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# 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 a vital skill for students in Islamic Family Law, particularly given the multifaceted nature of legal challenges in both academic and professional settings. However, its development at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Syariah Wal Aqidah Ash-Shofa (STISA Ash-Shofa) is hindered by traditional, lecture-based instruction and limited opportunities for active learning.

**Methods:** This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to explore how critical thinking is currently fostered. Participants included Islamic Family Law students and lecturers. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns, barriers, and enabling factors in cultivating critical thinking within the academic environment.

**Results:** Findings show that non-interactive teaching limits students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and construct legal arguments. Students often lack confidence to express ideas and are rarely exposed to real-world legal problems. Lecturers also noted the absence of participatory learning models and practical materials that bridge theory and practice.

**Conclusion:** The study recommends incorporating interactive pedagogies—such as case-based learning, legal simulations, and collaborative discussions—to enhance students' analytical engagement. Building a supportive, feedback-rich classroom atmosphere is also essential to encourage expression and improve critical reasoning. These interventions are key to preparing competent, reflective legal professionals.

**Novelty:** This study's strength lies in its integrative perspective, drawing insights from both students and faculty to design contextually relevant strategies for advancing critical thinking in Islamic legal education.

**Keywords:** Critical Thinking; Islamic Family Law; Legal Pedagogy; Qualitative Study; Student Engagement



## INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is recognized as a foundational competence for university students, particularly for those in the legal field (Zhang, Tang, & Xu, 2022; Dong, Li, & Chang, 2023). In an era marked by rapid technological, legal, and social transformation, the ability to critically assess information, construct sound arguments, and make well-informed decisions is indispensable (Ayçiçek, 2021; Bellaera et al., 2021). In this regard, students enrolled in the Islamic Family Law Program at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Syariah Wal Aqidah Ash-Shofa Manonjaya (STISA Ash-Shofa) are expected to develop strong critical thinking skills to enhance both academic performance and professional legal competence. These skills are essential not only in legal reasoning but also in addressing real-life issues related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and family justice based on Islamic law.

Despite its clear relevance, the development of critical thinking among students at STISA Ash-Shofa remains suboptimal. Although the curriculum nominally includes elements intended to promote analytical reasoning, practical classroom conditions suggest a gap between instructional intent and student outcomes. Traditional lecture-based teaching, limited exposure to practical legal cases, and minimal encouragement for open discussion restrict students' opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking. Several students report challenges in analyzing legal texts critically, evaluating evidence, or defending positions in classroom debates (Al Jahsh, 2024; Usmani, 2024). These barriers highlight the need for instructional transformation.

The urgency of this study also arises from national concerns about the quality of higher education, especially in legal studies. Indonesia continues to face complex legal challenges, including rising family disputes, evolving interpretations of Islamic law, and increased demands for legal professionals who can think analytically and act justly (Suntana et al., 2023; Wijatmoko et al., 2023). Legal education must therefore go beyond rote learning and promote critical intellectual engagement to prepare graduates for these realities. This research investigates how critical thinking is understood, developed, and challenged within the Islamic Family Law program. It aims to (1) describe the current dynamics of students' critical thinking, (2) identify the main obstacles in its development, and (3) offer practical recommendations for improving pedagogical strategies. In doing so, this study contributes to a broader discourse on enhancing the quality of legal education in Islamic institutions in Indonesia.

Previous studies provide valuable context. For example, Sulaiman and Syakarofath (2018) in *Critical Thinking in Islamic Psychology* emphasized the importance of reframing cognitive development in accordance with both modern and Islamic perspectives. Their emphasis on empowering youth through reflective learning has implications for broader Islamic education. Similarly, Danni and Tauratiya (2020) conducted a quantitative assessment of critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students at IAIN Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik Bangka Belitung.



