

Problem-Based Learning Model Based on Contemporary Issues to Improve Students' Critical Thinking in Islamic Cultural History Lectures

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ABSTRACT

Critical thinking is a core competency higher education must cultivate, yet instruction in the History of Islamic Civilization (SKI) course remains dominated by rote memorization of historical chronologies rather than analytical engagement. Prior studies applying Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in SKI have largely measured quantitative outcomes without examining how critical thinking develops through the learning process, nor have they integrated contemporary socio-religious issues as a basis for learning problems. This study aims to describe the implementation of contemporary issue-based PBL in the SKI course over 14 sessions and to analyze the development of students' critical thinking across five dimensions: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation. A descriptive qualitative case study was employed, involving seven purposively selected students and the course lecturer. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, with validity established through triangulation and member checking. Findings show that PBL was implemented across five stages, integrating five contemporary issues digital disinformation, polarization, radicalism, Islamophobia, and religious moderation each linked to a corresponding classical Islamic theme. Students exhibited consistent development across all five critical thinking dimensions, moving from superficial to reflective, evidence-based, and cross-temporal reasoning. Islamophobia and religious moderation (wasathiyyah) emerged as particularly effective catalysts for historical reasoning. Implementation was nonetheless constrained by uneven student readiness and limited source access, underscoring the centrality of lecturer facilitation. The study recommends that future research employ longitudinal or multi-site designs to examine the durability of these gains.

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Introduction

Higher education institutions bear the strategic responsibility of preparing graduates who not only master knowledge but are also capable of critical, reflective, and solution-oriented thinking regarding complex issues. Critical thinking skills encompassing interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation are widely recognized as essential 21st-century competencies that must be cultivated through meaningful and contextual learning processes (Alcantar-nieblas et al., 2025; Schmidt et al., 2026). Within the context of the Islamic Religious Education study program, the course on the History of Islamic Civilization should serve as a fertile

ground for developing these skills; its content extends beyond mere narratives of past events to encompass analytical dimensions, source interpretation, cause-and-effect evaluation, and the relevance of values to contemporary life (Azra, 2014).

However, the reality on the ground reveals a significant gap between that potential and actual instructional practices. Research indicates that instruction in the History of Islamic Culture remains dominated by an approach centered on the rote memorization of event chronologies rather than on analytical thinking processes (Rizqi & Abdullah, 2026). Under these conditions, students tend to act as passive recipients of information, thereby limiting opportunities to effectively develop skills in formulating arguments, critically examining narratives, and connecting historical values with contemporary phenomena.

On the other hand, the evolution of contemporary socio-religious issues, ranging from disinformation, identity polarization, and radicalism to shifting values within digital society, is deeply rooted in history and can be traced through an in-depth study of Islamic history. When these issues serve as a gateway for learning, students do not merely study the past; they also learn to interpret contemporary realities through a historical and critical lens. This connection extends beyond mere thematic relevance: contemporary issues require students to interpret the contexts in which problems arise, analyze their historical roots, evaluate the validity of circulating narratives, infer cause-and-effect patterns across eras, and articulate the rationale behind their own stances. Consequently, these five dimensions of critical thinking are cultivated simultaneously and reinforce one another, rather than being addressed only in a superficial or general manner (Yu & Zin, 2023).

To address this issue, the Problem-Based Learning model emerges as a relevant pedagogical alternative. This model positions real-world problems as catalysts for learning and encourages students to engage actively in processes of investigation, argumentation, and knowledge construction (Jonassen, 2010). Investigating real-world problems also fosters more meaningful collaboration, where students test each other's ideas and build a shared understanding; consequently, the resulting conceptual understanding tends to be deeper and more enduring, as it is constructed through actual experience rather than passively received (Delvia et al., 2026).

Studies regarding the implementation of Problem-Based Learning in the teaching of Islamic Cultural History have indeed been conducted, yet they generally stop at measuring quantitative outcomes. Research has described the correlation between the implementation of Problem-Based Learning and students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Cultural History classes at the Islamic senior high school, but it has not revealed how the critical thinking process develops stage by stage (Bariyah et al., 2022). Another study compared the effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning with the Think-Pair-Share model regarding critical thinking skills in the same subject; however, its focus was on comparing outcomes between the models rather than the dynamics of the critical thinking process itself (Wahyuni et al., 2025). Meanwhile, research concerning the link between Problem-Based Learning and critical thinking development in a broader sense has not yet addressed the context of Islamic Religious Education or integrated contemporary issues as the basis for learning problems (Widiastuti et al., 2023).

