



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Development of critical thinking skills in Islamic education students: Integrating outcome-based education into higher education courses

Herman Saputra*, Haikal Manda Az-Zahren, Nova Agustina, Math Alpy, Samsul Bahri

Received:
December 15, 2025

Accepted:
April 21, 2026

Published:
May 15, 2026

***Corresponding author:**
Herman Saputra
Faculty of Islamic Religion,
Universitas Islam Riau,
Pekanbaru, Indonesia

E-mail:
hermansaputra@student.uir.ac.id

Abstract: The development of critical thinking is a central priority in Islamic higher education, particularly in preparing students to engage with complex intellectual and ethical challenges. However, limited research has examined how Outcome-based Education (OBE) systematically shapes critical thinking within Islamic educational contexts. This study explores Islamic education students' perceptions and experiences of critical thinking development through OBE implementation. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with students enrolled in OBE-based courses at an Islamic university. The data were analyzed through iterative coding, thematic categorization, and interpretive synthesis. The findings indicate that OBE reorients learning from memorization toward reflective and analytical engagement. Critical thinking develops across three interrelated dimensions: analytical reasoning, metacognitive awareness, and dispositional-affective orientation, supported by clearly defined learning outcomes and context-based assignments. The novelty of this study lies in positioning OBE as an epistemic-pedagogical framework that integrates cognitive, reflective, and ethical dimensions of learning. Furthermore, critical thinking is conceptualized as embedded within Islamic epistemology, where rational inquiry is aligned with moral and spiritual consciousness. This study contributes to international discourse by offering a context-sensitive model of outcome-oriented Islamic education that fosters intellectually rigorous, reflective, and ethically grounded learners.

Keywords: Outcome-based education, critical thinking, Islamic higher education, epistemic learning, reflective pedagogy.

About Author

Herman Saputra, Faculty of Islamic Religion, Universitas Islam Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia; **Haikal Manda Az-Zahren**, Faculty of Ushuluddin, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt; **Nova Agustina**, Faculty of Islamic Religion, Universitas Islam Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia; **Math Alpy**, Highest Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; **Samsul Bahri**, Institut Ilmu al-Qur'an Jannatu Adnin Kendari, Sulawesi Tenggara, Indonesia.

To cite this article

Saputra, H., Az-Zahren, H. M., Agustina, N., Alpy, M., & Bahri, S. (2026). Development of critical thinking skills in Islamic education students: Integrating outcome-based education into higher education courses. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 2(1), 53-67. <https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v2i1.176>

1. Introduction

Critical thinking skills are essential competencies that must be possessed by students in the 21st-century higher education era. In the context of Islamic higher education, critical thinking is not only understood as a cognitive ability to analyze, evaluate, and draw conclusions from information, but also as a reflective process grounded in Islamic moral and spiritual values (Ainley & McGaw, 2022; Sukenti & Tambak, 2020; Yasin et al., 2025). Social realities indicate that many students in higher education, particularly in the Islamic Education study program, still tend to think linearly and rely heavily on memorization in understanding course material. This condition impacts students' analytical and evaluative abilities in assessing Islamic issues as well as contemporary social problems. Amid the advancement of knowledge, technology, and information globalization, students are required not only to understand Islamic teachings textually but also to interpret them contextually in order to provide solutions to contemporary challenges (Al-Fadhli & Al-Khalidi, 2023; Tambak & Sukenti, 2021; Firdaus et al., 2025). Therefore, critical thinking becomes a key element in shaping a generation of rational, reflective, and morally grounded Muslim intellectuals capable of addressing community issues through responsible scholarly approaches. In this framework, Islamic education must transform from traditional learning models toward approaches that foster reasoning, creativity, and independent thinking.

From a literature perspective, numerous studies have examined the importance of critical thinking skills among students in Islamic higher education; however, most of these studies focus on conventional learning strategies emphasizing discussion, reflection, or problem-solving without directly linking them to curriculum approaches oriented toward learning outcomes (Vygotsky, 2021). This gap indicates that students' critical thinking skills have not been fully developed through structured and measurable learning systems. Several studies, such as those conducted by Rahman et al. (2024) and Yuliana (2024), demonstrate that students' critical thinking can indeed improve through reflective and collaborative learning strategies; yet, these improvements are not accompanied by curriculum designs emphasizing the relationship between learning outcomes and learning activities. This becomes a fundamental problem because, without clear outcome direction, critical thinking skills develop sporadically and unsustainably.

