

Implementing Integrated Islamic Religious Education to Foster Critical Thinking Skills: A Qualitative Study at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga

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ABSTRACT

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning in many secondary schools is still dominated by teacher-centered instruction and memorization-oriented practices, which limit students' opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. This study aims to explore how integrated Islamic Religious Education is implemented to foster students' critical thinking abilities. Using a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving Islamic Religious Education teachers, students, and school administrators. The findings reveal that integrated IRE is systematically implemented through contextual instructional planning, dialogical and problem-based learning strategies, and reflective formative evaluation. These learning practices encourage students to analyze real-life issues, articulate arguments, and reflect critically on Islamic values. The learning process also supports students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which strengthens intrinsic motivation and active cognitive engagement. In conclusion, integrated Islamic Religious Education effectively promotes students' critical thinking skills while maintaining moral and spiritual values. Therefore, integrated IRE represents a relevant and effective pedagogical model for enhancing Islamic education learning in response to contemporary educational challenges.

I. INTRODUCTION

The demands of twenty-first-century education emphasize the development of higher-order thinking skills, particularly critical thinking, as a fundamental competence for students. Critical thinking enables learners to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and make reasoned decisions when facing complex social, moral, and religious issues. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), this competence is increasingly important, as Islamic education is expected not only to transmit doctrinal knowledge but also to cultivate reflective, analytical, and contextual understanding of Islamic values in contemporary life [1], [2].

However, the practice of IRE in many secondary schools remains dominated by teacher-centered instruction and memorization-oriented learning. Such approaches tend to prioritize cognitive recall over analytical reasoning, limiting students' opportunities to engage in critical inquiry and reflective thinking. As a result, Islamic Religious Education often struggles to respond effectively to current educational challenges, particularly the need to integrate religious understanding with critical engagement and real-life problem-solving [2], [3].

In response to these challenges, recent studies have highlighted the potential of integrated learning approaches in fostering critical thinking skills. Integrated education emphasizes the meaningful connection between subject matter, learners' experiences, and contextual issues, allowing students to actively construct knowledge rather than passively receive information [4]. Empirical studies over the last decade indicate that inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, and integrative pedagogical models contribute positively to students' critical thinking development [5]. Within Islamic education, several researchers have argued that integrating Islamic values with critical inquiry can strengthen students' reasoning skills and deepen their religious understanding. Nevertheless, most existing studies focus primarily on learning outcomes or employ quantitative measurements, providing limited insight into how integrated Islamic Religious Education is implemented in classroom practices [6].

This condition reveals a significant research gap. While previous studies confirm the effectiveness of innovative learning models in enhancing critical thinking, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative research that explores the process of implementing integrated Islamic Religious Education and how such implementation pedagogically supports the development of students' critical thinking skills [7]. In particular, few studies examine the instructional strategies, teacher roles, learning activities, and classroom interactions that enable the integration of Islamic values with critical thinking practices in Islamic senior high schools. This gap indicates the originality and necessity of the present study, which focuses on the implementation process rather than merely measuring learning outcomes [8].

Based on this gap, the central problem addressed in this study concerns how integrated Islamic Religious Education is implemented in classroom practices and how this implementation contributes to fostering students' critical thinking skills [9]. Instead of testing hypotheses, this study adopts an exploratory qualitative perspective to understand the dynamics of teaching and learning within an integrated Islamic education framework. The problem-solving approach employed in this research involves examining instructional planning, learning strategies, and classroom interactions that facilitate critical inquiry while maintaining Islamic values as the core foundation of learning [7].

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the implementation of integrated Islamic Religious Education in fostering students' critical thinking skills at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze how teachers design and enact integrated learning, how Islamic values are embedded within critical thinking activities, and how students respond to such pedagogical practices. The expected results of this research are to provide a comprehensive understanding of effective pedagogical practices in integrated Islamic Religious Education and to offer practical implications for improving Islamic education pedagogy. Furthermore, the findings are expected to contribute to the enrichment of theoretical discourse on Islamic education and critical thinking development, particularly within the context of secondary education.

II. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a case study approach. The qualitative approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of integrated Islamic Religious Education and its role in fostering students' critical thinking skills within a natural educational setting. A case study design allowed the researcher to explore instructional practices, interactions, and contextual factors comprehensively [10].

