

## BRIDGING TRADITION AND MULTICULTURALISM IN ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE EDUCATION

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the development of fiqh education at Ma'had Aly Situbondo, an Islamic boarding school that integrates a multi-madhab approach with democratic pedagogy and multicultural education. This study aims to identify how the multi-madhab curriculum and democratic learning methods improve students' fiqh competence and intercultural skills. This approach focuses on more inclusive and adaptive learning, in line with the needs of contemporary multicultural societies. The methodology used is a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. The main data sources are curriculum documentation, interviews with educators, administrators, and students, as well as participatory observation at Ma'had Aly Situbondo. The research population involves Ma'had Aly Situbondo students with a purposively selected sample. Qualitative data analysis techniques used thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests to measure changes in student competence before and after participating in the multi-madhab curriculum programme. The findings show a significant increase in fiqh understanding, fiqh application skills, and student confidence in making decisions based on a multi-madhab perspective.

### Keywords

Islamic Jurisprudence Education, Democratic Pedagogy, Multicultural Education, Progressive Pedagogy, Mixed-Methods Approach.



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## INTRODUCTION

The landscape of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) education within pesantren institutions is undergoing significant transformation, especially with the increasing diversity of student backgrounds and societal expectations. In particular, the introduction of a multi-madhab approach alongside democratic and multicultural pedagogies has begun to shape how new students (MABA) engage with the curriculum. Historically, pesantren have emphasized teacher-centered learning and a dominant focus on the Shafi'i madhab, which may have limited students' critical engagement with diverse jurisprudential perspectives. As a result, many MABA entering pesantren institutions today may face challenges in adapting to a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to fiqh education, which requires a broader understanding of Islamic law across different schools of thought. This shift towards multi-madhab and democratic pedagogies is essential in bridging the gap between traditional religious education and the contemporary needs of multicultural societies.

For MABA, the challenge is not only to acquire traditional knowledge but also to learn how to engage with and respect diverse cultural, religious, and jurisprudential perspectives. This dual demand necessitates a radical shift from the conventional, mono-madhab, and teacher-centered pedagogy that has long characterized much of pesantren education. In response to this urgent need, pesantren such as Ma'had Aly Situbondo have become pioneering institutions by implementing a distinctive pedagogical framework. Its methodology integrates a multi-madhab curriculum with democratic learning principles, deliberately fostering student-centered classrooms, dialogical discourse, and critical engagement with a plurality of Islamic legal opinions. This integrated approach is crucial as it does not merely aim to transfer academic knowledge of fiqh; more importantly, it actively nurtures the intercultural competence and jurisprudential agility necessary for MABA to navigate and contribute effectively to diverse, modern communities. It is precisely this innovative integration and its tangible impact on students that form the central focus of the present study, addressing a critical gap in the empirical literature on progressive Islamic legal education.

Recent scholarship highlights the urgent need for pesantren to incorporate progressive educational principles such as democratic learning, student-centered pedagogy, and dialogical discourse to nurture critical thinking and adaptability among students (Anisa & Suwendi, 2024; Romadlon et al., 2023). The integration of multi-madhab approaches alongside curriculum diversification has also been proposed to better reflect the pluralistic reality of Muslim societies and enhance legal reasoning skills (Aminuddin, 2020; Maragustam, 2016). Additionally, studies on

pesantren reform emphasize balancing religious sciences with secular knowledge and promoting learning environments that encourage open inquiry and inclusivity (Albert, 2021; Nashrullah et al., 2023).

In addition, some research on multiculturalism highlights how it is integrated into Islamic education, particularly through the multi-madhab curriculum and democratic pedagogy at Ma'had Aly Situbondo. Ardhy (2023) discusses the challenges and benefits of embedding Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in Islamic education. Padil et al. (2021) and Ramdhan & Sholeh (2025) explore how educators incorporate multicultural values into the classroom, while Tambunan et al. (2025) and Irbathy et al. (2025) show how Islamic education fosters interfaith dialogue and community harmony. Bafadhal, Sulhan, and Wahyudiati (2024) emphasize the role of policy frameworks in promoting multiculturalism in Islamic institutions. Together, these studies underline the importance of integrating multiculturalism to encourage social cohesion, tolerance, and pluralistic dialogue, which align with the democratic pedagogies and jurisprudential pluralism explored in this research.

Despite these important advances, there remains a lack of empirical research that closely examines how pesantren institutions concretely implement these progressive pedagogies, specifically in the domain of fiqh education. Ma'had Aly Situbondo offers a unique case as a pesantren-based higher education institution pioneering a multi-madhab fiqh curriculum combined with democratic, dialogical learning methods that foster critical and contextual jurisprudential thinking (Gazali & Malik, 2009; Lulu, 2022; Yasid, 2010). This study addresses the research gap by investigating how Ma'had Aly Situbondo operationalizes these innovations in practice.

