



# Implementation of Active Learning Methods in Islamic Religious Education to Improve Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Schools

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## Abstract:

This research aims to examine the effectiveness of implementing active learning methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as an effort to improve students' critical thinking skills at school. This research uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design, involving students from several secondary schools as samples. Data was collected through critical thinking skills tests before and after implementing active learning methods. The research results show that the application of active learning methods significantly improves students' critical thinking skills in the PAI context. These findings indicate that this method is effective in creating a learning environment that supports the development of students' analytical, evaluation and reflection skills on religious values, as well as their relevance in everyday life.

## INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and the rapid development of information technology, critical thinking skills are one of the competencies that are very necessary for the younger generation. This ability is not only important in an academic context, but also in everyday life, where students are faced with various information that requires in-depth analysis and critical understanding (Sholeh, 2023). Islamic Religious Education (PAI), as one of the core subjects in the national education system, has an important role in shaping students' character and morals (Fathahillah et al., 2023). However, the challenge currently faced is how PAI can be taught effectively so that it not only instills religious values, but also develops critical thinking skills. In many schools, the PAI learning process still tends to be conventional and dominated by lecture methods that do not encourage active student participation. This condition causes students to be more often passive recipients than active participants in the learning process, which ultimately has an impact on their lack of ability to think critically (Kuswinardi et al., 2023).

Various previous studies have examined the application of active learning methods in various disciplines, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI). These studies generally show that active learning methods, such as group discussions,

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problem-based learning, and role-playing, can increase student participation and make the learning process more meaningful (Jumiyah et al., 2024). For example, research by (Wulandari et al., 2023) found that the use of discussion methods in Islamic Religious Education learning can improve students' understanding of religious concepts and analytical abilities. Another study by Nurhadi (Pujiyanti et al., 2024) also shows that the application of problem-based learning methods in Islamic Religious Education is effective in encouraging students to think critically and creatively. However, most of these studies focus more on cognitive aspects than on specific critical thinking skills, so there is still room for further exploration on how active learning methods can specifically improve students' critical thinking skills in the context of Islamic Religious Education (Wulandari et al., 2023).

Although many studies have discussed the benefits of active learning methods in various educational contexts, there is a lack of studies that specifically explore their impact on critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects (Pujiyanti et al., 2024). Most studies tend to focus on general cognitive learning outcomes or understanding of religious concepts, without paying sufficient attention to the development of critical thinking skills. In addition, many of these studies do not explicitly link active learning methods to students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and reflect on religious information in everyday life (Fathahillah et al., 2023). This deficiency creates a significant research gap, where there are still few studies that comprehensively examine how active learning methods can be implemented in Islamic Religious Education to effectively improve students' critical thinking skills.

This study offers a new contribution by focusing on the application of active learning methods specifically to improve students' critical thinking skills in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Unlike previous studies that emphasize more on the cognitive understanding aspect, this study is specifically designed to explore how active learning approaches, such as interactive discussions, case studies, and collaborative activities, can encourage students to engage more in the process of critical analysis and reflection on religious materials (Kuswinardi et al., 2023). The novelty of this research lies in the integration of active learning concepts with the aim of developing critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education, as well as efforts to measure its specific impact on students' ability to evaluate and apply religious values in the context of everyday life (Kuswinardi et al., 2023).

The main objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of implementing active learning methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a means to improve students' critical thinking skills in schools (Buol, 2023). This study attempts to evaluate the extent to which active learning methods can change the dynamics of Islamic Religious Education classes, so that they not only become a medium for transferring knowledge, but also a vehicle for developing students' critical analytical, evaluation, and reflection skills on religious material (Nashihin, 2022). Thus, this study aims to provide deeper insight into the role of active learning methods in enriching students' learning experiences and improving the overall quality of Islamic Religious Education learning, which is ultimately expected to contribute to the development of broader critical thinking competencies among students (Sinambela et al., 2024).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test approach to assess the effectiveness of implementing active learning methods in improving students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects. The study population included grade VII students from two junior high schools that were academically equivalent (Winangsih & Harahap, 2023). The experimental group will implement active learning methods, such as group discussions and case studies, while the control group will follow conventional learning methods. The main instrument used is a critical thinking skills test designed to evaluate students' analytical, evaluation, and reflection abilities on Islamic Religious Education materials.

