Strategies of Al-Qur'an Hadith Teachers in Developing Students' Critical Thinking Skills Through Thematic Discussions at MAS Islamiyah, Sunggal

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the strategies of Al-Qur'an Hadith teachers in developing students' critical thinking skills through thematic discussions at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal. Critical thinking skills are important to develop so that students are able to analyze problems, construct logical arguments, and draw rational conclusions. Thematic discussions are understood as a learning process that starts from issues or problems that are examined from various perspectives while remaining based on Islamic values. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method through learning observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The results show that learning strategies that are carefully designed, aligned with the school's vision, and oriented towards student activity can encourage the development of critical thinking skills. The application of thematic discussions, linking material to real life contexts, and providing constructive feedback helps students connect arguments with actual problems, compare various views, and draw conclusions independently. Thus, Al-Qur'an Hadith learning does not only focus on mastering material but also shapes a rational and objective mindset based on Islamic values.

Keywords: Teacher Strategies, Students, Al-Qur'an Hadith, Critical Thinking, Thematic Discussions

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Introduction

In the digital and globalized era , education is faced with the need to develop students' critical thinking skills, which include the ability to analyze (Analyzing means the ability of students to break down information or problems into smaller parts), disseminate (Disseminating information in the context of critical thinking is not merely repeating it, but communicating the results of understanding and analysis clearly, systematically, and responsibly) and synthesizing (Synthesizing means combining various pieces of information, ideas, or different points of view into new understandings or conclusions). However, the practice of teaching the Qur'an and Hadith is often still dominated by memorization and one-way lectures, which tend to stifle students' potential for critical thinking [1].

Teachers, as educators who impart knowledge to students in school, are not only responsible for providing knowledge but also for instilling values and attitudes in students so that they develop good character. Teachers act as surrogate parents in the classroom, supervising, guiding, and disciplining students for any violations committed in class [2]. An educator, or teacher, is tasked with teaching and instilling values and attitudes in their students. Teachers apply reflective strategies through thematic discussions to stimulate students' critical thinking, as well as contextual approaches based on religious values [3].

This title was chosen because critical thinking is one of the important skills that students must have in the modern era, including in Islamic religious education. The subject of Al-Qur'an Hadith is not only intended to enable students to memorize verses or hadith, but also to understand the meaning, context, and values contained therein and to be able to relate them to everyday life. Therefore, appropriate learning strategies are needed so that students can think deeply and not passively.

Thematic discussions were chosen because this method provides space for students to actively ask questions, express opinions, analyze the content of verses and hadiths, and respond to their friends' views logically. Through thematic discussions, students are trained to think critically by relating specific themes to the arguments of the Qur'an and Hadith, making learning more meaningful. In addition, this research is important to be conducted at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal to find out how teachers' strategies are applied in the context of Qur'an Hadith learning and to what extent these strategies are able to improve students' critical thinking skills.

At Madrasah Aliyah Swasta (MAS) Islamiyah, as a private Islamic educational institution, Al-Qur'an Hadith teachers are challenged to reveal students' critical thinking skills through a more interactive approach. Thematic discussions, which include discussions of contemporary themes from the perspective of the Qur'an and Sunnah, emerge as a strategic potential. This approach allows teachers to facilitate structured discussions, where students can ask questions, build arguments, and reflect on their understanding, so that critical thinking skills are revealed naturally [4]. According to social constructivism theory, interaction through discussion can enrich students' proximal development zone, where teachers act as mediators who encourage the revelation of students' basic knowledge [5].

Literature Review a. Teacher Strategies

Education is a basic human need and serves as an effort to develop individual potential through the learning process. According to the National Education System Law Number 20 of 2003, Chapter 2, Article 2, national education aims to develop abilities, shape character, and create a dignified nation. In Indonesian, the term education comes from the word "didik" with the prefix "pe" and the suffix "an", which means "action" (thing, way, or so on). The term education originally comes from the Greek word "paedagogie", which means guidance given to children [6]. Islamic education has a strategic role in shaping a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also spiritually and morally mature [7].

Every teacher needs to understand and be skilled in formulating learning objectives because clear objectives can be used to assess the success of the learning process. A learning process is considered successful if students are able to achieve the planned objectives. Success in

achieving these objectives is a success for the teacher in applying strategies during the learning process [8].