The primary aim of this research is to analyze the educational framework and pedagogical strategies employed at Ma'had Aly Situbondo, which facilitate progressive and multicultural fiqh education. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how multi-madhab perspectives are integrated with democratic learning and multicultural pedagogies to promote adaptive and contextual jurisprudence, addressing contemporary social, religious, and multicultural challenges. By examining the implementation of these educational approaches through a mixed-methods framework, this research contributes both theoretically and pragmatically to the discourse on pesantren reform and Islamic legal education modernization. It offers a model that not only bridges classical Islamic scholarship with the needs of modern Muslim societies but also fosters intercultural

competence, preparing students to engage with diverse cultural and religious communities in a globalized world.

## METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore the progressive development of Islamic jurisprudence education at Ma'had Aly Situbondo. The mixed-methods approach is chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the multi-madhab curriculum and democratic learning methods on students' academic and intercultural competencies. The qualitative component focuses on in-depth insights into the educational framework, pedagogical strategies, and student experiences, while the quantitative component measures the effectiveness of the curriculum in fostering adaptive fiqh competence and intercultural skills among students.

Data collection techniques include document analysis, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and surveys. Document analysis involves reviewing institutional curricula, teaching materials, and policy documents to understand the structure and objectives of the multi-madhab curriculum and democratic learning approaches (Bowen, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are conducted with educators, administrators, and students to gather qualitative insights into their perceptions of how multi-madhab and democratic pedagogies promote critical thinking, cultural inclusivity, and adaptive jurisprudence. Participant observation allows the researcher to directly observe classroom dynamics, discussions, and learning activities, providing rich, context-based data (Angrosino, 2011). Surveys and questionnaires are administered to students to quantitatively assess their self-reported changes in competence, understanding, and confidence in applying fiqh across diverse contexts. The table below summarizes the key variables measured in the student surveys to assess their self-reported competencies in different areas.

**Table1.** Overview of Survey and Questionnaire Variables

Variable	Indicator Measured	Measurement Scale	Data Source
Fiqh Competence	Understanding of fiqh principles, application skills	Likert Scale (1-5)	Student Survey
Intercultural Competence	Ability to engage with diverse cultural perspectives	Likert Scale (1-5)	Survey, Observation
Decision-Making Confidence	Confidence in applying fiqh across diverse contexts	Likert Scale (1-5)	Student Survey
Participation in Class Discussions	Active involvement in cross-madhab discussions	Likert Scale (1-5)	Classroom Observation

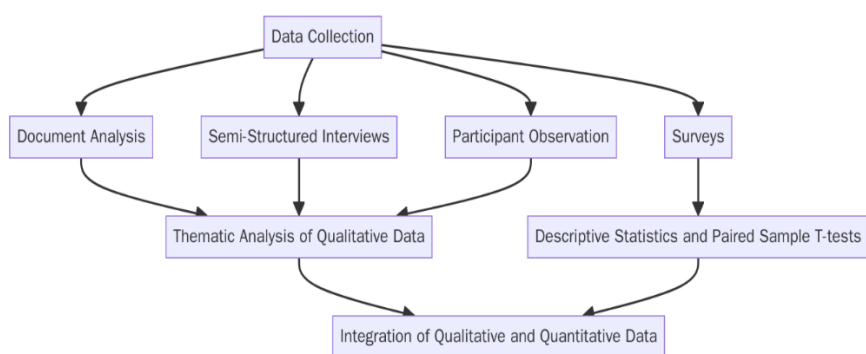
Source: Developed Based on Established Theoretical Frameworks.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a process of coding and categorizing the data into themes that reflect the core aspects of progressive fiqh education at Ma'had Aly Situbondo (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allowed the researcher to identify patterns and relationships within the data, providing an understanding of how multi-madhab perspectives and democratic pedagogy were operationalized in practice.

For quantitative data, descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests were used to analyze the surveys, measuring changes in students' academic performance and intercultural competence before and after participation in the multi-madhab curriculum. This statistical analysis provided objective measurements of the effectiveness of the curriculum and methods.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative data allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how the multi-madhab and democratic pedagogies impact students' competencies. Triangulation of data sources—interviews, surveys, and observations—ensures the credibility and robustness of the findings. By integrating both types of data, the study provides a holistic view of the educational process at Ma'had Aly Situbondo, capturing both the experiential (qualitative) and measurable (quantitative) outcomes.