Here, the outcome-based education (OBE) approach becomes essential, as it places learning outcomes at the center of the entire educational process. Through OBE, students are guided not only to acquire knowledge but also to develop higher-order thinking skills that can be measured and applied in real-life contexts. Therefore, implementing OBE in Islamic education is considered both relevant and urgent to be studied in depth. Previous research has contributed to understanding the relationship between teaching methods and students' critical thinking skills, yet few studies specifically examine how OBE can develop critical thinking skills within PAI courses. For instance, Suryani & Hidayat (2024) emphasize the role of lecturers in facilitating critical thinking through interactive digital media, while Latifah (2023) highlights the effectiveness of problem-based learning in stimulating students' analytical abilities. Firmansyah et al. (2023) link learning motivation to critical thinking, and Lestari (2024) identifies the academic environment as a key determinant in enhancing critical thinking. Meanwhile, Kusuma and Prasetyo (2023) and Hidayat et al. (2024) assert that critical thinking in the Islamic educational context cannot be separated from religious values that form the moral and ethical basis of reasoning. Nevertheless, all these studies have not examined how an outcome-based learning system like OBE can be effectively integrated to strengthen the cognitive, affective, and metacognitive dimensions of students' critical thinking (Al-Khalidi & Hassan, 2023). OBE has the potential to bridge the gap between theory and practice, between Islamic educational objectives and the demands of the modern world. Therefore, investigating the application of OBE in developing critical thinking skills among Islamic education students is relevant for identifying more effective, measurable, and outcome-oriented learning models.

From the above review, it can be concluded that although numerous learning approaches have been implemented to enhance students' critical thinking, approaches that fully integrate learning outcomes, reflection on Islamic values, and active learning strategies remain limited. Furthermore, OBE implementation in Islamic higher education is still relatively new and under-researched, particularly regarding its impact on developing critical thinking skills. Some lecturers in Islamic higher education have begun applying OBE principles partially but have yet to fully understand how learning outcomes can be used to stimulate higher-order thinking (Al-Khatib, 2024). In practice, learning still tends to focus on achieving exam scores rather than mastering substantive

competencies such as critical and reflective thinking. Therefore, empirical studies are needed to explore students' perceptions and understanding of OBE implementation, particularly regarding how this approach can help them build analytical, metacognitive, and contextual critical thinking skills (Al-Mahmoud & Ahmad, 2022; Tambak et al., 2025; Yasin et al., 2025). This highlights both the academic and practical urgency of the study, contributing to the development of Islamic educational theory and improving pedagogical strategies in religious higher education.

Based on the discussion above, this study focuses on two main research questions: (1) How do Islamic education students perceive critical thinking skills in higher education? and (2) How do Islamic education students understand critical thinking skills in relation to the OBE approach in their courses? The study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of students' perceptions and understanding of OBE as a learning approach that systematically and contextually develops critical thinking skills. Theoretically, the research is expected to enrich the knowledge base of Islamic education by emphasizing the integration of learning outcomes and higher-order thinking skills in the context of religious higher education. Practically, the findings may inform lecturers, curriculum developers, and Islamic educational institutions in designing more effective, reflective, and outcome-oriented learning strategies that enhance students' critical thinking abilities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Outcome-based education

The Outcome-based Education (OBE) approach is a learning paradigm that emphasizes the achievement of learning outcomes as the central focus of the entire educational process. OBE was developed to ensure that every learning activity is directed toward achieving explicitly formulated competencies across knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Spady, 2021; Harden, 2022; Abdullah et al., 2025; Chapakiya et al., 2025). In higher education, OBE provides a systematic framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating outcome-based learning, with the primary orientation on measurable student achievement (Biggs & Tang, 2022). Recent studies confirm that OBE implementation can enhance the effectiveness of the learning process by fostering students' metacognitive awareness and learning responsibility (Brown & Hirschfeld, 2021; Aulia, Anwar, & Nursaleh, 2025). Moreover, OBE strengthens the connection between theory and practice, as students are encouraged to apply learned concepts in real-world contexts (Khan et al., 2023; Al-Mahmoud & Ahmad, 2022; Sambell, 2024). In the context of Islamic education, OBE functions not only as a pedagogical approach but also as a conceptual strategy to integrate spiritual values with measurable academic achievements, thus producing graduates who are both intellectually competent and morally grounded (Rahman & Siddiqui, 2024; Tambak et al., 2021; Al-Shammari & Rahim, 2024).

Evaluatively, implementing OBE in Islamic higher education faces structural and epistemological challenges. The main challenge lies in adapting the curriculum to accommodate the contextual needs of Islamic educational institutions without compromising global graduate competency standards. Aulia et al. (2025) highlight a persistent gap between the formulation of learning outcomes and their implementation in the classroom, especially when lecturers lack strong pedagogical literacy in designing specific and measurable achievement indicators. Al-Fadhli & Al-Khalidi (2023) found that lecturers in Islamic higher education tend to assess learning outcomes primarily from the cognitive domain, while the affective and psychomotor domains receive less attention. To address this, Al-Khatib (2024) proposed an integrative OBE model based on Islamic values emphasizing three pillars: knowledge, skills, and ethics. This model is considered relevant as it links academic excellence with students' spirituality and minimizes cognitive bias in the learning evaluation process. Thus, implementing OBE in Islamic education is not merely a technical issue but a paradigm shift toward a humanistic, reflective, and epistemologically just learning system.