The research was conducted at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga, an Islamic senior high school that implements an integrated curriculum combining national educational standards with Islamic values. The research subjects consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers, students, and school administrators who were directly involved in the learning process. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the data obtained were relevant and information-rich [11].

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and school administrators to explore instructional planning, learning strategies, and perceptions regarding critical thinking development. Classroom observations were carried out to examine teaching-learning interactions, learning activities, and the integration of Islamic values with critical inquiry. Document analysis involved reviewing lesson plans, syllabi, teaching materials, and school policy documents related to integrated learning [12].

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by interview guides, observation checklists, and document review protocols. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of data sources and techniques, as well as member checking to confirm the accuracy of the findings [13].

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [14]. Data from interviews, observations, and documents were systematically coded and categorized to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the implementation of integrated Islamic Religious Education and the development of students' critical thinking skills. The analytical process was iterative, allowing the researcher to refine interpretations as the analysis progressed [15].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of integrated Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga, Ogan Ilir Regency, is carried out consciously and purposefully. Islamic Religious Education is not positioned merely as a formal subject oriented toward achieving

curriculum targets, but is understood as a value-based foundation that shapes students' ways of thinking, attitudes, and actions. This perspective is reflected in the policies and views of the school leadership, which emphasize that Islamic Religious Education must be "alive" in students' daily lives, both inside and outside the classroom [7].

In classroom practice, the implementation of integrated Islamic Religious Education is evident in teachers' efforts to connect instructional materials with the real-life experiences of students. Topics related to morals, fiqh, and other Islamic studies are not presented in an abstract manner, but are contextualized through issues closely related to students' lives, such as adolescent social interactions, the use of social media, and attitudes toward parents and the environment. This approach makes Islamic Religious Education learning more comprehensible and meaningful for students, as they can directly perceive the connection between Islamic teachings and their everyday life experiences [16].

Based on observational findings, the Islamic Religious Education learning process is conducted in a dialogical and participatory manner. Teachers do not dominate the classroom through one-way lectures; instead, they initiate learning with stimulating questions or the presentation of relevant cases. Students are then given opportunities to think, express their opinions, and engage in discussions. In this process, the teacher acts as a facilitator who guides students' lines of thinking, provides reinforcement, and corrects misconceptions without discouraging students' confidence to voice their ideas [17].

The implementation of integrated Islamic Religious Education is also evident in the consistent use of discussion, question-and-answer, and case study methods by teachers. These methods encourage students not only to recall learning materials, but also to analyze problems, consider multiple perspectives, and construct rational justifications for the opinions they express. Students are not required to respond quickly; instead, they are given sufficient time to think. This condition trains students to respond to issues in a more careful, reflective, and rational manner [7].

The interactions established between teachers and students during the learning process also indicate an academic climate that is conducive to the development of critical thinking skills. Teachers provide space for differing opinions and treat them as an integral part of the learning process. The teachers' open, respectful, and nonjudgmental attitudes make students feel safe to ask questions and express their views, even when those opinions are not yet fully accurate. Gradually, this condition encourages students to become more confident in thinking critically and articulating their arguments [18].

The research findings indicate that integrated Islamic Religious Education learning at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga, Ogan Ilir Regency, operates within an interconnected instructional system encompassing planning, implementation, and evaluation. Each stage plays a strategic role in shaping students' learning experiences, particularly in developing critical thinking skills. Instructional planning serves as the initial foundation that determines the direction and objectives of learning, implementation represents the concrete realization of these plans in classroom practice, and

evaluation functions to assess the achievement of learning objectives while providing a basis for subsequent instructional improvement [19].

3.1 Integrated Islamic Religious Education Learning Planning as the Foundation for Critical Thinking Development

The empirical findings of this study indicate that the planning of integrated Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga is consciously and systematically designed to promote students' cognitive and reflective engagement. Learning planning is not understood merely as an administrative activity, but as a strategic stage in cultivating critical thinking from the very beginning of the learning process. IRE teachers not only formulate learning objectives oriented toward mastery of religious content, but also direct instructional design toward developing students' abilities to reason, analyze, and evaluate Islamic issues within real-life contexts [20].

This is reflected in the following statement from one of the Islamic Religious Education teachers:

“Dalam menyusun RPP, kami selalu berusaha mengaitkan materi PAI dengan realitas yang dihadapi siswa sehari-hari, supaya mereka tidak hanya tahu dalilnya, tetapi juga bisa berpikir dan menilai persoalan yang ada”[20].