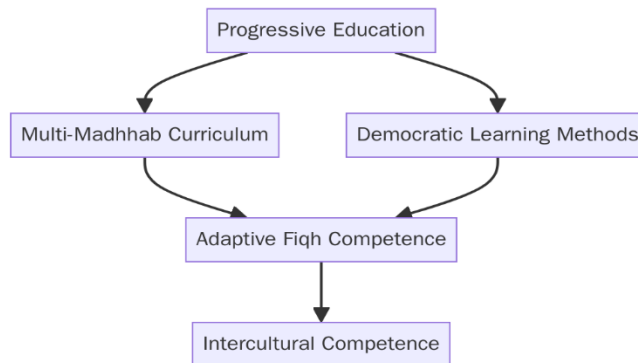
To illustrate the theoretical framework and methodological process applied, the following two diagrams are presented. First, the Data Collection and Analysis Process Diagram illustrates the steps taken in collecting data through document analysis, interviews, participatory observation, and surveys, and how the data was analysed using thematic and statistical analysis methods to produce comprehensive findings.



**Figure 1.** The Data Collection and Analysis Process Diagram Illustrates

The second figure below depicts the Conceptual Framework of Progressive and Multicultural Education, which illustrates the relationship between the main elements in the educational approach implemented at Ma'had Aly Situbondo. The framework highlights how Progressive Education interacts with the Multi-Madhab Curriculum and Democratic Learning

Methods to develop Adaptive Fiqh Competence and Intercultural Competence in students. This diagram shows the interaction between these elements and how they support each other in achieving the goal of inclusive and adaptive education.



**Figure 2.** Concept Map Research

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

The study combined both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the impact of the multi-madhhab curriculum and democratic learning methods at Ma'had Aly Situbondo. The results indicate significant improvements in students' fiqh competence, intercultural competence, and confidence in applying fiqh across different cultural contexts. The findings also suggest that these educational approaches fostered an environment of multicultural inclusivity and critical thinking among students.

### Quantitative Findings: Changes in Student Competencies

The quantitative data collected from surveys and questionnaires demonstrated significant improvements in various competencies among students before and after the intervention. The multi-madhhab curriculum and democratic learning methods played a crucial role in enhancing students' understanding of fiqh principles, their application skills, and their confidence in making decisions based on a multi-madhhab approach. The table below presents the mean scores for different competency domains, comparing the students' self-reported abilities before and after the intervention:

**Table 2.** Changes in Student Competencies Before and After the Multi-Madhhab Curriculum

Competency Domain	Pre-Program Mean Score	Post-Program Mean Score	Percentage Increase
Understanding of Fiqh	3.1	4.0	29.0
Application Skills	3.0	4.2	40.0
Confidence in Decision-Making	3.2	4.1	28.1
Class Discussion Participation	3.3	4.4	33.3

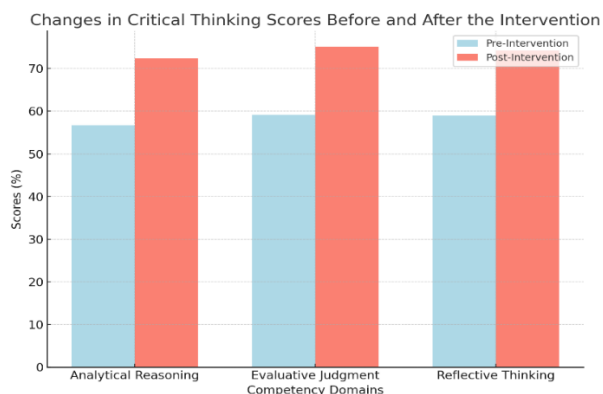
Source: Data obtained from pre-test and post-test surveys administered to the same student cohort. All changes shown are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Students showed notable improvements in their understanding and application of fiqh. The mean score for understanding of fiqh increased from 3.1 before the program to 4.0 after the program, representing a 29.0% increase. This suggests that the multi-madhhab curriculum effectively enhanced students' comprehension of Islamic jurisprudence, allowing them to engage with and understand a broader range of legal perspectives from the four main Sunni schools of thought.

Moreover, students' application skills saw an even more significant increase. The mean score for application skills rose from 3.0 to 4.2 (a 40.0% increase). This improvement indicates that students not only gained theoretical knowledge but also developed the practical skills needed to apply fiqh principles in real-world scenarios. The curriculum's emphasis on case-based learning, discussions, and cross-madhhab debates likely contributed to this development.

Students also reported a 28.1% increase in their confidence in making fiqh decisions, with the mean score rising from 3.2 to 4.1. This suggests that the multi-madhhab approach, which exposed students to diverse jurisprudential opinions, helped them feel more confident in applying these principles across varied social contexts. It appears that students became more equipped to make informed, balanced decisions by integrating multiple Islamic perspectives.