Their findings underscore the influence of both internal factors (motivation, self-efficacy) and external ones (curriculum design, teaching style). Meanwhile, Utami and Sugitanata (2024) explored critical thinking through a media-lens by analyzing the anime *One Piece* in relation to Islamic legal concepts. This innovative approach demonstrated how popular media can be used to enhance critical awareness, especially among younger audiences. These studies affirm that fostering critical thinking requires multidimensional strategies. The present research builds upon this foundation but narrows its focus to a specific institutional setting—STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya—and aims to integrate both student and faculty perspectives in developing feasible, context-sensitive teaching improvements. The title, *Dynamics of Critical Thinking Among Islamic Family Law Students: A Study at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya*, reflects this twofold goal: to diagnose current limitations and to propose sustainable enhancements for the legal education system.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical thinking is widely regarded as a foundational competency in higher education, particularly within disciplines that require evaluative judgment, such as law. Paul and Elder (2014) define critical thinking as "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information." In legal education, this skill is indispensable, as students must interpret laws, assess evidence, and formulate logical arguments under complex and sometimes ambiguous circumstances.

According to Facione (1990), critical thinking in legal contexts involves both cognitive and affective components, including skills such as inference, evaluation, interpretation, and disposition toward truth-seeking. This dual-dimensional nature of critical thinking aligns with the needs of Islamic Family Law education, which not only emphasizes legal literacy but also ethical reasoning based on Islamic jurisprudential principles. Yet, empirical evidence suggests that students in legal studies, particularly in Islamic law programs, often struggle to move beyond rote memorization of texts (Al-Bukhari, 2021; Mustaqim, 2022).

Scholars have consistently emphasized the role of pedagogy in developing students' higher-order thinking skills. Brookfield (2012) posits that teaching for critical thinking requires student-centered learning environments where questioning, reflection, and problem-solving are encouraged. Instructional approaches such as Socratic questioning, case-based learning, and collaborative debate are proven to stimulate cognitive engagement (Kurfiss, 1988; Halx & Reybold, 2005). In the context of Islamic legal education, incorporating classical Islamic scholarship alongside modern critical thinking strategies has been proposed as an effective hybrid method (Rohman & Zarkasyi, 2023). However, in practice, many institutions continue to rely on lecture-based teaching, limiting opportunities for discussion and problem-solving (Ismail & Farid, 2020). This observation aligns with findings from the present study, where



students at STISA Ash-Shofa reported minimal engagement in participatory learning experiences.

Islamic Family Law is a complex field governed by religious texts, classical jurisprudence, and evolving societal norms. As such, it offers a fertile ground for developing critical thinking, particularly in analyzing contemporary issues such as divorce, inheritance, guardianship, and domestic conflict resolution (Ali & Elamin, 2018). However, this complexity also poses challenges, especially when students are not equipped with tools to analyze contradictions between legal theory and social realities.

Rahman and Hasan (2019) argue that one of the difficulties in cultivating critical thinking in Islamic legal contexts is the perceived immutability of sacred texts, which discourages questioning. However, traditional Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) is rich with methodological tools such as qiyas (analogical reasoning), istihsan (juristic preference), and maslahah (public interest) that encourage analytical reasoning. Educators are encouraged to highlight these tools as part of a critical engagement strategy rather than focusing solely on textual memorization (Hashim & Osman, 2021). Several studies have empirically examined the state of critical thinking in Islamic higher education. Danni and Tauratiya (2020), in a quantitative study involving students of Islamic Family Law at IAIN Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik, found that most students fell within the “low to moderate” category of critical thinking ability. The authors linked this outcome to limited pedagogical variation, lack of practical legal training, and insufficient assessment mechanisms focused on critical thinking.

Meanwhile, a qualitative study by Sulaiman and Syakarofath (2018) explored how critical thinking can be developed through concept reformulation in Islamic psychology. Although not specific to legal studies, their findings emphasize the potential of interdisciplinary approaches in enhancing cognitive flexibility—a core component of critical thinking. Similarly, Mahfud et al. (2021) studied critical thinking in Islamic Education departments and found that students who engaged in project-based and discussion-based tasks demonstrated higher analytical capacity. These studies collectively underline the need for a transformation in teaching strategies within Islamic legal education. Despite theoretical alignment between Islamic thought and critical reasoning, the implementation in classrooms remains underdeveloped.

