning systems capable of developing students' critical reasoning and professional competence (Pambudi & Ulfa, 2024). Therefore, strengthening critical thinking within Islamic Family Law programs represents not merely an academic objective but also a strategic response to broader legal and societal changes affecting Indonesia.

The literature also identifies numerous factors influencing students' critical thinking development, which may generally be classified into pedagogical, institutional, and individual dimensions. Pedagogically, curriculum design, classroom interaction, assessment methods, and lecturers' instructional approaches substantially determine students' opportunities to practice analytical reasoning (Danni & Tauratiya, 2020; Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021). This perspective is consistent with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which argues that higher-order cognitive abilities develop through social interaction, collaborative learning, and guided participation within meaningful learning environments (Vygotsky, 1978/2012). Accordingly, classroom dialogue, lecturer facilitation, and peer discussion become essential mechanisms for fostering students' analytical reasoning and critical thinking. Student-centered learning, collaborative discussion, contextual case analysis, and experiential learning consistently produce stronger analytical engagement than conventional lecture-centered instruction (Zhang et al., 2022). Recent educational scholarship further argues that meaningful learning extends beyond formal classroom boundaries by encouraging students to connect academic knowledge with authentic experiences, reflective practice, and real-world engagement, thereby strengthening critical reflection and independent reasoning (Briller, 2024). Institutionally, supportive academic cultures and effective instructional leadership encourage students to question assumptions, construct arguments, and evaluate alternative legal perspectives without fear of making mistakes.

Studies indicate that leadership practices which promote collaborative learning, supportive classroom environments, and positive socio-cultural interactions significantly contribute to students' academic engagement and learning outcomes (Massouti et al., 2024). Conversely, rigid classroom environments often discourage intellectual exploration and reduce students' confidence in expressing legal opinions. Conversely, rigid classroom environments often discourage intellectual exploration and reduce students' confidence in expressing legal opinions. At the individual level, learning motivation, self-confidence, communication skills, willingness to engage in reflective inquiry, and a supportive knowledge-sharing environment significantly influence critical thinking performance. Studies further indicate that organizational culture and ethical values encouraging knowledge sharing positively affect individuals' willingness to exchange ideas and participate in collaborative learning, thereby

strengthening analytical reasoning (Dong et al., 2023; Usmani, 2024; Al Jahsh, 2024). These findings are increasingly relevant for Islamic legal education because contemporary legal professionals are expected to combine doctrinal understanding with adaptive reasoning capable of addressing increasingly complex ethical and legal issues (Dong et al., 2023; Al Jahsh, 2024). Accordingly, effective critical thinking development should be understood as the product of interaction between curriculum, institutional culture, lecturers, and students rather than solely an individual cognitive achievement.

Although previous studies have consistently confirmed the importance of critical thinking in higher education, significant gaps remain regarding its application within Islamic Family Law education. Danni and Tauratiya (2020) primarily measured students' critical thinking quantitatively, identifying moderate analytical ability but providing limited explanation regarding institutional factors shaping learning outcomes. Subsequent studies broadened the discussion by examining curriculum integration (Ayçiçek, 2021), instructional practices adopted by higher education instructors (Bellaera et al., 2021), and empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of structured critical thinking instruction (Zhang et al., 2022). More recent scholarship has shifted attention toward broader legal and societal transformation, emphasizing that higher education institutions must prepare graduates capable of responding to increasingly dynamic legal systems and social change (Suntana et al., 2023; Wijatmoko et al., 2023). In addition, contemporary discussions highlight that technological development and emerging ethical challenges require legal education to strengthen students' analytical reasoning, ethical judgment, and contextual decision-making rather than focusing exclusively on doctrinal knowledge (Pambudi & Ulfa, 2024; Al Jahsh, 2024). Nevertheless, relatively few studies investigate how institutional culture, lecturers' instructional strategies, classroom interaction, and students' learning experiences collectively shape critical thinking within Islamic Family Law programs. Existing research also rarely integrates the perspectives of institutional leaders, lecturers, and students simultaneously, despite these actors collectively determining the effectiveness of pedagogical practices. This gap demonstrates the need for qualitative investigation capable of explaining not only the level of students' critical thinking but also the educational processes that facilitate or inhibit its development within a specific institutional context.