An important aspect of the curriculum was the active participation in class discussions, particularly the cross-madhhab debates. The mean score for class discussion participation increased from 3.3 to 4.4, a 33.3% increase. This indicates that the democratic, dialogical methods used at Ma'had Aly Situbondo, which encourage open dialogue and critical reflection, led to greater student engagement. It suggests that students were not only absorbing information but were also able to critically engage with it, making their learning experience more participatory and dynamic.



**Figure 3.** Changes in Critical Thinking Scores Before and After the Intervention

This graph presents the increase in students’ critical thinking scores, highlighting improvements in analytical reasoning, evaluative judgment, and reflective thinking. *The graph shows the increase in students’ critical thinking scores, with notable improvements in analytical reasoning, evaluative judgment, and reflective thinking.* Analytical Reasoning: Increased from 56.7% (Pre) to 72.4% (Post) → 27.7% increase. Evaluative Judgment: Increased from 59.2% (Pre) to 75.1% (Post) → 26.9% increase. Reflective Thinking: Increased from 58.9% (Pre) to 74.2% (Post) → 26.0% increase

The significant increases in critical thinking skills support the hypothesis that democratic learning methods (such as debates, group discussions, and reflective exercises) helped students develop stronger analytical and evaluative abilities, essential for engaging in complex legal reasoning and problem-solving within Islamic jurisprudence.

In addition to the core fiqh competencies, the survey instrument also measured developments in students' intercultural competence. Table 3 presents the pre-test and post-test mean scores for the specific indicators under the 'Intercultural Competence' construct, which were part of the same comprehensive survey used to generate the data in Table 2. The analysis follows the same methodological procedure, employing descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests on the data collected from the identical student cohort.

**Table 3.** Self-Reported Confidence in Intercultural Competence

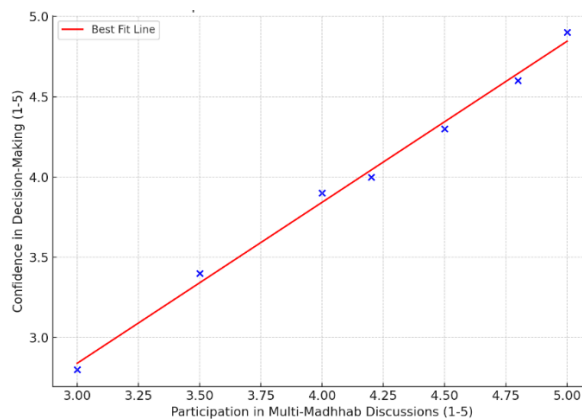
Competency Domain			Pre-Program Mean Score	Post-Program Mean Score	Percentage Increase
Engagement	with	Diverse Religious Views	3.4	4.3	26.5
Tolerance in Religious Dialogue			3.3	4.2	27.3
Confidence in Discussions		Interfaith	3.1	4.1	32.2

Source: Data derived from the pre- and post-test survey. All changes are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ )



The mean score for understanding diverse religious perspectives increased from 3.2 to 4.1, representing a 28.1% increase. This suggests that the curriculum helped students develop a better understanding of religious diversity, fostering a more inclusive perspective on Islamic jurisprudence. Similarly, students' cultural sensitivity improved, with scores rising from 3.1 to 4.0 (a 29.0% increase), indicating that the multi-madhab approach encouraged a more tolerant and culturally aware approach to fiqh.

Perhaps most notably, students' confidence in intercultural dialogue increased by 32.2%, from a pre-program mean of 3.1 to a post-program mean of 4.1. This increase suggests that the democratic learning environment, which emphasized dialogue and discussion across madhabs, helped students become more confident in engaging with people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. This aligns with the goal of preparing students not just for academic success but for effective, respectful engagement in multicultural and multi-religious contexts.



**Figure 3.** Correlation Between Participation in Multi-Madhab Discussions and Confidence in Decision-Making

This figure illustrates the correlation between active participation in multi-madhab discussions and students' confidence in making fiqh decisions. The figure demonstrates the positive relationship between participation in multi-madhab discussions and increased confidence in decision-making, with students who actively engage in diverse fiqh perspectives showing greater self-assurance in applying fiqh principles.

Students who were more actively engaged in multi-madhab discussions reported higher levels of confidence in applying fiqh principles and making independent decisions. This suggests that active engagement in discussions not only enhances knowledge acquisition but also fosters confidence in using that knowledge.