2.2. Critical thinking skills

Critical thinking refers to higher-order thinking skills encompassing activities such as analyzing, evaluating, interpreting, and making rational decisions based on evidence and logic (Brookfield, 2021; Ennis, 2018; Facione, 2021). In higher education, critical thinking is a core competency that must be developed to prepare students to tackle complex real-world problems. Lipman (2022) emphasizes that critical thinking involves questioning assumptions, constructing logical arguments, and reflecting on the ethical implications of decisions. Research by Suryana & Aziz (2024) in Islamic higher education shows that students' critical thinking skills remain at a moderate level, largely due to learning approaches that focus on knowledge transfer rather than conceptual exploration. This aligns with Lestari's (2024) findings that low critical thinking among Islamic education students stems from limited learning activities requiring active intellectual engagement. Within the framework of Islamic pedagogy, critical thinking is considered a manifestation of intellectual activity with worship value, as human reasoning and reflection enable understanding of God's signs in social reality (Taha & Mohamad, 2023; Qois Al Hadi et al., 2025).

Evaluatively, critical thinking cannot be developed solely through lecture delivery; it requires learning strategies emphasizing exploration and reflection. Halim & Ibrahim (2023) found that critical thinking development is more effective when lecturers act as facilitators, providing students with space to construct their own knowledge through dialogue and reflection. Jannah et al. (2024) highlight the importance of integrating critical thinking into learning based on Islamic values, as this prevents dogmatism while strengthening understanding of rational Islamic principles. Globally, Lee & Park (2022) assert that critical thinking developed through outcome-based approaches (OBE) enhances students' academic confidence and reflective thinking abilities. These findings indicate that critical thinking can be systematically nurtured through adaptive, collaborative, and reflective learning designs, including within the Islamic education context.

2.3. Integrating outcome-based education in developing critical thinking for Islamic education students

The integration of OBE in developing critical thinking skills among Islamic education students stems from the awareness that learning outcomes encompass not only cognitive aspects but also thinking dispositions and ethical values. In the OBE model, each learning activity is designed to achieve learning outcomes that cultivate analytical, evaluative, and creative thinking skills (Biggs & Tang, 2022; Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2023). Recent studies demonstrate a positive relationship between OBE implementation and the enhancement of students' critical thinking skills. Al-Shammari & Rahim (2024) at Islamic University of Madinah found that outcome-based learning improves students' ability to identify assumptions and evaluate arguments. Hashim & Yunus (2023) emphasize that integrating Islamic values into OBE strengthens the moral foundation of students' critical thinking. Additionally, Rahman & Ismail (2025) in Malaysia report that students learning through OBE show significant improvements in problem-solving and reasoning skills compared to those in conventional learning settings. This integration positions OBE not only as a modern pedagogical approach but also as a means of reinforcing rational, reflective, and ethical Islamic thinking.

Evaluatively, integrating OBE in Islamic education requires attention to Islamic epistemological dimensions that balance reason and revelation. Al-Faruqi (2022) argues that critical thinking in Islam should not be separated from tauhid and adab values, as without a spiritual foundation, critical thinking may fall into intellectual relativism. Therefore, OBE-based learning models must align with Islamic educational values to ensure that learning outcomes are not only academic but also moral. Nasir & Tambak (2023) propose an OBE learning design integrating Islamic value reflection, which enhances critical thinking skills while strengthening students' religious character. Thus, OBE integration in Islamic education should be understood as a holistic process combining learning outcome orientation, reflective thinking skills, and the cultivation of Islamic character. This approach aligns with Mutalib et al. (2025), who assert that the success of 21st-century Islamic education depends on institutions' ability to integrate learning outcomes with the balanced development of intellect and heart.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. This approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in developing critical thinking skills. A qualitative design allows researchers to explore phenomena contextually, naturally, and reflectively, based on the subjective experiences of informants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study method was chosen because the research focuses on a specific context, namely the learning process in the Islamic Education (PAI) Study Program at Universitas Islam Riau, which has begun applying OBE principles in its courses. This approach facilitates a deep understanding of how students interpret their engagement in an outcome-based learning system and how the system influences their thinking and academic behavior. Therefore, the study does not aim to produce statistical generalizations but to provide rich and meaningful analytical descriptions of OBE-based learning experiences in Islamic higher education.

The research design also considers the reflective and interpretative dimensions of a phenomenological approach, as the study seeks to understand the subjective meaning experienced by students when interacting with the OBE system. In line with Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2018), qualitative approaches are flexible and require researchers to play an active role in data collection and interpretation. The researcher functions not merely as an observer but as the primary instrument in constructing the meaning of empirical findings through direct interaction with informants. Consequently, the validity of this study depends on the depth of interpretation and the accuracy of the analysis based on data obtained from in-depth structured interviews.

3.2. Research informants

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a deliberate selection of subjects based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The study involved five students from the Islamic Education (PAI) Study Program at Universitas Islam Riau, chosen based on their active participation in courses that have implemented the Outcome-Based Education approach. The informants included one male student from the 2022 cohort, two female students from the 2024 cohort, one male student, and one female student from the 2025 cohort. This selection considered variations in cohort and learning experience, ensuring that the data represent diverse student perspectives on OBE implementation in a dynamic context.