This statement indicates that the teacher consciously positions students as active and reflective learners. Learning planning is directed toward opening a dialogical space between religious texts and social contexts, so that Islamic Religious Education does not remain limited to the transfer of normative knowledge, but develops into a process of rational and contextual meaning-making.



Figure 1. The Process of Designing Integrated Islamic Religious Education Learning

An examination of instructional planning documents reveals that Islamic Religious Education materials are designed by integrating Islamic values, contemporary social issues, and analytical, open-ended guiding questions. In the lesson plans, teachers formulate questions that do not merely require right or wrong answers, but encourage students to explain their reasoning, consider potential impacts, and relate Islamic teachings to concrete situations. Observation of these documents indicates consistency among learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment strategies that are oriented toward the development of higher-order thinking skills [21].

Such planning practices indicate an effort to foster students' learning autonomy from the early stages of instruction. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, this condition reflects the fulfillment of the need for autonomy, as students are positioned as individuals who are given space to think, interpret, and take rational stances on religious issues. Learning designs that provide choices, opportunities for discussion, and open-ended questions enable students to perceive the learning process as part of their own volition and personal engagement, rather than merely as an external demand [22].

In addition to the aspect of autonomy, the planning of integrated Islamic Religious Education learning also demonstrates teachers' attention to creating balanced cognitive challenges. Teachers design problem-based tasks and case studies that are relevant to students' developmental levels [23]. One Islamic Religious Education teacher explained:

"Kami berusaha membuat soal dan tugas yang menantang, tapi tetap sesuai kemampuan siswa, supaya mereka tidak merasa terbebani, tapi tertantang untuk berpikir" [24].

This statement indicates that teachers consciously take into account students' competence. Within the framework of Self-Determination Theory, proportionate cognitive challenges allow students to experience success in completing learning tasks. This sense of competence becomes an important factor in fostering intrinsic motivation, which in turn encourages deeper engagement in the critical thinking process [25].

Observations of planning practices also show that Islamic Religious Education teachers design progressive learning sequences, beginning with problem triggers, followed by concept exploration and value reflection. Such planning structures provide students with a clear cognitive framework, enabling them not merely to follow learning activities procedurally, but to understand the purpose and meaning of each learning activity they engage in [7].

Thus, the planning of integrated Islamic Religious Education learning at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga can be understood as a psychopedagogical foundation that supports the development of students' intrinsic motivation and critical thinking skills. Planning that accommodates the needs for autonomy and competence not only prepares students to understand Islamic teachings conceptually, but also equips them with the ability to reason and critically and responsibly reflect on religious values.

3.2 Implementation of Integrated Islamic Religious Education Learning and the Development of Students' Critical Reasoning

The implementation of integrated Islamic Religious Education learning at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga does not merely display a variety of instructional methods, but reflects a pedagogical paradigm shift that concretely facilitates the development of students' critical reasoning. Learning is conducted through dialogical, contextual, and reflective approaches that position students as active subjects in the construction of religious meaning. Direct observations of the learning process show

that teachers consistently design learning interactions that challenge students to think, evaluate, and take positions on religious issues encountered in everyday life [17].

In practice, learning begins with guiding questions drawn from real-life phenomena, such as ethics in social media use, peer relationships, or adolescent moral issues. These questions are not intended to elicit immediate normative answers, but to stimulate analytical and discursive thinking processes. The teacher then facilitates group discussions, whole-class discussions, and open dialogue before providing conceptual reinforcement. This strategy demonstrates that integrated Islamic Religious Education learning does not focus on memorizing religious texts, but rather on the process of reasoning about the meaning and implications of Islamic values [26]. One student expressed their learning experience as follows:

“Kalau sekarang, sebelum guru menjelaskan, kami diminta memikirkan dulu masalahnya. Jadi kami harus berani berpendapat dan menjelaskan alasannya, bukan hanya menjawab benar atau salah” [27].

This statement indicates a significant shift in students' learning experiences. Students are no longer positioned as passive recipients of religious teachings, but as individuals who actively construct arguments and reflect on values. This process serves as an indicator of the development of critical thinking skills, particularly in the areas of argumentation, logical reasoning, and the evaluation of issues.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, this dialogical learning practice simultaneously fulfills the needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Open and non-dominative interactions between teachers and students create a sense of psychological safety, allowing students to feel valued and heard. This sense of relatedness encourages students to express their opinions, pose critical questions, and respond to differing viewpoints in a rational and ethical manner [28].