Based on the foregoing literature, this study adopts a multidimensional perspective that conceptualizes *critical thinking* as the product of interaction among institutional environment, pedagogical practice, lecturer facilitation, and students' active participation in learning. This perspective is consistent with recent educational scholarship emphasizing that meaningful learning is strengthened through collaborative engagement, contextual experiences, and active participation that position students as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information (Garrison et al., 2024). Rather than viewing *critical thinking* solely as an individual cognitive competence, the present research considers it an educational outcome constructed through continuous engagement with legal problems, reflective discussion, collaborative learning, and contextual interpretation of Islamic Family Law. Rather than

viewing critical thinking solely as an individual cognitive competence, the present research considers it an educational outcome constructed through continuous engagement with legal problems, reflective discussion, collaborative learning, and contextual interpretation of Islamic Family Law. Accordingly, the analytical framework of this study positions classroom interaction, institutional academic culture, learning methods, and students' analytical engagement as interconnected components influencing critical thinking development. This framework serves as the theoretical foundation for interpreting the empirical findings presented in the subsequent Results and Discussion section. The novelty of this literature synthesis lies in integrating educational, institutional, and legal perspectives into a unified conceptual framework for analyzing critical thinking within Islamic Family Law education. By bridging educational theory with the realities of Islamic higher education, this study provides a stronger theoretical basis for developing context-sensitive pedagogical innovations and contributes to ongoing efforts to improve the quality of Islamic legal education in Indonesia and other Muslim-majority contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative *case study* approach to examine the dynamics of critical thinking among students enrolled in the Islamic Family Law Program at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Syariah Wal Aqidah Ash-Shofa (STISA Ash-Shofa) Manonjaya, Tasikmalaya, Indonesia. A qualitative design was selected because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and interactions within their natural educational setting rather than to measure critical thinking using standardized quantitative instruments. The *case study* approach enabled an in-depth exploration of how institutional culture, pedagogical practices, and classroom interactions collectively shape the development of critical thinking within Islamic legal education. This methodological orientation is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that critical thinking develops through active learning processes, classroom participation, curriculum implementation, and instructional innovation rather than through passive knowledge transmission alone (Danni & Tauratiya, 2020; Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). The research was conducted from March to May 2024. Participants were selected through *purposive sampling* based on their direct involvement in the teaching and learning process. The study involved fifteen undergraduate students who had completed core Islamic Family Law courses, including Islamic Marriage Law, Islamic Inheritance Law, and Islamic Judicial Procedure. These participants were considered capable of providing comprehensive information regarding their learning experiences and the development of analytical reasoning. To strengthen institutional perspectives, two lecturers responsible for teaching Islamic Family Law courses and one academic administrator overseeing academic affairs also participated as key informants, allowing the study to compare students' experiences with lecturers' instructional practices and institutional academic policies.

Data were collected using three complementary techniques to ensure the richness and credibility of the findings. First, *semi-structured interviews* were conducted with all

participants using open-ended questions designed to explore their understanding of critical thinking, classroom participation, learning experiences, pedagogical challenges, and suggestions for improving legal education. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission before being transcribed verbatim for analysis. Second, *non-participant classroom observations* were conducted during four Islamic Family Law lecture sessions to examine lecturers' teaching methods, questioning techniques, classroom interaction, students' participation, collaborative discussions, and the integration of legal case analysis into classroom activities. Observation data were systematically documented using structured field notes to maintain consistency throughout the observation process. Third, *document analysis* was undertaken by examining course syllabi, semester learning plans, teaching materials, classroom assignments, and institutional academic documents to identify the extent to which critical thinking competencies were incorporated into curriculum design and learning assessment. Furthermore, interview findings were strengthened through *personal communication* with institutional stakeholders, including the Vice Chair for Academic Affairs, Islamic Family Law lecturers, and students actively involved in classroom learning (Hapidin, 2024; Basiran, 2024; Ridho, 2024). The integration of interviews, classroom observations, and institutional documents enabled a comprehensive understanding of both the formal curriculum and the actual pedagogical practices implemented within the Islamic Family Law Program.