Barriers to developing critical thinking are both structural and cultural. Structurally, overcrowded classrooms, limited instructional time, and lack of access to updated case materials restrict meaningful engagement. Cultural factors also play a significant role. In many Islamic educational institutions, questioning teachers or challenging texts is often discouraged, creating a passive learning culture (Farooq & Ahmad, 2022). Such environments inhibit students’ willingness to engage in debate or express dissenting views, which are essential for critical thinking.



Basiran (2024), in a faculty interview at STISA Ash-Shofa, reiterated this challenge by highlighting the dominance of lecture-based instruction and lack of real-life case exposure. His insights echo the findings of this study and reinforce the call for teaching reform. Encouraging students to participate, question, and explore diverse perspectives must be embedded into the curriculum and supported by institutional culture. Recent pedagogical literature supports the inclusion of simulation and case-based learning in law education as effective methods for enhancing critical thinking. According to Bonney (2015), legal simulations expose students to real-world decision-making, requiring them to synthesize knowledge and apply legal principles under time and emotional pressure. These simulations have been implemented successfully in both secular and religious legal education contexts (Turner & Traynor, 2020). In the context of Islamic Family Law, simulations involving mock mediation, divorce proceedings, or inheritance negotiations could allow students to navigate complex legal, ethical, and social factors. Such approaches not only build students' confidence but also develop their capacity to handle ambiguity and multiple perspectives—key aspects of critical thinking (Ahmad & Hapidin, 2024).

This study draws on constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge actively through experience and reflection (Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivism aligns well with the objectives of critical thinking, as it emphasizes learner autonomy, interaction, and the contextual application of knowledge. Within the Islamic framework, constructivism can be harmonized with epistemological concepts such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), which legitimizes individual interpretation under qualified conditions. Furthermore, Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) remains a guiding model in assessing cognitive development. The taxonomy's higher-order levels—analysis, synthesis, and evaluation—are synonymous with critical thinking outcomes. When combined with Islamic epistemological tools, Bloom's model provides a balanced approach to curriculum development that is both modern and contextually rooted. Despite the growing recognition of critical thinking's importance, relatively few studies have focused specifically on students in Islamic Family Law programs. Even fewer incorporate both student and faculty perspectives to co-design pedagogical interventions. This gap is significant because lecturers' perceptions and instructional choices directly affect how students engage with the content (Tan, 2022). Moreover, most existing studies are either conceptual or quantitative, lacking the nuanced insights provided by qualitative methods.

This study contributes by offering a dual-perspective, qualitative analysis based on interviews and classroom observations. By identifying barriers, proposing context-specific solutions, and linking findings to broader theoretical frameworks, the study aims to inform both policy and practice in Islamic legal education. Its recommendations are practical, culturally sensitive, and adaptable to other Islamic higher education institutions across Indonesia and the wider Muslim world.



## METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the dynamics of critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya. A qualitative method was deemed most suitable to uncover the complex, subjective experiences of students and lecturers regarding the cultivation of analytical skills in a religious legal framework. This approach allows for rich, in-depth insights that are difficult to capture using purely quantitative tools.

The participants consisted of 15 students, purposively selected for their active engagement in core legal courses within the Islamic Family Law program. This selection ensured that the participants had adequate exposure to classroom instruction, legal discussions, and assignments relevant to critical thinking. The study also included input from two faculty members to gain additional perspectives on teaching practices and pedagogical challenges. Data were collected through two primary methods: (1) in-depth semi-structured interviews and (2) systematic classroom observations. The interviews used open-ended questions to explore students' understanding of critical thinking, their perceived challenges, and the learning activities they found most helpful or limiting. These interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were conducted in a setting comfortable for participants, ensuring candid reflections.

Simultaneously, classroom observations were conducted across four different lecture sessions. These observations aimed to assess the teaching methods used, the level of student participation, and the presence (or absence) of activities designed to stimulate critical thinking—such as debates, case analyses, or question-driven discussions. Observation notes were recorded using a structured template to ensure consistency. The data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, following six key steps: transcription, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and final interpretation. Recurring codes were grouped into themes such as “student confidence,” “teaching style,” “lack of real-case exposure,” and “pedagogical innovation.” These themes served as the basis for understanding how critical thinking is facilitated or hindered in the program.