Furthermore, the implementation of integrated Islamic Religious Education reveals an important novelty in the context of Islamic education, namely the development of critical thinking that is constructive and value-oriented. Teachers do not allow discussion processes to proceed without direction; instead, they pedagogically guide students so that the conclusions constructed remain grounded in Islamic values [18]. One Islamic Religious Education teacher emphasized:

“Kami tidak ingin siswa hanya kritis tanpa arah. Mereka boleh berbeda pendapat, tetapi tetap harus bisa menjelaskan dan mengaitkannya dengan nilai Islam” [29].

This approach demonstrates that critical thinking in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is not understood as a skeptical attitude toward religious teachings, but rather as the capacity to reason about those teachings in a deep, contextual, and responsible manner. Students are trained to distinguish between opinions, scriptural evidence, and interpretations, as well as to understand that Islamic teachings can be examined rationally without losing their normative foundations [6].

The novelty of this integrated PAI learning implementation lies in its capacity to foster critical thinking that remains closely connected to moral and spiritual dimensions. Students are not only able to articulate arguments, but also demonstrate a reflective attitude in evaluating the moral implications of particular actions. This is evident in students' ability to draw meaningful lessons from the learning process and to relate them to the attitudes and behaviors that should be adopted in real-life contexts.

Within the framework of Self-Determination Theory, this condition indicates that the fulfillment of basic psychological needs fosters the emergence of strong intrinsic motivation. Students engage in the learning process not due to external demands, but because they perceive the thinking process as meaningful to themselves. This intrinsic motivation serves as the foundation for the sustainable development of critical thinking, not merely as an academic skill, but as an intellectual and moral disposition [22].

Thus, the implementation of integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga demonstrates a learning model that effectively fosters students' critical thinking. The novelty of this study lies in the finding that PAI learning, when implemented in a dialogical, contextual manner and grounded in the fulfillment of students' psychological needs, is capable of generating critical thinking that remains aligned with Islamic values. These findings enrich the discourse of Islamic education by showing that the integration of religiosity and critical thinking is not only feasible, but can become a central strength of PAI learning in the contemporary era [30].

3.3 Evaluation of Integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning in Strengthening Students' Reflective Capacity and Critical Attitudes

Evaluation of integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga demonstrates a significant conceptual transformation, shifting from evaluation as a mere tool for measuring learning outcomes to evaluation as a pedagogical process that cultivates students' critical awareness. Evaluation is not positioned as a final, summative stage focused on right-wrong judgments; rather, it functions as a reflective space that enables students to review, evaluate, and continuously refine their modes of thinking [31].

In practice, teachers conduct evaluation through observing the discussion process, assessing the quality of students' arguments, and examining their ability to formulate value-based conclusions from the religious issues discussed. Evaluation is also integrated into classroom interactions through reflective questioning, clarification of arguments, and dialogical feedback [24]. One Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher explained:

"Kami lebih memperhatikan bagaimana siswa berproses, cara mereka berpendapat, dan bagaimana mereka menyimpulkan pelajaran, bukan hanya nilai ulangan" [20].

This statement indicates that evaluation is understood as a means of identifying the development of students' reasoning, rather than merely measuring mastery of content. Teachers assess how students construct arguments, consider differing perspectives, and connect Islamic values

with real-life contexts. In this way, evaluation functions as an instrument for cultivating critical awareness, rather than serving solely as a form of cognitive verification.

Observations of the evaluation process also reveal that teachers deliberately avoid evaluative practices that are pressuring or judgmental in nature. The feedback provided is constructive and dialogical, encouraging students to independently reflect on the strengths and limitations of their own thinking processes. This practice fosters metacognitive awareness, namely students' ability to recognize how they think, evaluate, and make decisions [7].

The impact of this reflective evaluation is clearly evident in changes in students' intellectual attitudes, particularly in how they respond to religious information encountered outside the classroom. Several students reported that they have become more critical and selective when engaging with information obtained from digital media [16]. One student stated:

"Sebelum percaya dengan informasi agama di media sosial, sekarang saya mencoba mencari sumbernya dulu" [32].