The collected data were analyzed using *thematic analysis* following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical approach was selected because it provides a systematic procedure for identifying, organizing, interpreting, and reporting recurring patterns across qualitative data. The analysis consisted of six interconnected stages: data familiarization, initial coding, category development, theme construction, theme refinement, and interpretative synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the coding process, recurring patterns were identified and subsequently organized into broader analytical themes, including classroom interaction, instructional strategy, student participation, institutional support, legal case exposure, and pedagogical innovation. These themes were interpreted by continuously comparing empirical findings with the theoretical perspectives discussed in the literature review to explain how institutional, pedagogical, and individual factors collectively influence students' critical thinking development. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, methodological triangulation was employed by comparing evidence obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and institutional documents. In addition, *member checking* was conducted by presenting preliminary interpretations to selected participants to verify the accuracy of the findings and minimize researcher bias. Ethical principles were carefully maintained throughout the research process. All participants received detailed information regarding the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without academic consequences. Written *informed consent* was obtained before data collection commenced, while participants' identities were anonymized during transcription, analysis, and reporting to ensure confidentiality and compliance with established ethical standards for qualitative educational research. This methodological framework provides a rigorous basis for producing context-sensitive findings

and evidence-based pedagogical recommendations for strengthening critical thinking within Islamic Family Law education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Current Dynamics of Critical Thinking Among Islamic Family Law Students

Critical thinking constitutes one of the essential competencies expected from students of Islamic Family Law because legal reasoning requires the ability to interpret legal texts, evaluate evidence, compare alternative legal opinions, and formulate arguments based on both normative and contextual considerations. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that the development of critical thinking among students at STISA Ash-Shofa remains uneven. Although most participants demonstrated adequate conceptual understanding of Islamic legal doctrines, many experienced difficulties when confronted with legal problems requiring analytical interpretation and independent reasoning. During interviews, several students acknowledged that they were generally able to explain legal provisions presented in lectures but encountered challenges when asked to compare different juristic opinions or formulate legal arguments for contemporary family issues. Similar tendencies were identified by Danni and Tauratiya (2020), who found that Islamic Family Law students generally possessed sufficient theoretical knowledge but demonstrated only moderate critical thinking abilities when addressing legal problems requiring higher-order cognitive skills. Previous educational studies likewise emphasize that critical thinking develops not merely through content acquisition but through active learning processes that encourage analysis, evaluation, reflection, and reasoned judgment (Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Consequently, the current findings suggest that the primary challenge does not lie in students' willingness to learn Islamic law but rather in the limited opportunities provided to practice analytical reasoning within authentic legal contexts.

Classroom observations further revealed that learning activities continued to be dominated by lecturer-centered instruction, where students primarily received explanations of legal doctrines and classical jurisprudential opinions with relatively limited opportunities for discussion, debate, or collaborative legal analysis. Although lecturers occasionally invited students to ask questions, classroom interaction generally remained one-directional, resulting in passive participation from many students. Interview data reinforced these observations. Several participants explained that they often hesitated to express opinions because they feared presenting incorrect legal arguments or contradicting lecturers' interpretations. This tendency reflects broader educational challenges in legal learning environments where students frequently prioritize doctrinal accuracy over analytical exploration. Similar observations have been reported in higher education research indicating that instructional strategies emphasizing knowledge transmission rather than inquiry-based learning tend to inhibit the development of critical thinking (Bellaera et al., 2021; Dong et al., 2023). Furthermore, contemporary legal education increasingly requires students to evaluate emerging legal and ethical issues rather

than merely reproduce established legal knowledge (Suntana et al., 2023; Wijatmoko et al., 2023). Consequently, the current instructional pattern observed at STISA Ash-Shofa demonstrates a discrepancy between curriculum expectations that promote higher-order thinking and classroom practices that continue to emphasize content mastery.

Table 1. Summary of the Current Dynamics of Critical Thinking Among Islamic Family Law Students

Aspect	Empirical Findings	Analytical Interpretation
Conceptual understanding	Students understand basic Islamic Family Law concepts.	Knowledge acquisition is relatively satisfactory.
Legal reasoning	Students experience difficulty comparing different legal opinions and constructing arguments.	Analytical reasoning remains underdeveloped.
Classroom participation	Participation is generally passive and lecturer-dominated.	Limited opportunities for active critical engagement.
Problem-solving	Students rarely analyze contemporary family law cases independently.	Application of legal theory to practical contexts is still weak.
Learning environment	Lectures emphasize explanation more than discussion or debate.	Pedagogical practices have not fully supported critical thinking development.

Source: Authors' analysis, 2025.