In summary, the quantitative results indicate that the multi-madhab curriculum and democratic learning methods at Ma'had Aly Situbondo had a significant positive impact on students' academic competencies, critical thinking, and intercultural competence. The students demonstrated:

- a. Improved fiqh competence: With notable increases in understanding and application of fiqh principles.
- b. Enhanced critical thinking: Significant gains in analytical reasoning, evaluative judgment, and reflective thinking.
- c. Increased intercultural competence: Students reported higher levels of engagement with and understanding of diverse religious perspectives.

These findings strongly support the effectiveness of the multi-madhab curriculum and democratic pedagogies in fostering not only academic proficiency but also intercultural skills, preparing students to navigate contemporary social and religious challenges.

### **Qualitative Results**

The qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations provide a deeper understanding of how the multi-madhab curriculum and democratic learning methods impacted students at Ma'had Aly Situbondo. These qualitative findings complement the quantitative results by offering rich, detailed insights into the students' experiences and perceptions of the educational approach.

#### **Increased Intercultural Competence**

A central theme that emerged from the qualitative findings was the development of intercultural competence among students. Interviews and observations highlighted how the multi-madhab curriculum exposed students to a variety of legal schools of thought, helping them engage with diverse religious perspectives. Many students noted how learning about the different madhabs expanded their understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, which in turn enhanced their appreciation for religious and cultural diversity.

Students reported that the discussions within this curriculum not only deepened their knowledge of Islamic law but also fostered respect for other schools of thought. One student reflected, "Before, I only knew about the Shafi'i madhab, but now I see that there are different valid interpretations of fiqh. It has made me more open to learning about other religions as well." This reflects how the curriculum encouraged students to look beyond their own religious perspectives

and engage with diverse interpretations of Islamic teachings.

Moreover, teachers observed similar improvements in students' engagement with diverse cultural and religious viewpoints. A teacher commented, "What I've noticed in the classroom is that students are no longer just absorbing knowledge passively; they're engaging with it. They listen to others' opinions more respectfully and are more willing to consider different interpretations." This shift from passive learning to active dialogue is crucial for multicultural education, as it helps students move from theoretical knowledge to practical, real-world application.

This intercultural engagement also fostered an inclusive learning environment. By integrating the views of multiple madhhabs, the students were not only introduced to diversity within Islamic jurisprudence but were also encouraged to consider how these diverse perspectives influence contemporary social issues. This emphasis on dialogue across differences is critical in preparing students for the challenges they will face in increasingly multicultural societies.

Overall, the multi-madhab curriculum significantly contributed to students' intercultural competence. By learning about various schools of thought and engaging in dialogues across madhhabs, students developed a more inclusive mindset, which is essential for navigating a diverse world. This multicultural competence extends beyond the classroom, preparing students for the globalized world they are entering.

### **Critical Thinking and Intellectual Growth**

The theme of critical thinking emerged strongly in the qualitative findings, as students reported significant intellectual growth due to their involvement in the multi-madhab curriculum. Before the program, many students expressed that their learning was largely teacher-centered, where they passively received information. However, after engaging in multi-madhab discussions, they reported a noticeable shift toward critical reflection and independent thinking.

One student shared, "In the past, I just accepted what my teachers said. Now, I feel that I can question and analyze ideas more critically. This has changed the way I approach not just fiqh but also other subjects and daily life." This statement reflects the impact of democratic learning methods, which encouraged students to challenge existing ideas and develop their own analytical skills. By engaging with multiple interpretations of Islamic law, students were encouraged to think critically about the principles and practice of fiqh.

Educators also observed an increase in the depth and quality of student contributions to discussions. As one teacher stated, "The classroom atmosphere is much more dynamic now.

Students aren't afraid to express their views or question each other. I see them engaging with complex legal and social issues in a way that shows real intellectual growth." This shift was attributed to the active learning environment, where students were encouraged to debate, reflect, and evaluate various perspectives.

The critical thinking skills developed through the curriculum went beyond just academic benefit. Students reported that the ability to engage with multiple perspectives helped them approach everyday situations with more reflection and analytical reasoning. For example, one student mentioned, "I feel more capable of analyzing not just fiqh issues but also my personal life decisions. I now evaluate everything from different angles."

In conclusion, the multi-madhab curriculum and democratic teaching methods were instrumental in fostering critical thinking among students. By encouraging dialogue, reflection, and the analysis of diverse opinions, students were not only prepared for the academic demands of fiqh but were also equipped with the intellectual tools necessary for navigating the complex issues they will face in society.

### **Confidence in Applying Fiqh Principles**

A key finding from the qualitative data was the increase in students' confidence in applying fiqh principles. Before the curriculum intervention, many students expressed uncertainty in applying Islamic jurisprudence outside of a classroom setting, particularly when it came to dealing with complex issues where different madhabs offered varying opinions. After completing the multi-madhab curriculum, however, students reported feeling more empowered and self-assured in applying fiqh to real-life situations.