This excerpt indicates that the critical thinking skills developed through instructional evaluation do not remain confined to the academic context, but are internalized and manifested in everyday life practices. Students begin to demonstrate evaluative capacities that include source verification, assessment of information validity, and ethical consideration before accepting or disseminating religious content. This represents a concrete form of applied and sustainable critical thinking.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, reflective evaluation that emphasizes constructive feedback directly contributes to the fulfillment of the need for competence. Students feel that their thinking processes are valued, rather than being judged solely on the basis of final outcomes [33]. The sense of competence that emerges from this evaluative experience strengthens students' self-confidence in expressing their views and revising their arguments in a rational manner.

Furthermore, the evaluation of integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI) also plays a role in fostering self-regulated learning, which constitutes a key element in the development of critical thinking. Students learn to control their thinking processes, re-evaluate the decisions they make, and take responsibility for the intellectual and moral stances they demonstrate. This self-regulation becomes the foundation for the development of critical thinking that is not reactive, but reflective and mature [34].

The novelty of this finding lies in the role of evaluation as a medium for the internalization of critical thinking within integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Evaluation not only strengthens the cognitive dimension of critical thinking but also shapes a critical disposition rooted in Islamic values. Students are not directed merely to question, but to weigh, reflect, and adopt responsible positions grounded in Islamic principles.

Thus, the evaluation of integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga functions as a strategic mechanism for shaping students who are critical, reflective, and possess strong character. This finding enriches the discourse of Islamic education by

demonstrating that evaluation, when designed in a humanistic and reflective manner, can serve as a central instrument in fostering critical thinking that is aligned with the moral and spiritual objectives of Islamic education.

3.4 Integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning as a Holistic Model for the Development of Critical Thinking

The discussion of the research findings indicates that integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga operates as a holistic pedagogical model for fostering students' critical thinking skills. This model does not merely emphasize the mastery of religious knowledge, but also focuses on the formation of reflective modes of thinking rooted in values, rationality, and spiritual awareness. Critical thinking in this context is understood as an active process through which students interpret, evaluate, and internalize Islamic teachings in a contextual and responsible manner [35].

The planning stage of instruction serves as an epistemological foundation that determines the direction of the development of critical thinking skills. Integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lesson planning is not prepared merely as an administrative requirement, but is deliberately designed to facilitate higher-order cognitive engagement. The integration of PAI learning materials with students' real-life issues such as ethics in social media use, moral responsibility, and the dynamics of adolescent social interactions creates opportunities for students to connect Islamic teachings with the realities they encounter. This approach is consistent with the view that critical thinking develops optimally when learners are confronted with authentic problems that require reasoning and reflective judgment [2].

Within the framework of Self-Determination Theory developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, such instructional planning reflects the fulfillment of students' autonomy needs. Students are not directed toward a single, dogmatic interpretation, but are instead provided with space to construct understanding through independent and reflective thinking processes. This learning autonomy constitutes an essential prerequisite for the emergence of intrinsic motivation, which, according to Deci and Ryan, serves as the psychological foundation for deep and sustained cognitive engagement [22].

The planning foundation is then consistently realized in classroom implementation. The learning process unfolds in a dialogical and participatory manner, with the teacher assuming the role of a facilitator who guides students' thinking processes through guiding questions, group discussions, and case analysis. This instructional practice demonstrates that the construction of religious knowledge does not occur through one-way transmission, but rather through dialogue and the negotiation of meaning. In line with the Vygotskian perspective, as articulated by Lev Vygotsky, social interaction functions as a crucial medium for the development of higher-order cognitive functions, including critical thinking [36].

From the perspective of *Self-Determination Theory*, the implementation of dialogical learning strengthens the need for relatedness. Open and mutually respectful relationships between teachers and students create a psychologically safe learning environment, enabling students to express critical perspectives without fear of being judged or blamed. This sense of relatedness not only enhances student participation but also reinforces their intellectual courage to formulate and defend arguments rationally. Research by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci (2020) emphasizes that learning environments that support social connectedness contribute significantly to the development of self-regulation and cognitive engagement [37].

The integration of students' lived experiences into Islamic Religious Education (*PAI*) learning demonstrates an innovative dimension in the development of critical thinking. Students are not encouraged to question Islamic teachings through a skeptical lens; rather, they are guided to understand religious values in a reflective and contextualized manner. Critical thinking within integrated *PAI* learning is conceptualized as the ability to assess religious evidence (*dalil*), comprehend contextual realities, and evaluate the moral and social implications of religious teachings. This approach indicates that critical thinking and spirituality are not situated in an antagonistic relationship; instead, they can develop simultaneously and reinforce one another [23].