The interview findings further indicate that the limitations in students' critical thinking are not primarily attributable to individual intellectual capacity but rather to the interaction between pedagogical practices and the academic learning environment. Most participants acknowledged that they rarely encountered authentic legal cases requiring them to formulate independent legal opinions based on multiple sources of Islamic jurisprudence. Instead, classroom activities predominantly emphasized understanding statutory provisions, memorizing doctrinal concepts, and reproducing lecturers' explanations during examinations. As a result, students became accustomed to seeking single correct answers rather than exploring alternative legal interpretations supported by evidence and reasoned argumentation. This condition is inconsistent with the nature of Islamic Family Law itself, which has historically accommodated diversity of juristic reasoning through *ijtihad*, comparative *fiqh*, and contextual interpretation of legal principles. Educational research consistently demonstrates that critical thinking develops most effectively when students are encouraged to analyze complex problems, defend arguments with evidence, and evaluate competing perspectives through continuous dialogue (Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021). Consequently, the present findings suggest that students' analytical competence is shaped more by the learning process than by their academic potential alone. This interpretation was reinforced during interviews with institutional stakeholders, who acknowledged that time constraints, curriculum coverage, and conventional instructional



approaches often limit opportunities for reflective discussion and collaborative legal analysis (Hapidin, 2024; Basiran, 2024).

Another important finding concerns students' confidence in expressing legal opinions during classroom discussions. Although most participants demonstrated adequate understanding of theoretical concepts, many admitted that they hesitated to question lecturers or defend alternative legal arguments because they feared making mistakes or being perceived as challenging authoritative interpretations. Such perceptions reflect a learning culture that continues to emphasize academic conformity rather than intellectual exploration. Similar tendencies have been identified in broader higher education research, where passive classroom environments reduce students' willingness to engage in analytical debate and independent reasoning (Dong et al., 2023). Within Islamic legal education, however, critical dialogue should not be interpreted as opposition to religious authority but rather as an academic exercise grounded in evidence, jurisprudential methodology, and ethical responsibility. Therefore, developing critical thinking requires not only pedagogical innovation but also an institutional culture that values constructive discussion, respectful disagreement, and reflective inquiry as integral components of legal learning. Such an environment would enable students to develop stronger analytical confidence while remaining committed to the ethical foundations of Islamic jurisprudence.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the current dynamics of critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students at STISA Ash-Shofa are characterized by an imbalance between relatively strong theoretical knowledge and comparatively limited analytical application. Students generally possess adequate conceptual understanding of Islamic Family Law but encounter difficulties when applying legal doctrines to contemporary family issues that require interpretation, evaluation, and reasoned judgment. This imbalance reflects broader challenges within legal education, where curriculum objectives promoting higher-order thinking have not yet been fully translated into classroom practice. Accordingly, strengthening critical thinking should not be viewed solely as improving students' individual competencies but also as transforming the pedagogical ecosystem in which legal learning occurs. These findings provide an empirical foundation for the following section, which examines the institutional, pedagogical, and individual factors that influence the development of critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students and explains why these dynamics continue to persist despite growing recognition of critical thinking as a core graduate competency.

Factors Influencing the Development of Critical Thinking Among Islamic Family Law Students

The findings demonstrate that the development of critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors that interact throughout the learning process. Rather than emerging solely from students' intellectual abilities, critical thinking evolves through continuous interaction between personal characteristics, instructional

practices, and the broader academic environment. Interview data revealed that students possessing higher learning motivation, stronger self-confidence, and greater willingness to participate in classroom discussions generally demonstrated better analytical reasoning when responding to legal problems. Conversely, students who lacked confidence tended to remain passive during discussions despite having adequate conceptual understanding of Islamic Family Law. Several participants admitted that they were reluctant to express legal opinions because they feared presenting incorrect arguments or being criticized by lecturers and classmates. These findings support previous research indicating that motivation, confidence, and active engagement are fundamental prerequisites for developing higher-order thinking skills (Danni & Tauratiya, 2020; Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). In addition, students highlighted that regular exposure to legal reading materials, independent study habits, and opportunities to analyze contemporary legal issues contributed positively to their analytical development. Therefore, individual readiness represents an important foundation for cultivating critical thinking, although it cannot develop optimally without corresponding institutional support.