These three studies demonstrate that research on Problem-Based Learning within the context of Islamic Cultural History education has largely focused on the quantitative measurement of learning outcomes, failing to address the qualitative processes and dynamics of critical thinking development, particularly when grounded in contemporary issues. This gap establishes the rationale for the present study. Unlike previous research, this study offers a novel contribution by conducting a qualitative analysis that specifically explores the processes and patterns of critical thinking development among Islamic Religious Education students through the implementation of contemporary issue-based Problem-Based Learning in Islamic Cultural History courses.

Based on the description above, this study aims to: (1) describe the implementation of a contemporary issue-based Problem-Based Learning model in the History of Islamic Culture course for sixth-semester Islamic Religious Education students over the course of 14 sessions; and (2) analyze the development of students' critical thinking skills through the application of this model, examined across the dimensions of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to describe the implementation of a contemporary issue-based Problem-Based Learning model in the History of Islamic Culture course and to analyze the development of critical thinking skills among Islamic Religious Education students over the course of 14 sessions, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument (Sugiyono, 2024). The research was conducted in the classroom during the instruction of the History of Islamic Culture course. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: being an active student enrolled in the course, attending all 14 sessions without absence, and demonstrating an interest in the subject matter as identified through the lecturer's diagnostic assessment. Based on these criteria, seven students were selected as primary participants, while the course lecturer was involved as a supporting informant.

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2021). In-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes each were conducted with the seven participants and the course lecturer, focusing on the participants' experiences during each stage of Problem-Based Learning and their critical thinking processes. Participatory observations covered the five phases of Problem-Based Learning, namely, orienting students to the problem, organizing students for learning, guiding individual and group investigations, developing and presenting work, and analyzing and evaluating the problem-solving process (Arends, 2012), and were carried out during four of the fourteen sessions selected to represent the initial, middle, and final stages of the model's implementation. Documentation involved course modules and student work in the form of student discussion sheets. Data validity was verified through source triangulation (comparing data from the seven participants and the lecturer), technique triangulation (comparing interview results with observations and documentation), and member checking (confirming the researcher's interpretations with participants to ensure alignment with their experiences).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), proceeding cyclically throughout the study. Data derived from interviews, observations, and documentation were compiled after each data collection session and subsequently condensed by selecting and categorizing segments relevant to the five dimensions of critical thinking interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation based on the specific stages of Problem-Based Learning where they emerged. The condensed data were presented in a progression matrix mapping the manifestation of each dimension for every participant from the initial meeting to the final observation; the identified patterns were then verified through triangulation and member checking before being formulated into the study's final findings.

Result

Implementation of Contemporary Issue-Based PBL in the History of Islamic Civilization Course

Implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in the History of Islamic Civilization (SKI) course is structured around five stages: problem orientation based on contemporary issues, organizing students for inquiry, source investigation and analysis, development and presentation of results, and evaluation and reflection. Five contemporary issues are integrated into the course material, namely digital disinformation, socio-religious polarization, radicalism, Islamophobia, and religious moderation. Each issue is deliberately linked to a corresponding theme within classical Islamic scholarship: digital disinformation corresponds to the tradition of sanad (chain of transmission) and matan (textual content) criticism in Hadith studies; radicalism and polarization correspond to classical sectarian dynamics such as the Kharijite schism; Islamophobia corresponds to colonial historiography and Orientalism; and religious moderation (wasathiyah) corresponds to the religious practices of the early Muslim community.