The assessment dimension further underscores the holistic character of integrated Islamic Religious Education (*PAI*) learning. Assessment is not solely focused on cognitive achievement; rather, it emphasizes the quality of students' reasoning processes, argumentation, and value reflection. Formative and constructive feedback encourages students to reflect on their own patterns of thinking, thereby fostering the development of *metacognitive awareness* [38]. Within the framework of *Self-Determination Theory*, this form of assessment strengthens students' sense of competence, as they perceive themselves as learners in the process of growth and development, rather than being judged exclusively on the basis of final outcomes.

Integrated Islamic Pedagogy for Critical Thinking: A Four-Phase Conceptual Framework

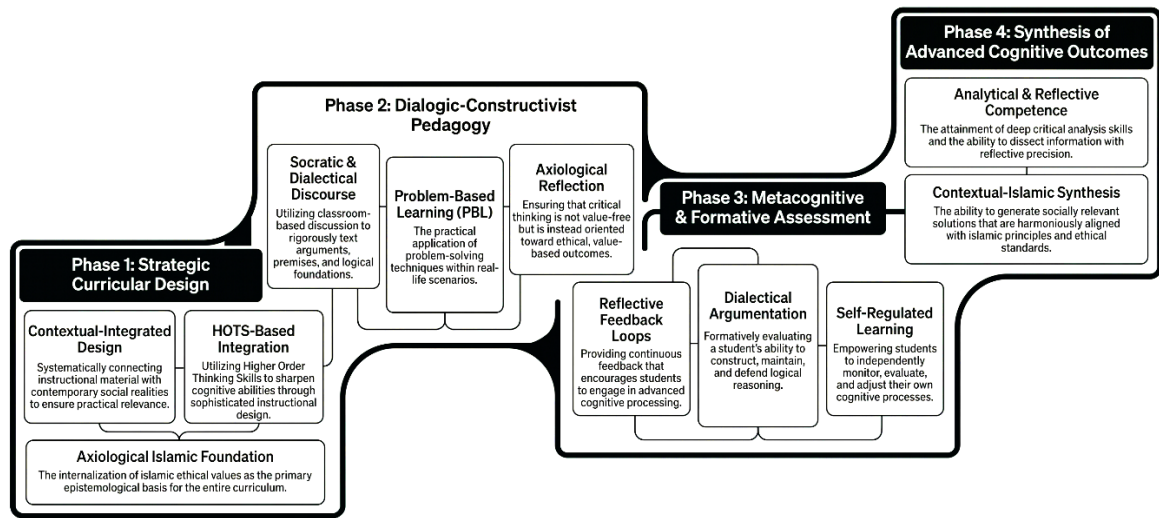


Figure 2. Integrated Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning Process for Enhancing Students' Critical Thinking Skills

Overall, integrated Islamic Religious Education (*PAI*) learning at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga can be understood as a holistic model for fostering critical thinking, integrating instructional design, pedagogical interaction, and reflective assessment into a coherent framework. The novelty of this study lies in its conceptualization of critical thinking as an integrative process encompassing reasoning, values, and spiritual awareness, reinforced by students' intrinsic motivation. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic Religious Education by demonstrating that the development of critical thinking is not incompatible with religious values; rather, it can be optimally cultivated through integrated, dialogical *PAI* learning that is oriented toward fulfilling students' basic psychological needs.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that integrated Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SMA IT Raudhatul Ulum Sakatiga plays a strategic role in fostering students' critical thinking skills through a coherent pedagogical process encompassing instructional planning, dialogical implementation, and reflective formative evaluation. Integrated IRE learning is implemented contextually by connecting Islamic teachings with real-life issues, encouraging students to analyze problems, construct arguments, and reflect on moral implications. Dialogical learning practices, supported by case-based discussions and reflective questioning, position students as active learners who engage critically while remaining grounded in Islamic values.

The novelty of this study lies in its empirical demonstration that critical thinking in Islamic Religious Education can be developed holistically without separating cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions. By integrating the principles of Self-Determination Theory autonomy, competence, and relatedness this research shows that intrinsic motivation serves as a key mechanism supporting sustainable critical thinking development in Islamic learning contexts. The findings extend existing theories of critical thinking by situating them within an integrated Islamic pedagogical framework and contribute to Islamic education discourse by offering a model of PAI learning that is dialogical, reflective, and responsive to contemporary educational challenges.

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