In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, strategy means a plan to achieve a specific goal. Meanwhile, in English, we call it a strategy, which means a reason or plan. John M. Echols in HTumiran states that it can be concluded that the definition of strategy in the title of this study is a plan or effort that is carried out continuously by teachers, which involves a series of activities to achieve a goal [9].

A strategy is a pattern that is planned and deliberately established to carry out activities or actions. A strategy includes the objectives of the activity, who is involved in the activity, the content of the activity, the process of the activity, and the means of supporting the activity [10]. A strategy is a broad outline for action in an effort to achieve predetermined goals. When related to teaching and learning, strategy can be interpreted as general patterns of teacher student activities in the implementation of teaching and learning activities to achieve predetermined objectives [11]. Strategy can also be interpreted as a method or technique for acting in an effort to achieve predetermined objectives or targets [12].

b. Al-Qur'an Hadith

The process of learning the Qur'an and Hadith is part of education that aims to shape the personality and morals of students in accordance with Islamic values. According to Mulyasa, Al-Qur'an Hadith learning is not limited to the cognitive realm, but also includes the affective and psychomotor dimensions. This aspect is important because religion-based education is not only about imparting religious knowledge, but also shaping students' behavior and attitudes in their daily routines [13].

The strategy of Al-Qur'an Hadith teachers in developing critical thinking through thematic discussions can be integrated through a model that combines content knowledge (Islam), pedagogy (discussion), and technology (for example, digital platforms for virtual discussions). Teachers must be trained to avoid indoctrination and encourage pluralism of thought, in accordance with the MUI fatwa on inclusive education [14].

c. Critical Thinking

In an educational perspective, in his book How We Think, Dewey emphasizes that critical thinking is not an innate talent, but a skill developed through reflective experience. Dewey distinguishes between routine thinking (everyday problem-solving) and reflective thinking (which involves doubt, inquiry, and hypothesis). This approach is relevant to PAI, where students are invited to reflect on Islamic teachings to resolve contemporary ethical issues, such as religious tolerance or digital ethics [15].

Critical thinking is one of the essential skills in 21st-century education, enabling individuals to analyze, acquire, and synthesize information logically and rationally. Critical thinking is defined as a deliberate and reflective thinking process that involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation [16]. This concept is based on an expert context that emphasizes six core elements: the cognitive ability to identify, assess evidence, and make informed conclusions. In the context of education, critical thinking is not only a tool for problem solving, but also a foundation for ethical decision making and democratic participation.

In the realm of Islamic education, the concept of critical thinking is in line with the principles of ijtihad and tadabbur taught in the Qur'an. As mentioned in QS. Ali Imran: 190191:

اِنَّ فِيْ خَلْقِ ۤ السمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ الَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَاٰيٰتٍ لِّاُولِى الْاَلْبَابِۙ ١٩٠ الَّذِيْنَ يَذْكُرُوْنَ اللّٰهَ قِيَامًا وَّقُعُوْدًا وَّعَلٰى جُنُوْبِهِمْ

وَيَتَفَكَّرُوْنَ فِيْ خَلْقِ ۤ السمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِۚ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هٰذَا بَاطِلًاۚ سُبْحٰنَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ١٩١

Meaning: 190. *"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs for those of understanding 191. (namely) those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, or lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying),*

"Our Lord, You did not create all this in vain. Glorified are You. Protect us from the punishment of the Fire.

In qualitative studies, critical thinking skills are often measured through observation of student behavior, such as their ability to construct arguments or respond to different views [17]. This is relevant to this study, in which the development of critical thinking is explored through a qualitative lens to capture the nuances of the learning process at MAS Islamiyah.

d. Thematic Discussion

Discussion is defined as a process of verbal and collaborative interaction between participants (such as students and teachers) that aims to share knowledge, explore ideas, analyze arguments, and reach mutual conclusions through the exchange of rational views [18]. More specifically, discussions can be classified into various forms, such as small group discussions, panel discussions, or discussions [19], which involve participants in asking questions, providing responses, and reflecting on ideas to overcome problems. In Al-Qur'an Hadith lessons, discussions generally combine Islamic arguments as the main basis for arguments, thus avoiding speculation without evidence.

Thematic comes from the English word "theme," which means "main topic" or "main point." In general, thematic refers to an approach or method that focuses on one central theme as the center for organizing ideas, content, or activities[20]. This approach aims to connect various elements coherently and holistically, rather than separately or fragmentarily. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, thematic is defined as "related to a theme" or "made based on a theme".