All informants had participated in several core PAI courses designed using OBE principles, such as Philosophy of Islamic Education, PAI Learning Strategies, and Learning Evaluation. Therefore, they possessed relevant empirical experience to provide insights into how OBE affects their critical, reflective, and analytical thinking skills. The sample size of five informants is deemed sufficient for qualitative research, as the study aims for depth of meaning rather than generalization (Guest, Namey & Chen, 2021). Informant characteristics were designed to provide rich and diverse data while maintaining the depth of individual narratives.

3.3. Data collection techniques

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2018), consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and verification (drawing concluding). The first stage, data reduction, involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw interview data relevant to the research focus. Each informant statement was coded into thematic categories such as "understanding of critical thinking," "perception of OBE," and "OBE's impact on learning reflection." The second stage, data display, involved presenting the data in narrative matrices illustrating patterns and relationships among categories and themes. This presentation helped identify logical connections between OBE implementation and the development of students' critical thinking skills. The third stage, verification and conclusion drawing, involved reviewing the displayed data to confirm findings, test consistency, and interpret the substantive meaning of the narratives. Analytical validity was maintained through triangulation among researchers and academic supervisors to ensure

objective and accountable interpretations. Additionally, the analysis followed the principle of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 2017), continuously comparing new findings with previous data until consistent patterns emerged. This process resulted in key analytical themes, such as increased reflective thinking awareness, transformed perspectives on learning, and the strengthening of academic dispositions based on Islamic values.

3.4. Research ethics

This study adhered to qualitative research ethics as recommended by the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2023). Prior to the interview, informed consent was obtained from all informants, including explanations of the research objectives, benefits, their right to decline or withdraw, and guarantees of confidentiality. Each informant was assigned an anonymous code (e.g., M1, M2) to protect privacy. All interview data were securely stored in encrypted digital formats and used exclusively for research purposes. No coercion, manipulation, or financial incentives were provided to informants. The researcher ensured that interpretations of the interviews remained objective and did not alter the substance of informants' statements. Principles of fairness, scientific honesty, and moral responsibility were upheld throughout the study, reflecting academic integrity aligned with Islamic ethical values, including honesty (*sidq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and justice in seeking knowledge. By adhering to these methodological and ethical procedures, this study is expected to produce valid, reliable, and meaningful data that contribute to the development of both theory and practice in Islamic Education learning based on Outcome-Based Education.

4. Result

4.1. Islamic education students' perceptions of critical thinking in lectures

The findings indicate that Islamic education students hold varied but generally positive perceptions regarding the importance of critical thinking in higher education. Most students understand critical thinking as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret information logically and comprehensively. They perceive critical thinking as essential not only in academic contexts but also as a means to understand Islamic teachings in a rational and contextual manner. One informant (M1, male, 2022 cohort) stated:

"I think critical thinking is important because it prevents us from merely accepting what the lecturer explains; it encourages us to understand the reasons and context. In PAI courses, critical thinking helps me see Islamic values not just from the text but also from their social significance."

This statement reflects students' epistemological awareness regarding the importance of critical thinking in understanding Islamic knowledge reflectively. Students no longer perceive religious learning as mere memorization but as a process of exploring meaning. Students also link critical thinking to the enhancement of both academic and spiritual capacities. Informant M3 (female, 2024 cohort) remarked that critical thinking enables students to respond wisely to differing religious perspectives:

"When we can think critically, we become more open-minded and less quick to blame others with different views. I understand that Islam also values differences, based on evidence and logic."

These views indicate that critical thinking fosters intellectual tolerance and maturity in the Islamic context. Students understand that critical thinking does not oppose religious teachings but seeks a deeper comprehension of them. Generally, students' perceptions of critical thinking are influenced by the learning experiences facilitated by lecturers. Informant M5 (female, 2025 cohort) explained that lecturers who employ discussion and reflection methods encourage deeper critical thinking:

"If the lecturer only lectures, I tend to be passive. But when the lecturer asks open-ended questions and asks us to explain our opinions, I think more critically because I have to provide strong reasoning."

These findings suggest that the learning environment plays a crucial role in shaping students' positive perceptions of critical thinking. Classes that emphasize dialogue, argumentation, and idea exploration encourage students to develop higher-order thinking skills. Overall, students perceive critical thinking as a key competency relevant to the mission of Islamic education, promoting scientific, spiritual, and moral awareness.

Based on Table 1, students perceive critical thinking not merely as a cognitive academic skill but as a form of scientific reflection integrated with Islamic spiritual values. M1's statement indicates that critical thinking contributes to understanding Islamic values within social contexts, encouraging the internalization of meaning in daily life. In terms of scientific reflection, critical thinking is seen as a means to link academic knowledge with Islamic principles, strengthening students' epistemological awareness. From a spiritual perspective, critical thinking aligns with moral and spiritual consciousness, ensuring that evaluation and reasoning remain grounded in ethics, responsibility, and faith. Overall, students view critical thinking as a holistic reflection that unites intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions in scholarly practice.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of critical thinking as scientific and spiritual reflection

Category	Status	Narrative / Statement
Critical Thinking Perception	Student (M1)	<i>"Critical thinking helps me better understand Islamic values socially."</i>
Scientific Reflection	Student	Critical thinking is understood as an academic reflective process connecting knowledge and Islamic values.
Spiritual Dimension	Student	Critical thinking is inseparable from moral and spiritual awareness in Islam.