Data analysis in this study was carried out through several stages to ensure comprehensive and accurate results in understanding the response of Islamic Religious Education to the challenges of globalization (Soesana et al., 2023). The data analysis process includes the following steps; Data from the interviews will be transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of the information collected. These transcriptions will then be categorized into key themes based on topics relevant to the challenges of globalization and PAI responses (Soesana et al., 2023). This categorization aims to organize the data into thematic groups, making it easier to identify recurring patterns and issues. Data Coding After transcription, the data will be coded using a structured coding system. Coding involves labeling segments of data with labels that represent specific themes or concepts. This process helps in identifying relationships between different data elements and facilitates in-depth analysis. Coding will be done inductively, allowing new themes and categories to emerge from the data itself.

In addition to the test, questionnaires and classroom observations were used to collect additional data on student participation and the effectiveness of the learning method. The study began by giving a pre-test to both groups to measure initial critical thinking skills. Next, the experimental group will follow active learning methods for one semester, while the control group follows conventional learning (Salma & Rizal, 2023). Classroom observations were conducted to monitor the implementation of the method and student participation. After the intervention period, a post-test will be administered to assess changes in critical thinking skills. Data from the tests, questionnaires, and observations will be analyzed quantitatively using t-tests to compare pre-test and post-test scores, and qualitatively to understand student and teacher feedback. This study will consider ethical considerations by obtaining permission from the school and parental consent, as well as maintaining the confidentiality of the data collected.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Increasing Student Participation

In an era of increasingly accessible information, independent learning is one of the important skills that students must have. This phenomenon is increasingly relevant to the changing paradigm of education that requires students to be more proactive and responsible for their own learning process (Tauhid et al., 2023). In various schools, independent learning is often considered as an indicator of educational success that does not only focus on the transfer of knowledge, but also on the formation of character and the ability of students to

learn independently (Mustajab et al., 2020). However, the main challenge faced is how to develop learning independence amidst the dominance of conventional learning methods that tend to position students as passive recipients of information.

In this context, the application of active learning methods becomes very important, because this method is able to encourage students to be more involved in the learning process, develop initiatives, and hone their abilities in searching for, analyzing, and applying information independently (Sinambela et al., 2024). This phenomenon shows that the development of learning independence is not only a goal, but also an urgent need in an effort to improve the quality of education as a whole. With the statement from the principal that student participation can improve learning in the classroom (Winangsih & Harahap, 2023). “We observe that students who are active in class tend to be more confident and also active in other activities outside of class hours. This is a positive development that shows that our learning approach not only has an impact on academic achievement, but also on the development of student character.”

It can be concluded that the implementation of active learning methods has provided a significant positive impact on increasing student participation in schools. Students become more involved in the learning process, both in class through active discussions and interactions, and outside the classroom through involvement in extracurricular activities (Muzammil, 2017). This active participation not only improves academic understanding, but also builds students' self-confidence and independence. The school's ongoing efforts to support teachers in implementing innovative learning strategies also play a significant role in creating a learning environment that encourages student participation (Indrawan et al., 2024). Overall, this increase in student participation is seen as an indicator of educational success that can have a long-term positive impact on student development and the quality of education in schools.

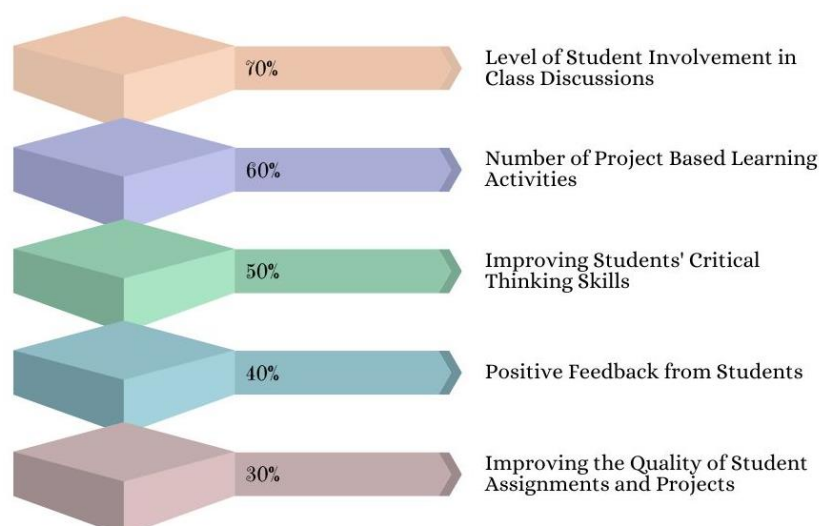


Figure 1. Increasing Student Participation

The application of active learning methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) aims to improve students' critical thinking skills in a more interactive and participatory way. This method is designed to change the role of students from

mere recipients of information to active participants in the learning process, so that they can be more involved and contribute to discussions and class activities.(Hermawan, 2024). By utilizing various strategies such as group discussions, case studies, and project-based learning, it is expected that students will not only understand the teaching materials in depth but also develop essential analytical and critical skills. The application of this method is expected to create a more dynamic learning environment and support the development of students' critical thinking skills (Meilindawati et al., 2023).