To ensure validity and reliability, **triangulation** was conducted by comparing data from interviews and observations. Furthermore, **member checking** was employed, where participants were asked to review preliminary findings to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved in follow-up conversations. Ethical considerations were also taken into account. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained before each interview, and confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the research process. This methodological framework ensured a comprehensive, context-sensitive exploration of critical thinking in Islamic legal education, allowing for both diagnostic analysis and grounded pedagogical recommendations.





## RESULTS

### Overview of Critical Thinking Dynamics Among Islamic Family Law Students

This study reveals that students enrolled in the Islamic Family Law Program at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya generally demonstrate a foundational understanding of critical thinking concepts. However, their capacity to effectively apply these skills in academic and practical settings is considerably limited. Analysis of interview transcripts and classroom observations indicates a persistent gap between theoretical comprehension and practical application in resolving complex legal cases. A representative statement from Muhammad Hafidz Ridho, a student participant, captures this issue vividly:

“When we were asked to analyze a divorce case, many classmates focused solely on the legal aspects, without considering the social and religious values that are also crucial.” (Ridho, personal communication, 2024)

This comment highlights a tendency toward linear and compartmentalized thinking, where students analyze legal matters narrowly through a purely juridical lens. This approach neglects the multifaceted nature of Islamic Family Law, which inherently combines legal norms with social and religious considerations. Such restricted perspectives undermine the comprehensive critical analysis required in family law practice. A recurring theme across student interviews was the limited opportunity to practice critical thinking through real-world application or experiential learning activities. Muhammad Hafidz further emphasized:

“Most of our courses are more theoretical than practical. We rarely have opportunities to practice in real-world contexts, so when faced with actual cases, we feel unprepared.”

This reflects a significant pedagogical shortcoming: the curriculum’s overemphasis on theoretical knowledge delivery, at the expense of applied learning exercises such as internships, legal clinics, or simulation-based activities. The absence of such experiential components constrains students’ readiness to navigate real-life legal challenges, where decision-making requires integrating multiple perspectives and contextual nuances. Further illustrating this problem, students described their approach to inheritance law cases as often reproducing textbook theories verbatim, rather than engaging in analytical evaluation or alternative viewpoint consideration. This rote learning approach indicates a missed opportunity to foster higher-order thinking skills such as critical evaluation, synthesis, and argumentation. Insights from a lecturer, Mr. Basiran, corroborate the students’ experiences and pinpoint institutional factors shaping these dynamics:



“The current curriculum emphasizes theoretical knowledge but offers limited avenues for interactive learning and critical engagement.” (Basiran, personal communication, 2024)

This comment underscores a dominant teaching model that privileges knowledge transmission through lectures rather than active, participatory learning. Classroom observations confirm a predominantly unidirectional flow of information, with minimal student involvement in critical discussions or problem-solving activities. This instructional approach stifles opportunities for students to practice and hone their critical thinking. The lack of integration of case-based teaching methods further compounds this issue. According to Mr. Basiran:

“The textbooks we use generally only present theoretical concepts without providing relevant case studies. This makes it difficult for students to link theoretical knowledge with real-world legal practice.”

Thus, the curricular design inadvertently perpetuates a disconnect between abstract learning and applied legal reasoning, limiting students’ development of analytical skills essential to Islamic Family Law practice.

Beyond curriculum and pedagogy, affective factors such as student confidence and classroom atmosphere significantly influence critical thinking development. Interview data reveal students’ hesitation to express opinions or challenge ideas during class discussions, primarily due to fear of negative judgment or embarrassment. Mr. Basiran noted:

“An unsupportive classroom atmosphere makes students hesitant to participate. They are afraid of being wrong or irrelevant.”