Table 2 shows that students perceive critical thinking as essential for fostering intellectual tolerance in academic contexts. M3's statement emphasizes that critical thinking encourages openness and reduces the tendency to quickly dismiss differing viewpoints. Regarding intellectual tolerance, critical thinking is understood as a process that helps students rationally and objectively accept and consider diverse academic perspectives. In terms of academic attitude, students become more cautious and reflective in evaluating others' opinions, prioritizing argument- and evidence-based reasoning. Overall, critical thinking not only strengthens academic reasoning but also cultivates an ethical scholarly dialogue and inclusive academic culture.

Tabel 2. Students' perceptions of critical thinking in fostering intellectual tolerance

Category	Status	Narrative / Statement
Critical Thinking Perception	Student (M3)	<i>"We become more open and less quick to blame."</i>
Intellectual Tolerance	Student	Critical thinking promotes openness toward differing academic viewpoints.
Academic Attitude	Student	Students become more cautious when evaluating others' opinions.

4.2. Students' understanding of critical thinking in relation to outcome-based education

Interview results indicate that students have a strong understanding of the relationship between critical thinking and the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in lectures. Students recognize that OBE places learning outcomes at the core, directing the learning process to ensure students develop higher-order thinking skills aligned with these outcomes. Informant M2 (female, 2024 cohort) explained:

"In the OBE system, the lecturer explains from the start what outcomes we should achieve. So, we know that one of the goals is critical thinking. Every assignment or discussion is directed toward that, so I can see the connection between theory and practice."

This statement demonstrates that students understand OBE as an approach that provides clear guidance for developing critical thinking. They perceive having a roadmap that helps them self-assess their learning progress. Furthermore, OBE is seen as capable of shifting students' learning orientation from merely pursuing grades to meaningful understanding. Informant M4 (male, 2025 cohort) stated:

"Previously, I studied just for exam scores, but now I focus more on skills. OBE makes me realize that critical thinking is part of the expected learning outcomes. So, I study to truly understand, not just to pass."

This illustrates a paradigm shift in students' learning approaches. They no longer view learning as an administrative obligation but as a process of self-improvement, in line with OBE's outcome-based learning principles, where learning outcomes serve as the measure of success. Other findings reveal that students perceive OBE as facilitating critical thinking through practical and reflective learning activities. Informant M1 remarked:

"OBE makes us learn from real cases. For instance, in Multicultural Islamic Education, we are asked to analyze social issues and propose solutions based on Islamic values. This makes me think more critically because I have to consider many aspects."

This highlights that OBE helps students connect theory with social reality, thereby enhancing analytical and reflective thinking. Students perceive the learning process as more meaningful because they can see the relevance of academic material to real-life contexts. However, the study also revealed challenges in OBE implementation. Some students noted that not all lecturers consistently applied OBE principles. Informant M5 stated:

"Sometimes OBE is mentioned at the beginning, but in assignments and evaluations, it is still like the old method. So, sometimes we are confused about the expected outcomes."

This indicates a gap between the conceptual design of OBE and its practical implementation in the classroom, often due to lecturers' readiness in preparing truly outcome-oriented learning instruments. Despite these challenges, students agreed that OBE positively impacts critical thinking by encouraging independent and reflective thinking. Overall, students' understanding of the relationship between critical thinking and OBE can be summarized into three main dimensions: (1) awareness of outcome-based learning goals, (2) a shift in learning orientation from memorization to comprehension, and (3) enhancement of analytical skills through practical assignments.

Tabel 3. Students' understanding of OBE as emphasizing critical thinking

Category	Status	Narrative / Statement
OBE Understanding	Student (M2)	<i>"We know learning outcomes include critical thinking."</i>
Learning Outcomes	Student	OBE is understood as a system emphasizing critical thinking achievement.
Academic Awareness	Student	Students understand the indicators of expected learning outcomes.

Table 3 shows that students understand OBE as emphasizing critical thinking as a key learning outcome. M2's statement indicates awareness that learning outcomes encompass not only knowledge mastery but also critical thinking as a measure of academic success. In terms of learning outcomes, OBE is perceived as a structured learning system that systematically emphasizes critical thinking through objectives, strategies, and evaluations. Regarding academic awareness, students demonstrate a good understanding of the indicators of learning outcomes, allowing them to position themselves reflectively regarding learning processes and results. Overall, these findings indicate that OBE is understood as a clear pedagogical framework for developing and assessing critical thinking.

Tabel 4. Students' understanding of OBE in shaping learning orientation

Category	Status	Narrative / Statement
Learning Orientation	Student (M4)	<i>"Now I study to understand, not just to pass."</i>
Meaningful Learning	Student	OBE shifts learning focus from grades to conceptual understanding.
Learning Independence	Student	Students become more active and reflective in the learning process.