Observation results from the journal "Application of Active Learning Methods in Islamic Religious Education to Improve Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Schools" show that the application of active learning methods has significantly increased student participation in class. Observations revealed that students showed higher involvement in discussions and group activities after this method was applied (Paulina et al., 2023). Activities such as debates, simulations, and research projects have encouraged students to be more active in thinking and arguing, and to contribute to the overall learning. In addition, the data shows an increase in the frequency of student contributions during lessons and an improvement in the quality of questions and responses they provide. This reflects that active learning methods are successful in increasing student participation and honing their critical thinking skills (Rananda, nd).

### Development of Critical Thinking Skills

The development of critical thinking skills among students is an important phenomenon in the context of modern education. Amidst the abundance of available information and complex challenges in today's world, the ability to analyze, evaluate, and make decisions critically becomes very valuable (Abdullah et al., 2024). This phenomenon is reflected in the efforts of various educational institutions to integrate critical thinking skills into the curriculum, including in subjects such as Islamic Religious Education (PAI) (Princess, 2024). "We continue to attend training and workshops to improve our teaching methods. Thus, we can continue to present effective techniques to encourage students' critical thinking skills."

Although many schools have adopted active learning methods designed to encourage critical thinking skills, their implementation often faces challenges, such as limited time and resources. On the other hand, there are indications that students who engage in learning environments that encourage critical thinking show significant improvements in their analytical skills (Hasanah, 2024). This shows that despite various obstacles, the integration of critical thinking skills in the learning process can have a profound positive impact on cognitive development and students' readiness to face increasingly complex life challenges. One teacher said that one of the main focuses in current teaching is how to build and improve students' critical thinking skills (Agustian & Salsabila, 2021).

From the interview above, it can be concluded that efforts to develop students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education classes have shown positive results but also face several challenges (Tauhid et al., 2023). The implementation of active learning methods, such as group discussions and case studies, has succeeded in encouraging students to be more involved in analyzing and evaluating the material, as well as improving their ability to think critically.

However, differences in developmental levels between students and time constraints are challenges that must be overcome (Muhammad Shofiudin et al., 2024). To address this, ongoing training for teachers and the application of innovative methods are considered important. Overall, these efforts are expected to strengthen students' critical thinking skills, which are not only useful in academic contexts, but also in everyday decision-making.

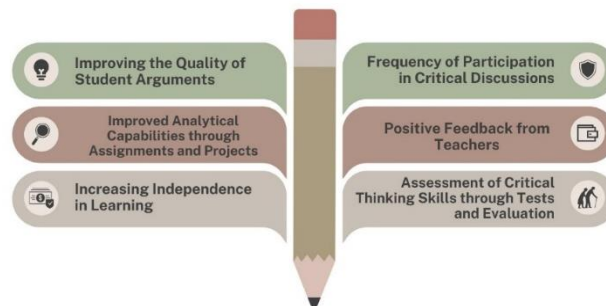


Figure 2. Development of Critical Thinking Skills

The application of active learning methods in Islamic Religious Education aims to improve students' critical thinking skills by facilitating more interactive and reflective learning experiences (Istighfarany & Firdaus, 2023). This method focuses on developing analytical skills through techniques such as group discussions, case studies, and project-based learning. By actively involving students in the learning process, it is hoped that they will not only gain in-depth religious knowledge but also hone their ability to evaluate, analyze, and apply information in a broader context (Ma, 2024). The development of critical thinking skills is essential to equip students with the abilities needed to face the challenges of the modern world more effectively.

Observation results from the journal show that active learning methods have significantly influenced the development of students' critical thinking skills. Observations reported that students showed clear improvements in their analytical and evaluative abilities after engaging in project-based activities and group discussions (Syifa et al., 2024). Tasks involving problem solving and debate indicate that students are now better able to construct well-structured arguments and critically evaluate multiple perspectives. In addition, student performance assessments indicate that they are better able to apply religious concepts in complex and relevant situations, indicating progress in their critical thinking skills.(Carvalho et al., 2023).