Besides internal characteristics, the findings indicate that external factors exert even greater influence on students' critical thinking development. Classroom observations consistently showed that instructional methods remained predominantly lecturer-centered, with limited implementation of case-based discussion, collaborative learning, or legal simulation. Limited opportunities for analytical engagement may also reduce students' capacity to develop independent academic reasoning and encourage surface learning approaches, conditions that have been associated with weaker academic integrity and higher vulnerability to plagiarism in higher education (Albudaiwi et al., 2024). Interviews with lecturers likewise acknowledged that curriculum demands, limited instructional time, and the need to complete extensive doctrinal materials often reduced opportunities for interactive learning (Basiran, 2024; Hapidin, 2024).

These findings are consistent with recent educational literature suggesting that pedagogical design, classroom interaction, and institutional learning culture significantly determine students' critical thinking performance (Dong et al., 2023). Likewise, higher education institutions that cultivate inclusive learning environments, equitable participation, and supportive academic communities provide greater opportunities for students to engage actively in knowledge construction and collaborative learning, thereby strengthening analytical competence (AlKharouf et al., 2024). Furthermore, contemporary legal education increasingly requires graduates who are capable of responding critically to evolving legal and social issues rather than merely mastering legal doctrines (Suntana et al., 2023; Wijatmoko et al., 2023). Furthermore, contemporary legal education increasingly requires graduates who are capable of responding critically to evolving legal and social issues rather than merely mastering legal doctrines (Suntana et al., 2023; Wijatmoko et al., 2023). Accordingly, strengthening critical thinking should involve systematic improvements not only in students' learning attitudes but also in instructional strategies, curriculum implementation, and institutional academic culture.

Table 2. Factors Influencing the Development of Critical Thinking

Category	Factors Identified	Influence on Critical Thinking
Internal	Learning motivation	Encourages active learning and independent inquiry
Internal	Self-confidence	Increases willingness to present legal arguments
Internal	Reading habits	Broadens legal knowledge and analytical capacity
External	Lecturer-centered instruction	Restricts discussion and critical dialogue
External	Limited legal case exposure	Weakens practical legal reasoning
External	Classroom culture	Influences participation and intellectual confidence
External	Curriculum implementation	Determines opportunities for analytical learning

Source: Authors' analysis, 2025.

The interaction between internal and external factors demonstrates that the development of critical thinking cannot be explained through a single dimension. Students with high motivation and adequate academic ability may still struggle to develop analytical competence when learning environments provide limited opportunities for discussion, legal argumentation, and problem-based learning. Conversely, supportive pedagogical practices can significantly improve students' confidence and analytical performance, even among those who initially demonstrate limited participation. This reciprocal relationship suggests that critical thinking should be understood as the outcome of an educational ecosystem rather than merely an individual cognitive attribute. Previous studies similarly argue that instructional design, active classroom engagement, and reflective learning experiences are essential components in cultivating higher-order thinking (Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021). The present findings reinforce this perspective by showing that students become more willing to analyze legal issues when lecturers encourage open dialogue, appreciate diverse opinions, and facilitate discussions based on contemporary family law cases. Therefore, institutional commitment to creating participatory learning environments is as important as improving students' individual learning motivation.

Another significant finding concerns the relationship between legal education and the realities of contemporary Islamic Family Law. Interviews revealed that students expressed greater enthusiasm when classroom discussions addressed actual legal disputes, judicial decisions, or current issues concerning marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and family conflict. Authentic legal cases enabled students to move beyond memorizing legal doctrines toward evaluating competing legal arguments and considering the social implications of judicial decisions. This finding is particularly important because Islamic Family Law continuously evolves alongside changes in society, requiring graduates who are capable of contextual legal reasoning rather than mechanical application of legal texts. Contemporary scholarship likewise emphasizes that higher education institutions must prepare graduates capable of responding



critically to legal transformation, ethical challenges, and social development (Dong et al., 2023; Suntana et al., 2023; Wijatmoko et al., 2023). Consequently, strengthening critical thinking requires greater integration between theoretical instruction and authentic legal practice, allowing students to connect normative legal principles with practical realities encountered by Muslim communities.