One student shared, "Now that I understand different perspectives, I'm more confident in making decisions, especially when there's a disagreement. Before, I didn't know how to approach these differences, but now I feel I can navigate them." This increased confidence in decision-making was attributed to the exposure to multiple fiqh perspectives, which helped students feel more prepared to engage with diverse legal opinions and make informed decisions.

Teachers also noted the growth in students' decision-making abilities. A teacher commented, "I've seen students become more assertive in their reasoning. They're no longer just memorizing rulings—they're analyzing them, defending their choices, and demonstrating a deeper understanding." This shift from rote memorization to critical application suggests that the curriculum not only improved students' understanding of fiqh but also enhanced their ability to

apply it in diverse contexts.

Importantly, this newfound confidence wasn't limited to classroom discussions. Students reported feeling more capable of making independent fiqh decisions in their personal lives and in their communities. For instance, one student reflected, "I feel more equipped to advise others or make decisions in my family about religious matters. I don't feel like I'm just following someone else's opinion—I'm confident in my own understanding." Overall, the multi-madhab curriculum played a crucial role in empowering students to make independent fiqh decisions. By exposing them to diverse perspectives and fostering critical engagement, students developed the confidence to apply fiqh principles in various aspects of their lives.

### **Theme: Engagement in Class Discussions**

Another significant theme that emerged from the qualitative data was the increase in student participation during class discussions. This was particularly noticeable in discussions that focused on cross-madhab perspectives. Before the intervention, many students were passive participants in class, often hesitant to speak up or share their opinions. However, after engaging in multi-madhab discussions, students became more active and confident in participating.

One student reflected, "Before, I didn't speak much in class, but now I'm not afraid to share my thoughts. These discussions help me understand fiqh better and express my ideas more clearly." This shift in behavior was linked to the democratic pedagogy employed at Ma'had Aly Situbondo, which encouraged students to speak freely and engage in debates. Teachers observed that these methods helped students develop better communication skills and the ability to express their views confidently. Teachers also noted the increased depth of student contributions. "There's been a visible change in participation," one teacher stated. "Students who were once passive are now more engaged and willing to challenge ideas, whether in fiqh or broader social contexts. These discussions have made them more articulate and confident in expressing themselves." The curriculum's focus on active learning and dialogical discussion provided students with the opportunity to refine their argumentation skills and express their views in a structured and respectful manner.

Overall, the multi-madhab curriculum, combined with democratic learning methods, stimulated class participation and encouraged students to become more engaged in their education. This not only helped students develop academic skills but also improved their communication and critical thinking abilities, which are essential for success in both academic and real-world contexts.

### **Perception of the Curriculum's Impact**

Finally, many students and teachers reflected on the overall impact of the multi-madhab curriculum, describing it as a transformative experience. While students initially approached the curriculum with some uncertainty, they soon reported that it significantly altered the way they approached Islamic jurisprudence and their role in applying it. One student shared, "This experience has changed the way I view Islamic law. It's not just about learning facts—it's about thinking critically, engaging with different ideas, and making informed decisions that are relevant to our society." This sentiment was echoed by teachers, who reported that students were more independent, critical, and confident in applying fiqh principles. A teacher stated, "The impact on students has been profound. They have learned how to engage with diverse perspectives, think critically, and apply their knowledge confidently. This is exactly what we need in today's globalized world."

The curriculum's emphasis on multidimensional learning—combining academic rigor, critical thinking, intercultural dialogue, and democratic engagement—has equipped students with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of contemporary society. As one teacher put it, "The students have developed not only intellectually but also socially and personally. They're ready to engage with the world around them in a way that is informed, respectful, and confident." In conclusion, the multi-madhab curriculum at Ma'had Aly Situbondo has had a significant and transformative impact on students. Through critical engagement, dialogue, and interdisciplinary learning, students were equipped not only with a deeper understanding of Islamic law but also with the tools to engage confidently with a multicultural world.

### **Discussion**

#### **Theoretical Insights**

The findings of this study affirm the pivotal role of democratic learning methods in fostering critical thinking skills within Islamic jurisprudence education. Observations from Ma'had Aly Situbondo indicate marked improvements in students' analytical capabilities and reflective judgment, resonating with Hooks's (2014) advocacy for education as a practice of freedom, where dialogue liberates learners from passive knowledge reception. This dialogical learning environment supports Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformative learning, wherein critical reflection induces shifts in students' epistemological frames.