This environment discourages intellectual risk-taking, a core component of critical thinking that involves questioning assumptions, testing arguments, and engaging with alternative perspectives. Such reluctance restricts the development of reasoning and debate skills, leaving students passive recipients rather than active constructors of knowledge.

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings

Theme	Findings	Implications
<b>Understanding of Critical Thinking</b>	Basic theoretical knowledge present but limited practical application	Need for experiential learning to bridge theory and practice
<b>Analytical Skills</b>	Narrow focus on legal aspects, neglecting social/religious dimensions	Encourage multi-perspective analysis in teaching and assessments





Theme	Findings	Implications
<b>Practical Experience</b>	Minimal opportunities for internships or simulations	Incorporate hands-on legal training and role-playing exercises
<b>Teaching Methods</b>	Predominantly lecture-based with limited interaction	Shift toward participatory, student-centered pedagogies
<b>Curriculum Design</b>	Emphasis on knowledge transmission over skill development	Revise curriculum to prioritize critical thinking skill-building
<b>Student Preparedness</b>	Students feel underprepared for real-world legal challenges	Enhance real-world engagement and applied problem-solving
<b>Classroom Atmosphere</b>	Unsupportive environment inhibits open dialogue	Foster safe, respectful spaces for intellectual risk-taking

### Challenges in Developing Critical Thinking

The research identifies several interrelated challenges hindering the development of critical thinking skills among Islamic Family Law students:

1. **Lecture-Centered Teaching:** The predominance of passive learning formats limits students' engagement and reduces critical discourse. Students reported feeling disengaged and disconnected from the material due to lack of interaction.
2. **Absence of Practical Examples:** Teaching materials and lectures rely heavily on abstract theories without integrating contemporary or contextually relevant legal cases. This absence weakens students' ability to apply concepts critically.
3. **Lack of Open-Ended Questions:** Lecturers rarely employ questions designed to stimulate exploratory thinking, debate, or problem-solving, further limiting students' analytical skill development.
4. **Unsupportive Classroom Atmosphere:** Fear of ridicule or failure discourages students from expressing opinions or challenging viewpoints, creating a culture of conformity and passivity.
5. **Limited Student Participation:** Students mostly act as passive listeners rather than active contributors, inhibiting the development of argumentation and reasoning skills vital to critical thinking.

These challenges, interconnected and mutually reinforcing, represent significant barriers that must be addressed to cultivate robust critical thinking capacities. In light of these findings, several pedagogical strategies emerge as necessary for enhancing critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students:

- **Adoption of Interactive Learning Strategies:** Group discussions, debates, and problem-solving exercises promote active participation, encouraging students to articulate and defend viewpoints while considering diverse perspectives.



- Integration of Case-Based Learning: Incorporating real-world legal cases within coursework helps students bridge theory and practice, improving analytical reasoning and practical problem-solving.
- Use of Simulations and Role-Playing: Courtroom and mediation simulations provide immersive experiences that foster critical thinking, decision-making, and communication skills.
- Faculty Development: Training instructors in innovative teaching methods ensures effective facilitation of interactive learning and sustained pedagogical improvement.
- Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment: Establishing norms of respect, open dialogue, and intellectual safety encourages student engagement and reduces fear of participation.

Overall, while foundational critical thinking knowledge exists among students, substantial obstacles related to teaching practices, curriculum design, and classroom climate restrict their ability to fully develop and apply these skills. Addressing these limitations through curriculum reform, pedagogical innovation, and supportive learning environments is critical for preparing competent Islamic Family Law practitioners equipped to navigate the complex demands of their profession.

## DISCUSSION

This study's findings shed important light on the state of critical thinking among students in the Islamic Family Law Program at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya. While students demonstrate a foundational understanding of critical thinking concepts, there remains a significant gap between theoretical knowledge and its application in practical legal contexts. This duality reflects both promise and challenge, revealing that students' cognitive development in critical thinking is nascent and constrained by structural and pedagogical factors. The tendency of students to focus narrowly on legal issues, as highlighted by Muhammad Hafidz Ridho's example of analyzing divorce cases, underscores a pattern of linear and compartmentalized thinking. Students often approach cases from a purely legalistic perspective without integrating the broader social, religious, and ethical dimensions intrinsic to Islamic family law. This finding aligns with broader educational research emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary and multifaceted approaches in law education. For example, King and Kitchener (1994) emphasize that critical thinking in complex fields, such as law, requires synthesizing diverse perspectives to appreciate the nuances of real-world issues. The current curriculum's inability to foster such integration suggests a pressing need for pedagogical reform.