Overall, the findings indicate that the development of critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students is influenced by the continuous interaction of personal readiness, pedagogical practice, and institutional academic culture. Internal factors—including motivation, self-confidence, and independent learning habits—provide the foundation for analytical development, whereas external factors—including instructional methods, classroom interaction, curriculum implementation, and exposure to legal cases—determine whether these individual capacities can develop optimally. The analysis therefore suggests that improving critical thinking requires comprehensive educational reform rather than isolated pedagogical adjustments. Universities should foster learning environments that promote dialogue, collaborative inquiry, and evidence-based legal reasoning while simultaneously encouraging students to participate actively in the learning process. These findings provide the empirical basis for the following discussion, which proposes context-sensitive pedagogical strategies for strengthening critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students at STISA Ash-Shofa through instructional innovation, active learning, and institutional support.

Strengthening Critical Thinking Through Contextual Pedagogical Innovation in Islamic Family Law Education

The findings of this study indicate that strengthening critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students requires pedagogical innovation that extends beyond conventional knowledge transmission. Although students possess adequate conceptual understanding of Islamic legal doctrines, the previous sections demonstrate that they experience difficulties in applying legal reasoning to contemporary family law issues. Consequently, instructional practices should shift from lecturer-centered approaches toward learning environments that actively engage students in legal inquiry, evidence-based argumentation, and reflective discussion. Such transformation is consistent with educational literature emphasizing that critical thinking develops through active participation, collaborative learning, and authentic problem-solving rather than through passive reception of information (Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Within Islamic Family Law education, this pedagogical shift is particularly important because students are expected not only to understand normative legal provisions but also to interpret diverse juristic opinions and evaluate legal issues emerging from rapidly changing social realities. Accordingly, classroom learning should provide regular opportunities for students to analyze judicial decisions, compare *fiqh* perspectives, evaluate legal evidence, and formulate independent legal arguments grounded in both Islamic legal principles and contemporary societal contexts.

The empirical findings further suggest that contextual learning experiences significantly enhance students' analytical engagement. Interview participants consistently expressed greater enthusiasm when lecturers introduced real legal cases, encouraged collaborative discussion, and provided opportunities to defend legal opinions during classroom activities. Likewise, lecturers acknowledged that discussion-based learning and legal case analysis generated more meaningful interaction than traditional lecture methods, although such approaches had not yet been implemented systematically because of curriculum constraints and limited instructional time (Basiran, 2024; Hapidin, 2024). These findings indicate that pedagogical reform should not merely introduce new teaching techniques but should redesign classroom interaction to position students as active participants in knowledge construction. Therefore, this study proposes an integrated pedagogical framework emphasizing four complementary dimensions: authentic legal case analysis, collaborative discussion, reflective legal reasoning, and constructive lecturer feedback. Together, these components create a learning environment that encourages students to question assumptions, evaluate alternative legal interpretations, justify arguments using evidence, and develop confidence in expressing reasoned opinions within an ethical academic atmosphere.

Table 3. Proposed Contextual Pedagogical Framework for Strengthening Critical Thinking

Pedagogical Component	Learning Activity	Expected Learning Outcome
Authentic legal case analysis	Analysis of contemporary Islamic Family Law cases	Improved analytical reasoning and legal interpretation
Collaborative discussion	Small-group discussion and legal debate	Stronger communication and argumentation skills
Reflective legal reasoning	Reflection on multiple <i>fiqh</i> perspectives and judicial decisions	Deeper critical evaluation and contextual reasoning
Constructive lecturer feedback	Continuous academic feedback during discussion	Greater confidence and independent thinking

Source: Authors' analysis, 2025.

The proposed pedagogical framework also reflects the distinctive characteristics of Islamic Family Law education, where legal reasoning extends beyond the application of statutory provisions to include ethical reflection, jurisprudential interpretation, and contextual understanding of contemporary social issues. Unlike many other legal disciplines, Islamic Family Law requires students to reconcile classical *fiqh* doctrines with evolving family problems, judicial developments, and changing societal expectations. Consequently, critical thinking should not be understood as encouraging unrestricted criticism of religious authority but rather as cultivating the intellectual capacity to evaluate evidence, compare juristic opinions, and formulate reasoned legal conclusions through systematic analysis. Previous educational studies consistently emphasize that higher-order thinking develops when students

actively construct knowledge through inquiry, reflection, and collaborative learning rather than through passive memorization (Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). The present findings reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that students become more analytically engaged when legal learning is contextualized through authentic family law cases, guided discussion, and reflective evaluation of multiple legal perspectives. Therefore, pedagogical innovation should preserve the normative foundations of Islamic jurisprudence while simultaneously encouraging intellectual openness and analytical engagement within an academically responsible environment.