Field data indicate that students responded positively to this learning model. BG stated, "*In the past, the History of Islamic Civilization course felt like nothing more than memorizing dates and names of historical figures. With PBL, however, we discuss contemporary issues, such as the Islamic resurgence in Southeast Asia, and link them to historical dynamics, which makes the course far more*

engaging." Echoing this sentiment, RZ remarked, *"This model has truly changed the way I view SKI. I have come to realize that history is not merely about rote memorization, but serves as an analytical tool for understanding the world."*

Development of Students' Critical Thinking Dimensions

Regarding the interpretation dimension, students' understanding shifted from a superficial view of contemporary issues toward a more reflective-normative interpretation by linking these issues to Islamic historical perspectives. This shift is evident in NR's statement: *"We were asked to independently seek out historical sources relevant to the issues assigned by the lecturer and then discuss them in groups. The process was indeed demanding, but the learning outcomes were more meaningful."*

In the analysis dimension, student reasoning moved from a linear-narrative pattern toward multi-domain analysis. MS illustrated this through his experience examining the issue of extremism, stating, *"The issue that left the greatest impression on me was transnational Islamic movements, such as ISIS, and their connection to the history of the Kharijites during the classical Islamic era. This understanding helped me analyze the phenomenon of contemporary radicalism more objectively."* Similarly, BG noted that he became *"far more critical when reading historical sources" after realizing that "every source carries a certain bias, so we need to compare various sources before drawing conclusions."*

The evaluation dimension showed the most dynamic development among the five dimensions. At the start of the course, KR admitted to struggling with distinguishing personal opinion from evidence-based analysis, noting, *"I found it difficult to differentiate between personal opinion and evidence-based analysis. I was often tempted to jump to conclusions based on my own beliefs rather than on the available historical data."* However, as the PBL process progressed, the students' evaluative abilities improved. MA stated, *"My critical thinking skills improved, particularly regarding the evaluation of sources. I became more selective in choosing references and more critical of information circulating on social media concerning Islamic issues."*

Regarding the inference dimension, student reasoning evolved from drawing normative conclusions toward making cross-temporal inferences. MA described this shift by stating, *"I became more accustomed to a thought process involving problem identification, data collection, analysis, and finally drawing conclusions. This pattern is useful not only for the SKI course but for other courses as well."*

The explanatory dimension, considered the most integrative of the five, was primarily developed through group presentations. MA explained, *"Each group presented its analysis of a contemporary issue from the perspective of Islamic history, followed by responses from other groups. This practice fostered confidence in speaking and defending arguments."*

Contemporary Issues as Catalysts for Discussion

Informants consistently identified several contemporary issues as the most memorable and engaging topics discussed in class, including radicalism, Islamophobia, the status of women in Islam, the relationship between Islam and democracy, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Regarding the latter, MA explained that situating the conflict within its historical trajectory enabled a more comprehensive understanding: *"Understanding its historical roots from the Umayyad era to the British Mandate allows me to view the issue comprehensively and avoid being easily swayed by one-sided narratives."*

Among these issues, Islamophobia and religious moderation (*wasathiyyah*) emerged as particularly effective in fostering critical-historical reasoning, albeit through distinct mechanisms. As illustrated in MA's account above, discussions of Islamophobia encouraged students to trace how colonial-era narratives had shaped, and continue to shape, Western perceptions of Islam. Religious moderation, by contrast, functioned less as a discrete topic than as an interpretive framework: informants described it as a reference point against which other issues including radicalism, polarization, and Islamophobia itself could be evaluated in a more balanced manner.

Factors Hindering and Supporting Implementation

Several factors were identified as obstacles to implementing issue-based PBL centered on contemporary topics. These included uneven student readiness for independent learning, difficulties in locating and evaluating credible sources, unequal group participation, limited access

to references and journals, and underdeveloped presentation skills. Such challenges are consistent with KR's earlier statement regarding the difficulty of distinguishing personal opinion from evidence-based analysis, suggesting that source literacy remained a persistent constraint across informants' experiences.

Conversely, two factors were identified as central to supporting implementation. First, the lecturer's role as a facilitator was critical in guiding discussions on sensitive contemporary issues while ensuring they remained within academic boundaries. Second, the structured format of group presentations and inter-group responses provided students with consistent, recurring opportunities to practice formulating and defending evidence-based arguments.

Discussion

1. Implementation of Contemporary Issue-Based PBL in the Islamic Cultural History Course

The implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) centered on contemporary issues within the History of Islamic Civilization (SKI) course is structured across five stages: (1) problem orientation based on contemporary issues; (2) organizing students for investigation; (3) investigation and source analysis; (4) development and presentation of results; and (5) evaluation and reflection (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980). The integrated contemporary issues include digital disinformation, socio-religious polarization, radicalism, Islamophobia, and religious moderation.