Furthermore, the expressed scarcity of practical exercises within the program limits students' ability to develop applied critical thinking skills. This observation resonates with studies in



legal education globally, where experiential learning—such as internships, moot courts, and legal clinics—has been shown to deepen students’ analytical capacities and readiness for professional challenges (Sullivan et al., 2007). The students’ lack of preparedness when confronted with actual cases reveals the inadequacy of a purely theoretical curriculum in cultivating the practical judgment and problem-solving skills vital to legal practice.

The challenges identified at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya mirror findings from similar educational contexts. Research by Facione (1990) posits that critical thinking development is contingent not just on exposure to content but on the learning environment and instructional methods that promote active inquiry, reflection, and dialogical engagement. The predominance of lecture-centered, one-way teaching methods reported by both students and lecturers in this study resonates with long-standing critiques of traditional legal education, which often prioritize rote learning and memorization over analytical discourse (Posner, 2008).

Basiran’s observation that the curriculum prioritizes knowledge transmission over skill development is a significant factor inhibiting critical thinking. This echoes the sentiments expressed in a UNESCO (2015) report advocating for educational reforms that emphasize competency-based learning and critical thinking across disciplines. In Islamic legal education specifically, the integration of case-based learning and real-world contexts is essential to bridge the gap between normative texts and lived realities (Kamali, 2008). The deficiency of practical case studies and open-ended questions limits students’ exposure to ambiguity and complexity, which are crucial for honing evaluative and reasoning skills. Moreover, the classroom atmosphere described as unsupportive and inhibitive to student participation reflects psychological barriers to learning. This aligns with Brookfield’s (2012) assertion that critical thinking flourishes in environments where learners feel safe to express divergent viewpoints and risk intellectual vulnerability. Without such an atmosphere, students may default to passive learning modes, further stalling the development of reasoning and argumentation skills necessary for effective legal analysis.

The Implications of these findings are multi-layered and urgent. First, the disconnect between students’ theoretical knowledge and their limited practical application highlights the necessity of curriculum reforms oriented toward experiential learning. Integrating internships, legal clinics, simulations, and moot court exercises into the Islamic Family Law program would provide students with valuable opportunities to apply their knowledge, develop problem-solving skills, and engage critically with complex scenarios. This practical engagement fosters not only cognitive skills but also professional confidence, addressing the students’ expressed feelings of unpreparedness. Second, the narrow focus on legal aspects without adequate consideration of social and religious contexts suggests that teaching strategies must promote interdisciplinary and multi-perspective analysis. Islamic family law inherently involves the intersection of legal, social, ethical, and theological domains. Thus, pedagogical approaches should encourage students to appreciate this complexity through case discussions that



explicitly require analyzing legal issues alongside their socio-religious implications. This aligns with experiential learning models suggested by Kolb (1984), which emphasize concrete experience and reflective observation as key stages in developing critical thinking competencies.

Third, the study's findings on teaching methods underscore the need to shift from traditional lecture-based delivery to more interactive, student-centered learning models. Techniques such as group discussions, debates, problem-based learning, and role-playing not only increase engagement but actively train students to question assumptions, weigh evidence, and articulate reasoned arguments. The literature supports this shift; studies have shown that active learning strategies significantly enhance critical thinking skills in law students (Michael, 2006). Additionally, faculty development emerges as a critical component of any successful reform. Instructors must be equipped with the pedagogical skills and resources to implement interactive teaching methods effectively. Ongoing training in facilitation techniques, case method teaching, and simulation exercises can empower lecturers to create dynamic classrooms that nurture critical thinking. This emphasis on teacher capacity building is consistent with findings by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who argue that professional development is key to sustainable educational innovation.