Thematic discussion is a learning approach that focuses on discussing contemporary themes from an Islamic perspective. In the modern era, Islamic thematic discussion enables Al Qur'an Hadith teachers to facilitate the development of critical thinking by encouraging students to analyze primary Islamic sources and compare them with reality.

Consulting (wasyāwirhum fīl-amri), Involving them again in decision making. This is a teaching about democracy and respect for the opinions of team members. Consultation ensures that everyone feels valued and has a role. A successful leader must always be gentle, forgive the mistakes of team members, involve them in deliberations to make decisions, and after a decision is made, he must be confident and surrender his success to Allah. As mentioned in QS Ali 'Imran verse 159:

فبَمَا
رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ ٱللِ لِنْتَ لهُمْۚ وَلوْ كُنْتَ ف ظَا َغَلِيْظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوْا مِنْ حَوْلِكَۖفَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِى الْاَمْرِۚ
فَاِذَا
عَزَمْتَ فتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱللِۗاِ َّن ٱللَ يحُبُّ ب الْمُتَوَكِّلِيْنَ ٩٥١

Meaning: *"So, by the grace of Allah, you (Prophet Muhammad) are gentle towards them. If you were harsh and hard-hearted, they would surely turn away from you. Therefore, forgive them, ask forgiveness for them, and consult with them in all (important) matters. Then, when you have made up your mind, put your trust in Allah. Verily, Allah loves those who put their trust in Him."*

Research Methodology

The type of research in this study is descriptive qualitative research. This research uses qualitative methods conducted at Islamiyah Sunggal from December to January. Data collection will utilize methods through Participatory Observation in the school/foundation environment, Semi-Structured Interviews with key informants (principals, Al-Qur'an hadith teachers, 12th grade students), and Documentation to verify and complete the findings of the case study. Therefore, this research procedure will produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. Through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, this research was conducted at MAS Islamiyah, Sunggal.

Results 1. Teachers' Strategies in Al-Qur'an Hadith Instruction

Research at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal revealed that the development of students' critical thinking skills through the Al-Qur'an Hadith subject is carried out systematically. The principal explained the vision and mission of the school at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal. Based on the results of an interview with the principal, Mrs. Rinawaty, on Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. Western Indonesian Time, she said that:

> "This school has a primary vision to produce superior human resources who are faithful, have good character, are devout, and are environmentally conscious. To achieve this vision, the school implements several strategic missions, including improving the quality of educators through continuous professional training and providing in-depth Islamic character building for all students. In addition, developing student potential is a priority by encouraging and facilitating their talents and interests so that they can develop optimally."

Interviews with Mrs. Rinawaty revealed that MAS Islamiyah Sunggal has made systematic efforts to develop students' critical thinking skills. These efforts are reflected in the alignment of the school's vision with classroom teaching practices. The school's commitment is not only stated in its vision but also realized through its mission, which focuses on improving teacher competence and implementing active learning. The shift from conventional learning methods to a more interactive approach allows Al-Qur'an Hadis teachers to guide students to not only memorize the material, but also understand and examine the values contained therein. The support of school facilities and the strengthening of Islamic character also create a conducive learning environment for the development of students' critical thinking skills in balance with the formation of good character.

Ms. Rina also said that:

> "The school also implements special policies that support active learning methods, especially through thematic discussions in class, including in Al-Qur'an Hadith learning. The school has a policy that encourages teachers to implement active and student-centered learning. This is realized through the preparation of lesson plans that emphasize learning models such as discussions, question and answer sessions, and group work. Facilities such as discussion rooms and the use of technology such as Infocus are provided to support collaborative interaction between students. The main focus of this method is to instill problem-based critical thinking skills."

Based on the interview results, the researcher assessed that MAS Islamiyah Sunggal has implemented the school's vision into operational learning policies, one of which is through the preparation of student-oriented lesson plans. The application of thematic discussion, question and answer, and group work methods in Al-Qur'an Hadith learning is carried out in a planned manner to encourage the active role of students in the learning process. In addition, the availability of supporting facilities such as discussion rooms and the use of Infocus media also supports the creation of more dynamic learning interactions, so that the classroom atmosphere becomes more effective and less monotonous.

2. Implementation of Thematic Discussions in Al-Qur'an Hadith Learning

Thematic discussions are carried out by dividing students into small groups. Each group is given a problem or sub-theme to analyze based on predetermined verses from the Qur'an and hadith. Students are asked to discuss the meaning of the verses, relate them to real life, and formulate conclusions which are then presented in front of the class.