An equally important implication concerns institutional commitment to sustaining pedagogical transformation. The interviews indicate that lecturers recognize the importance of critical thinking but frequently encounter structural constraints, including limited instructional time, dense curriculum content, and classroom traditions that continue to prioritize content delivery over analytical interaction (Basiran, 2024; Hapidin, 2024). Accordingly, strengthening critical thinking should become part of broader academic policy rather than remaining an individual initiative undertaken by lecturers. Curriculum planning should explicitly incorporate critical thinking outcomes into course learning objectives, classroom assessment, and instructional evaluation. Likewise, continuous professional development programs for lecturers should introduce active learning strategies, legal simulations, collaborative case analysis, and reflective assessment techniques that support analytical learning. Such institutional support would create a sustainable academic culture in which students are encouraged to question, discuss, evaluate, and construct legal arguments confidently while maintaining academic ethics and respect for diverse scholarly opinions. Through this institutional approach, critical thinking becomes embedded within the overall educational system instead of functioning merely as an additional classroom activity.

Overall, this study proposes that strengthening critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students requires an integrated pedagogical ecosystem that combines active learning, authentic legal experiences, institutional support, and continuous academic reflection. Rather than focusing exclusively on students' cognitive abilities, the proposed framework recognizes that critical thinking emerges through dynamic interaction between learners, lecturers, curriculum design, and the academic environment. The principal contribution of this research lies in developing a context-sensitive pedagogical framework specifically designed for Islamic Family Law education, integrating empirical findings from students and lecturers with contemporary educational theory. Unlike previous studies that predominantly measured critical thinking levels or discussed pedagogical concepts separately, this study synthesizes institutional experiences, classroom observations, and participant perspectives into a coherent model that is directly applicable within Islamic higher education. Consequently, the findings not only address the research objectives but also provide practical guidance for curriculum development, lecturer training, and instructional innovation, thereby contributing to ongoing efforts to improve the quality of Islamic legal education in Indonesia and other Muslim higher education institutions facing comparable educational challenges.



CONCLUSION

This study investigated the dynamics of critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya by addressing three research objectives: describing the current state of students' critical thinking, identifying the factors influencing its development, and proposing pedagogical strategies to strengthen analytical competence. The findings indicate that students generally possess adequate conceptual understanding of Islamic Family Law but experience difficulties in applying legal reasoning to contemporary family law issues requiring analysis, evaluation, and evidence-based argumentation. Classroom observations and interview data further reveal that lecturer-centered instruction, limited exposure to authentic legal cases, and insufficient opportunities for collaborative discussion restrict students' ability to develop higher-order thinking. These findings suggest that the principal challenge lies not in students' academic potential but in the need for a more participatory learning environment that consistently promotes analytical inquiry, reflective discussion, and contextual legal reasoning.

The study further demonstrates that critical thinking develops through the interaction of internal and external factors. Internal factors include learning motivation, self-confidence, and independent reading habits, while external factors encompass instructional methods, curriculum implementation, classroom interaction, institutional academic culture, and opportunities to engage with real legal cases. Based on these findings, this research proposes a contextual pedagogical framework integrating authentic case analysis, collaborative discussion, reflective legal reasoning, and constructive lecturer feedback as complementary strategies for strengthening critical thinking in Islamic Family Law education. The novelty of this study lies in the development of an integrated pedagogical framework grounded in empirical evidence from both students and lecturers, offering a context-sensitive model specifically designed for Islamic legal education. This study contributes theoretically by enriching the discourse on critical thinking within Islamic higher education and contributes practically by providing recommendations for curriculum development, instructional innovation, and lecturer professional development to improve analytical legal competence.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted at a single Islamic higher education institution using a qualitative approach and a relatively limited number of participants, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to other institutional contexts. In addition, the proposed pedagogical framework has not yet been empirically implemented or evaluated in classroom practice. Future studies are therefore encouraged to involve multiple universities, employ mixed-methods or experimental designs, and assess the effectiveness of the proposed instructional model in improving students' critical thinking. Such research would provide stronger empirical evidence for advancing pedagogical innovation and enhancing the quality of Islamic Family Law education in Indonesia and other Muslim higher education institutions.

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