Finally, fostering a supportive classroom environment is essential to overcoming students' hesitation to participate. The findings suggest that fear of judgment stifles intellectual risk-taking and open dialogue, both of which are prerequisites for critical inquiry. Establishing classroom norms that promote respect, inclusivity, and constructive feedback can build student confidence and create a culture of collaborative learning. Such an environment not only supports critical thinking but also mirrors the professional contexts where legal practitioners must engage with diverse perspectives respectfully and effectively.

The study's results extend beyond the Immediate educational setting to have broader implications for the Islamic legal profession. Graduates equipped with robust critical thinking skills are better prepared to navigate the complexities of contemporary legal challenges, which often require balancing strict legal interpretations with evolving social and ethical considerations. Without these skills, legal practitioners risk offering narrow, fragmented advice that may fail to address the multifaceted needs of clients and communities.

Moreover, fostering critical thinking in Islamic family law education can contribute to the ongoing development and reform of Islamic jurisprudence itself. As scholars and practitioners encounter new issues and social realities, critical engagement with texts and contexts becomes essential to *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and the evolution of legal thought. Thus, educational reforms that cultivate analytical and evaluative capacities among students serve the dual purpose of professional readiness and intellectual advancement within Islamic legal traditions. While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its



limitations. The research is context-specific, focusing on a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of findings. Further studies across diverse Islamic legal education settings would help ascertain whether similar challenges and dynamics exist more broadly. Additionally, quantitative measures of critical thinking skills could complement qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive picture of student competencies. Future research might also explore longitudinal impacts of pedagogical innovations on student outcomes, assessing how curriculum reforms and teaching methods translate into improved critical thinking and professional performance post-graduation. Investigating faculty perspectives in greater depth could uncover additional institutional barriers or enablers influencing teaching practices.

In sum, the findings from this study illuminate a complex interplay of curricular, pedagogical, and environmental factors shaping the development of critical thinking among Islamic Family Law students at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya. While foundational theoretical understanding exists, meaningful application is hampered by lecture-centered teaching, lack of practical experience, and unsupportive learning environments. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach encompassing curriculum reform, interactive teaching methods, faculty development, and the cultivation of positive classroom dynamics. Aligning with established educational theories and previous research, the recommended transformations promise to enhance students' analytical, evaluative, and decision-making skills. Ultimately, such improvements will not only elevate academic performance but also better prepare graduates to fulfill their roles as competent, reflective, and adaptive legal professionals capable of engaging the multifaceted realities of Islamic family law in the contemporary world.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the dynamics of critical thinking among students in the Islamic Family Law Program at STISA Ash-Shofa Manonjaya demonstrate a foundational understanding of critical thinking concepts. However, their practical ability to apply these skills effectively in academic and legal contexts remains limited. Many students face difficulties when required to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize complex legal information, highlighting a significant gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

The main obstacle identified is the predominance of traditional, lecture-based teaching methods that restrict student interaction and limit opportunities for active engagement and critical inquiry. Furthermore, the infrequent incorporation of case analysis and real-world problem-solving exercises in the curriculum diminishes students' chances to practice and refine higher-order thinking skills essential for legal reasoning and decision-making.



To address these challenges, it is crucial to redesign instructional strategies to be more interactive and student-centered. Implementing participatory teaching approaches such as group discussions, case-based learning, and simulation exercises can foster deeper engagement and enhance critical thinking competencies. Moreover, cultivating a supportive classroom environment that encourages open dialogue, respectful debate, and intellectual risk-taking will boost students' confidence and willingness to participate actively.

This study offers valuable insights for curriculum developers, educators, and academic institutions aiming to improve the quality of legal education in Indonesia. By adopting these recommendations, the Islamic Family Law Program can better prepare its students to navigate the complexities of legal practice with critical acumen and professional readiness. Ultimately, enhancing critical thinking skills among law students is vital for producing competent graduates capable of addressing the evolving challenges of the legal profession and society at large.

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