The selection of these five issues was not arbitrary; rather, it was based on their connections to historical roots within the Islamic scholarly tradition, thereby serving as a bridge between historical reasoning and critical thinking. Digital disinformation is linked to the tradition of *sanad* (chain of transmission) and *matan* (textual content) criticism in the science of Hadith; the roots of radicalism and socio-religious polarization are traced to classical sectarian dynamics, such as the Kharijite schism; Islamophobia is examined through the lens of colonial historiography and Orientalism; and religious moderation (*wasathiyyah*) is traced back to the religious practices of early Islamic generations. Within this framework, each issue serves not merely as a topic for contemporary discussion but also as a means to train students in sourcing, contextualization, and the corroboration of historical sources—practices essential to historical reasoning (Umanah, 2024).

In general, students responded positively to this model. This is reflected in BG's statement: *"In the past, the History of Islamic Civilization (SKI) course felt like a matter of memorizing dates and the names of historical figures. However, with PBL, we discuss contemporary issues, such as the resurgence of Islam in Southeast Asia, and link them to historical dynamics. This makes me much more interested."* Echoing this sentiment, RZ stated: *"This model has truly changed the way I view SKI. I've come to realize that history is not merely about rote memorization, but rather an analytical tool for understanding the world."*

These findings align with Hmelo-Silver (2004) argument that PBL fosters higher levels of cognitive engagement compared to conventional instruction. However, the present study extends this argument by demonstrating that the cognitive engagement involved is not generic; rather, it is specifically directed toward historical reasoning, as contemporary issues compel students to continuously contextualize past events in order to comprehend present-day matters. These findings also reinforce and expand upon the results of study regarding the importance of contextual relevance, while adding the critical caveat that such relevance must be anchored in a historical epistemological framework to prevent learning from being reduced to mere thematic actualization devoid of sharpened historical thinking methods (Yoon, 2026).

2. The Development of Critical Thinking Dimensions Among University Students

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, the development of students' critical thinking can be identified across five dimensions following the framework of Hmelo-Silver (2004): interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation. The development of each dimension is outlined as follows:

a. Dimensions of Interpretation

Students' interpretive abilities evolved from a superficial understanding toward normative reflection. At the beginning of the course, students tended to view contemporary issues in isolation from Islamic values. However, as the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) process progressed, they

began to connect these issues with historical Islamic perspectives. NR stated: *"We were asked to independently find historical sources relevant to the issues assigned by the lecturer and then discuss them in groups. The process was indeed demanding, but the learning outcomes were more meaningful."*

The shift from surface interpretation to reflective-normative interpretation is consistent with recent understandings of contextualization in historical thinking. Contextualization involves placing an issue, source, or historical actor within the temporal, spatial, social, and ideological conditions that shaped its production and meaning (Kainulainen et al., 2025; Steiss et al., 2024). Although (Yoon, 2026) emphasize contextual relevance in general terms, the field data in this study indicate that contextualization becomes more substantial when students independently locate, select, and evaluate primary sources.

b. Dimensions of Analysis

Students' analytical skills evolve from a linear-narrative pattern toward multi-domain analysis. MS illustrates this development through his experience examining the issue of extremism: *"The issue that left the greatest impression on me was transnational Islamic movements, such as ISIS and their connection to the history of the Kharijites during the classical Islamic era. This understanding helps me analyze the phenomenon of contemporary radicalism more objectively."* Meanwhile, BG states: *"I have become far more critical when reading historical sources. I learned that every source carries a certain bias, so we need to compare various sources before drawing conclusions."*

The excerpt from MS explicitly demonstrates how the issue of radicalism contributes to historical and critical reasoning: by drawing a genealogical line between the classical Kharijites and contemporary transnational movements, students engage in the processes of sourcing and corroboration, examining connections across sources and time periods rather than accepting a single narrative (Wilke et al., 2023). Meanwhile, BG's statement underscores the growing awareness of source bias (source criticism), a competency that supports authentic problem-solving in problem-based learning (PBL), particularly when students must evaluate evidence, compare perspectives, and formulate justifications based on available sources (Yu & Zin, 2023). These findings deepen, rather than merely confirm, Hung's argument by revealing a specific mechanism, cross-source historical comparison, that bridges contemporary issues with analytical competence.