From a hermeneutical standpoint, Ricoeur's (2016) theory of interpretation elucidates the dynamic process wherein students engage with classical fiqh texts and contemporary issues, constructing meaning through dialectic engagement. This interpretive interplay encourages openness to multiple madhhab perspectives, nurturing a pluralistic mindset necessary for legal reasoning in the modern Muslim world. Habermas's (2010) communicative rationality further explicates how democratic pedagogies engender spaces for rational-critical debate, essential for social integration and mutual understanding in diverse educational settings. At Ma'had Aly Situbondo, such engagement not only advances intellectual growth but also fosters social responsibility and tolerance, critical in Indonesia's pluralistic society (Kaplan Toren & Schwartz, 2025; Musaddad, 2023).

The study also aligns with Dewey's (1938) philosophy emphasizing experiential learning as a catalyst for ethical and intellectual development. Democratic methods challenge conventional rote learning, facilitating ethical jurisprudential reasoning that is responsive to evolving social realities. Moreover, the findings resonate with Santos's (2020) framework of intercultural epistemologies, highlighting the validation of diverse legal traditions within a pluralistic educational model. Together, these theoretical perspectives illustrate democratic learning as a holistic educational framework cultivating critically engaged, ethically grounded Islamic jurists equipped to bridge classical knowledge with contemporary societal needs.

### **Novelty and Contribution**

This research provides a distinctive empirical validation of democratic pedagogy in the specialized field of Islamic legal education, an area that is often dominated by abstract theorization rather than empirical study. By integrating feminist pedagogy, hermeneutics, and communicative theory, the study offers a nuanced framework for understanding how participatory learning fosters jurisprudential pluralism and ethical criticality among Islamic law students (Freire, 2021; Mezirow, 2000; Suddick et al., 2020). The multi-madhhab curriculum plays a crucial role in this framework, enhancing students' ability to engage with diverse legal perspectives and nurturing jurisprudential agility. This approach not only improves cognitive skills but also develops students' emotional and social capacities, contributing to their ethical development (Aboud & Levy, 2021; Burge et al., 2014; Derpic, 2020; Katyeudo & de Souza, 2022).

The methodological strength of the study lies in its comprehensive qualitative approach, which combines narrative inquiry and discourse analysis to provide deep insights into the

pedagogical effects across cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. This approach facilitates triangulation of perspectives, thus ensuring a well-rounded understanding of how democratic pedagogies influence students' engagement with Islamic law and their broader social interactions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2020; Fairclough, 2010). The integration of narrative inquiry allows for the exploration of personal and collective experiences of students, which is crucial for understanding the impact of pedagogical methods on their development as ethical and critical thinkers.

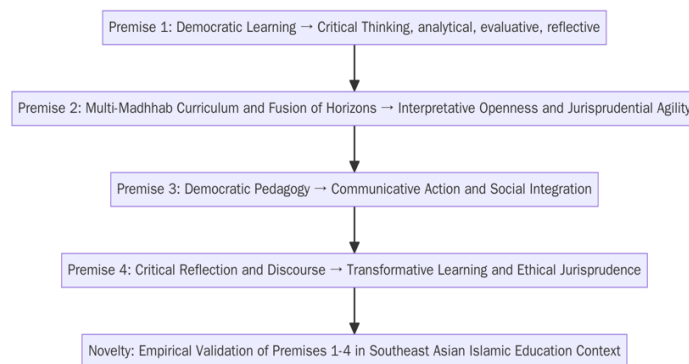
This study places a particular emphasis on Southeast Asian pesantren, exploring how region-specific cultural and juridical particularities shape educational practices. It highlights the adaptive nature of democratic pedagogy in Muslim-majority societies characterized by socio-legal complexity and interfaith coexistence. As noted by Fealy and White (2008), and Hefner (2011), democratic pedagogies are essential in fostering tolerance and social cohesion in such pluralistic contexts, and this study contributes to this body of research by demonstrating their application in Islamic legal education.

Beyond academic contributions, this research links pedagogical innovations to societal impact, illustrating how Ma'had Aly Situbondo's curriculum enhances graduates' capacity for conflict resolution and pluralistic dialogue, key attributes for social cohesion in Indonesia and beyond. The study echoes Bertrand (2003), who highlights the critical role of education in promoting tolerance and social harmony within diverse societies. Importantly, this research bridges theoretical innovation with practical reform, offering a replicable model that balances respect for tradition with progressive responsiveness—a need that is increasingly pressing amid global debates on Islamic educational reform (Kamaliah, 2022). The integration of critical pedagogy, hermeneutic philosophy, and communicative action theory has created a multidimensional framework that explains how democratic learning not only promotes jurisprudential pluralism but also enhances critical thinking and ethical decision-making among Islamic law students. This innovative approach aligns with Freire's emphasis on education as liberation and the idea that democratic learning enables social transformation (Freire, 2021).