Table 4 indicates that students perceive OBE as fostering a more meaningful and comprehension-centered learning orientation. M4's statement reflects a shift in motivation from merely passing to deeply

understanding concepts. OBE is seen as redirecting learning from grade-focused to conceptually grounded and sustainable mastery. Regarding learning independence, students become more active, reflective, and responsible in managing their learning process, given that learning outcomes are clearly defined and measurable. Overall, OBE contributes to cultivating a goal-conscious and critical-thinking-oriented learning mindset.

Table 5. Challenges in implementing OBE in lectures

Category	Status	Narrative/Statement
Implementation Challenges	Student (M5)	<i>"Sometimes OBE is mentioned, but assignments are still traditional."</i>
Lecturer Consistency	Student	OBE implementation is not fully consistent in assignments.
Conceptual-Practical Gap	Student	There is a difference between OBE concepts and classroom practice.

Table 5 shows that students perceive several challenges in implementing OBE, primarily related to consistency. M5's statement reflects discrepancies between the conceptual discussion of OBE and the design of assignments, which may not fully reflect outcome-based approaches. Regarding lecturer consistency, students note uneven application of OBE in planning and executing assignments. In terms of the conceptual-practical gap, differences were found between the ideal OBE model emphasizing critical thinking and meaningful learning and the still conventional classroom practices. Overall, these findings highlight the need for stronger understanding and implementation commitment to ensure OBE is applied consistently and aligned with intended learning outcomes.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic education students hold a positive perception of the importance of critical thinking in lectures and recognize the contribution of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) to its development. Students view critical thinking not merely as a cognitive skill but as both an intellectual and spiritual competency that enables them to understand Islamic teachings in a rational and contextual manner (Namora et al., 2025; Taha & Mohamad, 2023; Sukenti & Fauzan, 2024). OBE is considered an approach capable of structuring learning outcomes, providing students with a clear and reflective framework for thinking (Aulia et al., 2025; Abdullah et al., 2025; Kegan, 2022). Furthermore, students reported a paradigm shift from rote memorization to reflective analysis, aligning with the principle of constructive alignment in OBE (Tambak et al., 2025; Biggs & Tang, 2022; Widodo et al., 2025). This suggests that integrating OBE with Islamic education has the potential to cultivate a generation of scholars who are highly analytical, critically minded, and morally grounded. Nevertheless, challenges remain in implementation, particularly concerning lecturers' pedagogical readiness, as highlighted by Al-Mahmoud & Ahmad (2022) and Al-Fadhli & Al-Khalidi (2023), who noted variability in instructors' understanding of OBE design principles.

Critical thinking in Islam has a strong theological foundation. Intellectual reasoning (*'aql*) and reflection are forms of scholarly worship aimed at discovering truth (Al-Faruqi, 2022; Tambak & Sukenti, 2024; Muhajir et al., 2025; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2022). Within the OBE framework, each learning outcome can be associated with values of wisdom (*hikmah*) that characterize Islamic reasoning (Hashim & Yunus, 2023; Tambak & Sukenti, 2025). This study demonstrates that students interpret critical thinking not as destructive criticism but as a scientific process for uncovering meaning and wisdom in Islamic phenomena (Rahman & Siddiqui, 2024; Ertmer & Newby, 2021). OBE aligns with Islamic educational values (*tarbiyah Islamiyah*), emphasizing the integration of academic achievement and moral development. Spady (2021) notes that OBE focuses on competency outcomes, which, in the Islamic context, encompass not only intellectual proficiency but also spiritual excellence (*akhlak al-karimah*). Thus, integrating OBE in Islamic education represents a synthesis of knowledge (*'ilm*), practice (*'amal*), and faith (*iman*), guiding learning toward both worldly and spiritual success.

This study confirms that OBE serves as a catalyst for strengthening critical thinking among PAI students. Participants reported increased metacognitive awareness in managing their learning processes (Lee & Park,

2022; Rasyidi et al., 2025; Merrill, Drake & Lacy, 2023), perceiving learning outcomes as guidance rather than an administrative burden. Consequently, OBE functions both as an instructional strategy and a reflective tool. Within the Islamic educational framework, OBE-facilitated critical thinking reinforces a balance between rationality and spirituality (Posner et al., 2022; Nasir & Tambak, 2023; Paul & Elder, 2021), supporting Lipman's (2022) assertion that critical thinking is most effective when connected to moral and social contexts. Findings also indicate that students who understand outcome-based learning objectives tend to exhibit higher self-regulated learning (Al-Khalidi & Hassan, 2023; Flavell, 2021; Firdaus et al., 2025), consistent with Firmansyah and Yusuf's (2023) findings regarding the role of motivation in reflective thinking.