c. Evaluation dimensions

The evaluative dimension demonstrated the most dynamic development. At the beginning of the course, students' assessments tended to be dichotomous and rooted in ideological affiliations. KR acknowledged this challenge: *"I struggled to distinguish between personal opinion and evidence-based analysis. I was often tempted to jump to conclusions based on my own beliefs rather than on the available historical data."* However, as the PBL process unfolded, the students' evaluative skills improved. MA stated: *"My critical thinking skills have improved, particularly regarding the evaluation of sources. I have become more selective in choosing references and more critical of information circulating on social media concerning Islamic issues."*

The evolution of this evaluative dimension is most clearly evident in the context of digital disinformation: the participant's (MA) remarks regarding the need for caution with social media information demonstrate a direct transfer of historical source evaluation skills to digital literacy competencies. These findings extend Hmelo-Silver (2004) argument regarding Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a driver of cognitive engagement by showing that such engagement can be cross-contextual, transferring from the academic realm to students' everyday lives as social media users. Meanwhile, the difficulty expressed by another participant (KR), a tendency to base conclusions on personal beliefs, aligns with challenges identified in PBL literature as consequences of issues being ill-structured and ideologically charged (Yu & Zin, 2023). These findings confirm that the progression toward critical-epistemic evaluation is not linear but involves a phase of cognitive dissonance, which some students perceive as a source of difficulty rather than merely a positive stimulus.

d. Inference Dimension

The students' inferential abilities evolved from drawing normative conclusions toward making cross-temporal inferences. MA described this shift in mindset: *"I became more accustomed to a thought process involving problem identification, data collection, analysis, and finally, drawing*

conclusions. This pattern is useful not only in the History of Islamic Civilization (SKI) course but in other courses as well."

This ability to draw cross-temporal conclusions reflects an inferential achievement consistent with historical thinking competencies, specifically, the capacity to reconstruct historical contexts, compare phenomena across time, and utilize knowledge of the past to understand cause-and-effect relationships and diverse perspectives (Miralles-sánchez et al., 2020). Furthermore, these findings confirm that the cross-temporal inferences observed in this study did not emerge spontaneously; rather, they were cultivated through the repeated application of the PBL cycle across multiple sessions. This aligns with Hmelo-Silver (2004) emphasis that high-level cognitive competence requires repeated exposure to authentic problems rather than a single assignment. The systematic mindset described by MA, problem identification, data collection, analysis, and conclusion, also demonstrates that historical inference in this study developed in tandem with, and is inseparable from, the dimensions of analysis and evaluation discussed earlier.

e. Explanatory Dimension

The explanation dimension is the most integrative, as it requires students to synthesize all other dimensions of critical thinking. MA illustrates this process through the experience of group presentations: *"Each group presents its analysis of a contemporary issue from the perspective of Islamic history, after which other groups provide responses. This practice fosters the confidence to speak and defend arguments."*

This forum for inter-group presentations and responses serves as a space for articulation a concept deemed crucial by Hmelo-Silver (2004) for transforming reasoning from an internal, cognitive process into something explicit and open to social scrutiny. Thus, the explanation dimension in this study represents more than just public speaking ability; it serves as an indicator that the four preceding dimensions, interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, have been integrated into a coherent historical argument that is academically sound.

3. The Role of Contemporary Issues as a Catalyst for Critical Thinking

Contemporary issues have been shown to serve as authentic problems that generate productive cognitive dissonance for students (Wang et al., 2023). All informants cited specific, highly memorable issues, ranging from radicalism, Islamophobia, the status of women in Islam, and the relationship between Islam and democracy, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. MA stated: *"Understanding the historical roots, from the Umayyad era through the British Mandate, allows me to view this issue more comprehensively and avoid being easily swayed by one-sided narratives."* These findings align with Doorselaere (2025), who notes that history learning becomes more meaningful when students connect contemporary issues with authentic historical inquiry, relevant learning experiences, and the analysis of evidence and past contexts.