This study also contributes to the growing body of literature on democratic pedagogy in Islamic education, particularly in Southeast Asia. It provides empirical validation of the theories discussed in seminal works by Habermas (2010) and Santos (2020), demonstrating the real-world impact of democratic learning on students' abilities to navigate pluralistic societies with ethical responsibility and social awareness.



Incorporating these references enhances the understanding of how multiculturalism is integrated into Islamic education, providing context for the multi-madhab curriculum and democratic pedagogies at Ma'had Aly Situbondo. Ardhy emphasizes the role of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), while Padil et al. (2021) and Ramdhan & Sholeh (2025) explore how educators implement multicultural values in the classroom. Tambunan et al. (2025) and Irbathy et al. (2025) show how Islamic education promotes interfaith dialogue and community harmony, and Bafadhal, Sulhan, and Wahyudiati (2024) discuss the role of education policy in supporting multiculturalism. However, this study uniquely examines how democratic pedagogy and the multi-madhab approach specifically foster jurisprudential pluralism, ethical criticality, and critical thinking, extending the discourse beyond tolerance to the development of adaptable legal reasoning in modern contexts. Thus, this research enriches existing literature by highlighting the impact of multicultural education on Islamic legal pedagogy and critical decision-making.



**Figure 5.** Theoretical Findings and Novelty Framework

This diagram illustrates the framework of theoretical findings and novelty contributions of research on democratic learning in Islamic legal education. Four main premises—democratic learning that enhances critical thinking, integration of multi-madhab curriculum with the concept of horizon fusion, the role of democratic pedagogy in communicative action and social integration, and transformative learning towards ethical jurisprudence presented as the theoretical foundation. All these premises are empirically validated in the context of Islamic education in Southeast Asia, underlining the role of democratic learning in developing pluralistic jurisprudential competence and social cohesion.

### **Implications for Islamic Education**

The proven efficacy of democratic learning methods invites significant implications for curriculum and pedagogy in Islamic higher education. Institutions are encouraged to embed dialogical, participatory approaches as foundational to developing not only knowledge but critical,

ethical, and social competencies (Banks, 2019).

Successful adoption demands institutional investment in faculty capacity-building and resource provision to enable facilitation of inclusive discourse and constructive debate ((Ladson-Billings, 2021; Nithiya et al., 2021). Creating an institutional culture prioritising reflexivity, openness, and dialogue is crucial. Furthermore, democratic pedagogy supports graduates' development of ethical, legal reasoning critical for addressing contemporary challenges, empowering them as mediators and advocates within their communities (Kamaliah, 2022; Nutefall et al., 2021). Future studies should undertake longitudinal and comparative research to assess the sustainability and contextual adaptability of democratic pedagogies. Employing phenomenological methods to explore lived experiences can deepen understanding of epistemic and ethical development through participatory learning (Van Manen, 1990). Ultimately, embracing democratic education in Islamic pedagogy promises to cultivate scholars who are intellectually agile, ethically informed, and socially committed, essential for Islam's evolving global engagement (Bruinessen, 1995; Hefner, 2011; Romadlon et al., 2023).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study highlights the significant role of democratic pedagogy and the multi-madhab curriculum in shaping Islamic legal education at Ma'had Aly Situbondo, emphasizing the cultivation of jurisprudential pluralism and ethical criticality. By integrating multiculturalism, the study demonstrates how democratic learning methods foster critical thinking, intercultural competence, and the ability to navigate diverse legal and cultural perspectives. The curriculum's focus on engaging with multiple fiqh traditions empowers students to develop jurisprudential agility, enabling them to make informed, contextually relevant decisions in both academic and real-world settings. This integration of participatory learning creates a dynamic, inclusive environment where students not only deepen their understanding of Islamic law but also develop the skills necessary to engage in pluralistic dialogues and contribute to social cohesion. Furthermore, this article contributes a multidimensional framework that bridges theory and practice, providing educators, policymakers, and scholars with empirical and conceptual tools to rethink curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and institutional cultures within pesantren and Islamic higher education globally. The implications extend to nurturing legal pluralism and epistemic justice, essential for cultivating jurists capable of addressing complex contemporary challenges such as legal

reform, interfaith dialogue, and social justice. Ultimately, this comprehensive examination positions democratic learning as indispensable for the evolution of Islamic education, advocating a forward-looking vision that harmonises intellectual rigor, ethical responsibility, and cultural relevance. It calls for sustained commitment and innovative scholarship to further embed these principles in the broader landscape of religious education reform, ensuring that Islamic jurisprudence remains vibrant, inclusive, and responsive in the face of global change.

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