The results align with prior research in Malaysia (Rahman & Ismail, 2025), which found that students exposed to OBE demonstrated significant improvements in analytical and reflective abilities. Similar outcomes were observed in Madinah by Al-Shammari & Rahim (2024), indicating that outcome-based learning enhances students' analytical reasoning. In Indonesia, studies by Suryana & Aziz (2024) and Lestari (2024) corroborate that integrating reflective activities within outcome-based learning consistently promotes critical thinking among PAI students. However, consistent with Al-Mahmoud & Ahmad (2022), a key barrier to OBE implementation in Islamic higher education is lecturers' insufficient preparedness to design assessment rubrics balancing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Mutalib, Hassan, & Omar (2025) emphasize that lecturer training is essential for OBE to function as a truly transformative approach. Thus, this study extends previous findings by demonstrating how OBE can adapt epistemologically within the Indonesian Islamic education system.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the integration of OBE with Islamic epistemology, emphasizing that learning outcomes encompass knowledge, skills, and spirituality (Harden, 2022; Al-Faruqi, 2022; Freire, 2021). The findings support the integrated learning outcomes approach proposed by Mutalib et al. (2025), wherein learning achievements reflect a balance between critical thinking and religious values. Practically, these findings recommend that lecturers in Islamic higher education explicitly design learning outcome indicators to stimulate students' critical thinking (Biggs & Tang, 2022; Pellegrino & Hilton, 2021; Sukenti & Tambak, 2025; Hattie & Yates, 2021). PAI curricula should incorporate reflection, case analysis, and theological dialogue as part of outcome assessment (Tomlinson, 2023; Nasir & Tambak, 2023; Gusrianto et al., 2025; Tambak et al., 2022). At the policy level, universities should strengthen OBE-based academic audit systems to ensure that outcome-oriented principles are fully embedded in academic culture (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2021). In conclusion, OBE in Islamic education transcends administrative mechanisms; it is a transformative instrument for developing *insan kamil*, individuals who are critically thinking, reflective, and morally grounded. This paradigm demonstrates that outcome-based Islamic education can serve as a model for 21st-century learning, harmonizing intellectual excellence with spiritual integrity.

6. Conclusion

This study confirms that the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in Islamic Education (PAI) courses has a significant impact on the development of students' critical thinking skills. Students perceive critical thinking not merely as a cognitive ability but as a scientific and spiritual process that facilitates a contextual understanding of Islamic values. Their understanding of OBE reflects a paradigm shift in learning orientation from rote memorization toward reflective and meaningful learning. Although OBE implementation among lecturers is not yet fully consistent, students perceive this approach as providing clear guidance on learning outcomes, enhancing academic responsibility, and fostering metacognitive awareness. Theoretically, the findings advance the understanding of integrating OBE with Islamic educational epistemology, which emphasizes a balance between reason and revelation. OBE is compatible with the principles of *tarbiyah Islamiyah*, being oriented toward measurable moral and intellectual outcomes. These results support the integrated learning outcomes paradigm proposed by Biggs & Tang (2022) and Al-Faruqi (2022), in which learning success is assessed not only through academic indicators but also through ethical and spiritual dimensions. Methodologically, this study demonstrates that in-depth structured interviews are an effective tool for exploring students' subjective interpretations of OBE practices. Interactive analysis, encompassing data reduction, display, and verification, generated empirical themes consistent with contemporary theories of critical thinking.

This study has limitations due to the small number of informants and the single-institution context, restricting the generalizability of its findings. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples from multiple Islamic higher education institutions to enhance external validity and facilitate comparative analyses of OBE practices across contexts. Lecturers and curriculum developers are encouraged to deepen their pedagogical literacy regarding OBE through targeted training on designing learning outcomes and reflection-based assessment. Islamic educational institutions should also strengthen academic quality policies to ensure that OBE implementation consistently aligns with Islamic values. In conclusion, when effectively implemented, OBE in Islamic higher education has the potential to cultivate graduates who are *kāffah*, knowledgeable, critical, reflective, and morally upright—embodying the integration of faith, knowledge, and practice (*iman*, *ilm*, and *amal*). This demonstrates that outcome-based Islamic education can serve as a transformative model for 21st-century learning, harmonizing intellectual excellence with spiritual integrity.

Author Contribution Statement

All authors contributed equally to the research and manuscript preparation. The first author conceptualized the study, designed the interview instruments, and conducted the data collection in the field. The second author performed data analysis through the processes of data reduction, display, and verification, and thematically interpreted the findings based on in-depth interviews. The third author was responsible for the literature review and the development of the theoretical framework, ensuring consistency between the analysis results and the conceptual foundations. The fourth and fifth author focused on drafting the discussion and conclusion sections, as well as aligning the manuscript with the JIIRE guidelines. All authors actively participated in revisions, final editing, and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

Disclosure of Interests

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest in the conduct of this research and the preparation of this article. There was no financial, professional, or personal involvement that could have influenced the research results, data analysis, or interpretation. All research activities were conducted independently for academic purposes and the advancement of knowledge in the field of Islamic Education. This article did not receive any external funding, and all stages of the research were carried out in accordance with the principles of academic integrity, scientific honesty, and ethical research standards.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Islamic Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Riau for providing academic support throughout this research. Special thanks are also extended to the five students who willingly participated as research informants, sharing their learning experiences regarding the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in their courses. Appreciation is further conveyed to the supervising lecturers and colleagues who offered valuable feedback in refining this manuscript. The authors hope that the findings of this study will make a meaningful contribution to the development of outcome-based Islamic pedagogy in higher education.