More specifically, two issues whose contributions were not addressed in the previous section, Islamophobia and religious moderation, offer distinct mechanisms for fostering students' critical-historical reasoning. The issue of Islamophobia, as illustrated by the quote from MA above, encourages students to engage in historiographical deconstruction: tracing how colonial narratives dating back to the British Mandate era have shaped Western perceptions of Islam. This process trains students to recognize the biases inherent in a source author's perspective, moving beyond mere factual bias to understand the author's standpoint. Religious moderation (*wasathiyyah*), on the other hand, serves as an evaluative framework that helps students assess other issues such as radicalism, polarization, and Islamophobia in a balanced manner; it acts as an "axis" that integrates the other four issues into a coherent analytical framework. Thus, the contributions of these four issues to critical-historical reasoning are complementary: disinformation hones source evaluation; radicalism fosters genealogical analysis; Islamophobia cultivates historiographical deconstruction; and religious moderation facilitates cross-issue evaluative synthesis.

4. Factors Hindering and Supporting Implementation

Research findings indicate that implementing Problem-Based Learning (PBL) centered on contemporary issues presents challenges regarding students' readiness for independent learning, their ability to locate and evaluate sources, collaborative teamwork, and the construction of evidence-based arguments. The difficulty in distinguishing personal opinions from evidence-based analysis suggests that students require not only an understanding of the issues at hand but also

proficiency in information literacy and historical reasoning. Issues such as limited references, restricted journal access, uneven group participation, and underdeveloped presentation skills further highlight that PBL implementation must be accompanied by the cultivation of independent learning habits and a clear division of responsibilities within groups. In the context of sensitive contemporary issues, the lecturer plays a crucial role as a facilitator, guiding discussions to ensure they remain within an academic framework rather than devolving into a mere exchange of opinions.

This situation demonstrates that the challenges encountered during PBL implementation are, in fact, integral to the process of developing students' critical thinking skills. Difficulties in evaluating evidence provide an opportunity for students to learn how to scrutinize information and construct arguments, while openness to diverse perspectives supported by lecturer facilitation can transform differing viewpoints into a process of reflection and reasoning. This aligns with the view that PBL fosters critical thinking by engaging students in the analysis and resolution of problems (Delvia et al., 2026; Loyens et al., 2023; Riyanto et al., 2024). Consequently, the success of contemporary issue-based PBL in Islamic Cultural History (SKI) courses depends not only on the selection of current issues but also on the ability to link these issues with historical reasoning, the use of evidence, multi-perspective discussion, and lecturer guidance.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the implementation of contemporary issue-based Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in the History of Islamic Civilization (SKI) course provides an effective pedagogical pathway for cultivating students' critical thinking skills. By anchoring five contemporary issues digital disinformation, radicalism, socio-religious polarization, Islamophobia, and religious moderation to their corresponding roots within the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, the PBL model enabled students to move beyond the rote memorization of historical events toward an analytical engagement grounded in historical reasoning.

Across the five dimensions of critical thinking examined, students exhibited a consistent developmental trajectory: interpretation shifted from superficial to reflective-normative understanding; analysis progressed from linear narratives to multi-domain, cross-source reasoning; evaluation matured from ideologically driven judgment toward evidence-based assessment, albeit through a nonlinear process marked by cognitive dissonance; inference evolved from normative conclusions to cross-temporal reasoning; and explanation developed through the social articulation of arguments in group presentations. Notably, each contemporary issue was found to cultivate a distinct facet of historical reasoning: digital disinformation honed source evaluation, radicalism fostered genealogical analysis, Islamophobia enabled historiographical deconstruction, and religious moderation functioned as an integrative evaluative framework indicating that the five dimensions of critical thinking were not developed in isolation but reinforced one another through the specific character of each issue.

Nevertheless, implementation was not without constraints. Uneven student readiness for independent learning, limited access to credible references, unequal group participation, and underdeveloped presentation skills posed persistent challenges, underscoring that the success of issue-based PBL depends not only on the relevance of the selected issues but also on sustained lecturer facilitation and the deliberate cultivation of information literacy and collaborative learning habits.

Theoretically, these findings extend existing PBL scholarship by demonstrating that cognitive engagement in historical education is not generic but issue-specific, mediated by the particular historical genealogy each contemporary issue invokes. Practically, the findings suggest that lecturers designing SKI curricula should deliberately pair contemporary issues with corresponding classical Islamic themes and provide structured scaffolding particularly in source literacy and argumentation to support students whose independent-learning readiness remains uneven. As this study was limited to a single case involving seven students over one semester, future research employing longitudinal or multi-site designs is recommended to examine the durability of these critical-thinking gains and their transferability across other Islamic higher education contexts.

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