Based on the results of an interview with the Al-Qur'an Hadith teacher, Mr. Egy, on Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. Western Indonesian Time, he said.

> "In selecting relevant and challenging themes, I always try to draw a straight line between sacred texts and the contemporary realities faced by students, such as the issue of social media ethics or environmental preservation from an Islamic

> perspective. The chosen theme must have a "discussion gap," meaning that the material allows room for healthy differences in interpretation while remaining within the corridor of Sharia law. In this way, students feel that Al-Qur'an Hadith lessons are not just about the past, but rather a tool for life that challenges their critical thinking skills in responding to current issues."

The researchers assessed that the learning approach applied by Pak Egy in the Qur'an Hadith subject is a contextual learning strategy that encourages the development of students' higher-order thinking skills. Linking Qur'an Hadith material to current issues, such as social media ethics and environmental awareness, helps students understand that the subject matter is not only to be memorized but also to be analyzed and applied in everyday life. Providing space for guided discussion is an important factor in training students' critical thinking, as they are encouraged to express and respond to differences of opinion in an argumentative manner.

He also said that the biggest challenge in managing arguments is maintaining emotional stability and focus on the discussion. Sometimes, the students' high enthusiasm makes their arguments too subjective or even stray far from the original text. Managing this diversity of opinions requires me to be an agile moderator. I must be able to bring their focus back to the argument without stifling their creative thinking. Keeping the discussion objective and not ending up in a heated debate is an art in itself in teaching critical thinking in religious education classes.

Regarding the success of this learning process, the Al-Qur'an Hadith teacher, Mr. Egy, on Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. Western Indonesian Time, said:

> "Regarding success indicators, I assess students' critical thinking skills through several main criteria. First, their ability to construct logical and coherent arguments (not just talking randomly). Second, the extent to which they are able to relate one argument to the context of the problem appropriately. If a student is able to draw strong independent conclusions after comparing various points of view, that is where I am confident that their critical thinking skills have grown."

Researchers assess that establishing criteria for logical and coherent arguments is an important reference in maintaining students' critical thinking process so that it remains rational and focused. Students' ability to relate arguments to the context of the problem and draw conclusions based on comparisons of various points of view shows that learning the Qur'an and Hadith has encouraged the achievement of higher-level thinking skills. Therefore, the development of students' critical thinking is reflected in the maturity of their reasoning in analyzing problems and synthesizing their thoughts independently, objectively, and in accordance with Sharia values.

3. Student Responses to Thematic Discussion Strategies

Based on the interview results, most students responded positively to the implementation of thematic discussions. Students stated that Al-Qur'an Hadith learning became more interesting, easier to understand, and provided opportunities for deep thinking. Thematic discussions also made students more courageous in expressing their opinions and respecting the views of others.

The effectiveness of the thematic discussion strategy in stimulating critical thinking was also confirmed by the students. Based on the results of an interview with Mukhtadar Majed (January 21, 2026), it was revealed that the role of teachers in providing post-discussion evaluations was a key factor in sharpening the analytical skills of 12th grade students. On Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at 10:30 a.m. Western Indonesian Time, Majed stated:

> "The teacher always provides very clear feedback after the discussion session ends. He does not just agree or disagree, but explains where our thinking is wrong and adds new perspectives that we had not thought of before. This feedback helps me to think more critically, because I now know that a verse or hadith can be viewed from various perspectives."

Researchers assessed that the provision of constructive and dialogical feedback by teachers plays an important role in developing students' metacognitive abilities at MAS Islamiyah

Sunggal. The process of evaluating Al-Qur'an Hadith learning does not only focus on assessing right or wrong, but also on retracing students' thought processes to correct logical errors. The presentation of alternative perspectives by teachers helps students understand the diversity of perspectives in interpreting verses of the Qur'an and hadith.

Conclusion

The Al-Qur'an Hadith learning strategy at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal is implemented in a planned manner and is in line with the school's vision and student-oriented learning policies. Through thematic discussions, linking the material to everyday life, and providing constructive feedback, teachers encourage students to think more critically and analytically. The students' ability to connect arguments with real issues, compare different views, and draw conclusions independently shows that learning has led to higher-level thinking. Thus, Al-Qur'an Hadith learning does not only focus on mastering the material but also shapes a rational and objective mindset based on Islamic values.

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