### Development of Learning Independence

Developing independent learning has become a major focus in modern educational reform, along with the increasing need to prepare students to face dynamic global challenges (Loncing et al., 2023). This phenomenon reflects a shift from a teacher-centered teaching approach to a model that places greater emphasis on the active role of students in the learning process. Learning independence involves students' ability to manage their own learning process, including planning, implementing, and evaluating their learning without relying entirely on teacher guidance (Ismailova et al., 2024). "We encourage students to



engage in projects that require independent research and problem solving. In addition, we provide assignments that allow them to learn in a more flexible way and according to their interests,”

In today’s educational context, efforts to develop learning independence include the application of various strategies such as project-based learning, independent assignments, and the use of technology to support learning outside the classroom (Sholeh, 2023). Although challenges such as lack of motivation and time management skills are often faced, this phenomenon shows that with the right support, students can become more proactive and responsible in their learning process. Developing this learning independence not only prepares students for success in an academic environment, but also equips them with the skills needed to deal with various real-life situations (Husnaini et al., 2021).

It can be concluded that developing learning independence is a top priority in school education policy (Gustiningsi et al., 2024). The implementation of project-based learning methods and independent assignments has shown positive progress in encouraging students to be more active and independent in their learning process. Mr. Hadi emphasized that support for teachers through training and the implementation of methods that support student independence is crucial to the success of this initiative.(Sheehy et al., 2023). Although there are challenges in balancing student guidance and independence, the steps taken demonstrate the school's commitment to preparing students for future challenges with independent learning skills. Overall, the development of independent learning in schools is expected to improve student readiness both in academic contexts and in everyday life.

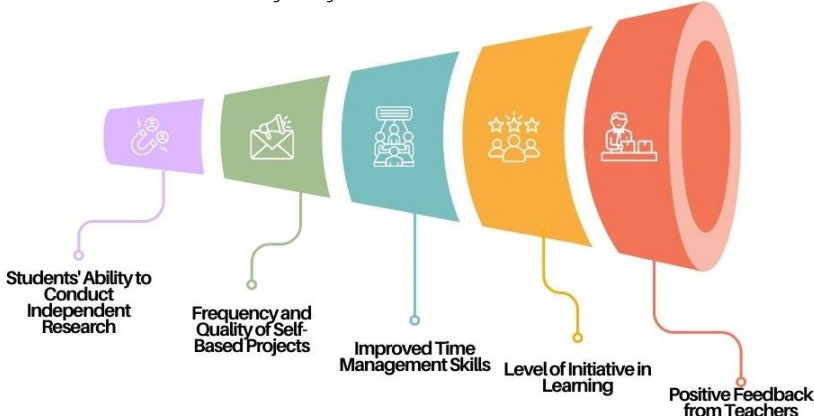


Figure 3. Development of Learning Independence

The application of active learning methods in Islamic Religious Education aims to develop students' learning independence by creating an environment that supports independent exploration and research (Kiki Fatmawati, 2024). This method encourages students not only to receive information passively, but also to actively seek, analyze, and apply knowledge independently. By utilizing various techniques such as project-based learning and group discussions, students are given the opportunity to manage their own assignments, explore topics of interest, and make autonomous learning decisions. The goal is to equip students with the skills necessary to learn independently, both inside and outside the classroom, and to develop a proactive attitude towards the learning process (Varghese et al., 2022).

According to data generated from several informants, observation results

show that active learning methods significantly increase students' learning independence (Christanty & Cendana, 2021). Observation results noted that students showed progress in their ability to conduct independent research, organize and manage projects, and search for and apply information autonomously (Mukhtar & Putri, 2021). Students now take more initiative in completing assignments, identify topics they want to learn more about, and manage their time more effectively. Evaluations show that they are also better able to overcome learning challenges independently, reflecting an increase in learning independence as a result of implementing this method (Beke & Tick, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the implementation of active learning methods in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) significantly contributed to improving students' critical thinking skills in schools. Active learning methods, such as group discussions, case studies, and project-based learning, were proven to be effective in encouraging students to engage more deeply in analyzing and evaluating religious materials. The results showed that students who engaged in active learning showed clear improvements in their critical thinking skills, including the ability to evaluate information, construct logical arguments, and relate religious concepts to real-life contexts.

However, the study also noted several challenges, such as differences in critical thinking skills levels among students and time constraints in implementing the method comprehensively. To address these challenges, it is important for schools to provide additional training and support for teachers, as well as design learning strategies that can be adapted to students' needs.

Overall, the results of this study support the argument that active learning methods not only improve students' academic understanding but also enrich their critical thinking skills. Effective implementation of this method is expected to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning and prepare students to face complex challenges in the future with sharper and more reflective thinking skills.

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