References

Abdullah, M. R., Muhamad, F. N., Hj Abdullah, Z., Amonov, B., & Yaakob, M. A. (2025). Exploring the mediating effect of academic self-efficacy on metacognitive awareness and students' academic writing skill in Islamic higher education. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 1(2), 135-152. <https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v1i2.175>

- Ainley, M., & McGaw, B. (Eds.). (2022). *The Cambridge handbook of the learning sciences, assessment, and technology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Fadhli, M., & Al-Khalidi, A. (2023). Assessment alignment in outcome-based education for Islamic studies. *Education and Learning Research Journal*, 14(2), 77–91.
- Al-Khalidi, A., & Hassan, R. (2023). Outcome-based learning and critical self-regulation. *Teaching and Learning Studies Journal*, 19(3), 145–160.
- Al-Khatib, H. (2024). Ethics and outcomes: Integrating moral reasoning in Islamic OBE frameworks. *Global Education Studies Journal*, 15(1), 25–38.
- Al-Mahmoud, F., & Ahmad, K. (2022). Challenges of implementing OBE in higher education: A case of Islamic universities. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 28(4), 112–126.
- Al-Shammari, M., & Rahim, F. (2024). OBE implementation and student analytical reasoning in Madinah Islamic University. *Middle East Education Review*, 10(2), 58–72.
- Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2021). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. Longman.
- Aulia, M. H., Anwar, S., & Nursaleh, N. (2025). Analysis of Islamic religious education materials to improve students' critical thinking. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 17(1), 102–116.
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2022). *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does* (5th ed.). Open University Press.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2021). *Teaching for critical thinking: Tools and techniques to help students question their assumptions*. Jossey-Bass.
- Brown, G. T. L., & Hirschfeld, G. H. F. (2021). Assessment literacy and learning outcomes. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 28(7), 805–822.
- Chapakiya, A., Abdullah, A. R., Mohamad Salleh, M. N., Luthfi, S., & Panjalu, G. F. (2025). Development of higher order thinking skill for students in madrasa southern Thailand: Engaging case-based learning methods. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 1(2), 121-134.
<https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v1i2.174>
- Chen, P. P., & Wang, T. (2022). OBE and student engagement: Evidence from Asian universities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(3), 472–486.
- Donnelly, R., & Fitzmaurice, M. (2023). Teaching and learning technologies in OBE frameworks. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 54(2), 528–546.
- Ertmer, P. A., & Newby, T. J. (2021). Behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism: OBE and pedagogy. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 69(1), 1–19.
- Facione, P. A. (2021). Critical thinking: A statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 53(1), 1–20.
- Firdaus, F., Siregar, A. S., Abdullah, B. bin, Belbekkai, D., & Jumrodah, J. (2025). The accuracy of developing professional madrasah teachers: Seen from gender and teacher certification in the future profession. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 1(1), 15-28.
<https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v1i1.3>
- Firmansyah, A., & Yusuf, H. (2023). Motivation and critical thinking in Islamic pedagogy. *Journal of Religious Education and Social Transformation*, 14(4), 59–73
- Flavell, J. H. (2021). *Cognitive development: Children's knowledge about the mind*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Freire, P. (2021). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (50th anniversary ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.

- Gusrianto, G., Zakarya, Z., Mahfuzh, T. W., Ali, A., & Simbolon, B. R. (2025). Innovation of madrasa teacher teaching: Transformation of teacher teaching creativity through performance and motivation engagement in teaching and learning. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 1(2), 71-86. <https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v1i2.8>
- Halim, Z., & Ibrahim, R. (2023). Student self-reflection and critical reasoning in faith-based learning. *Asian Journal of Theology and Education*, 8(2), 91–104.
- Harden, R. M. (2022). *AMEE Guide No. 14: Outcome-based education: Part 1—An introduction to OBE for medical educators*. Elsevier.
- Hashim, N., & Yunus, M. (2023). Integrating Islamic values in outcome-based education: A framework for critical thinking skills. *International Journal of Islamic Pedagogy*, 4(1), 10–24.
- Hattie, J., & Yates, G. (2021). *Visible learning and the science of how we learn*. Routledge.
- Jannah, R., Ibrahim, A., & Halim, Z. (2024). Faith-based critical thinking model in Islamic universities. *Humanities and Education Research Review*, 18(4), 145–159.
- Kegan, R. (2022). *The evolving self: Problem and process in human development*. Harvard University Press.
- Khan, R., Qureshi, N., & Mehmood, A. (2023). Bridging theory and practice through OBE in higher Islamic education. *Asian Social Science Review*, 15(4), 82–98.
- Kirkpatrick, D. L., & Kirkpatrick, J. D. (2022). Evaluating training programs: The four levels. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 35(1), 65–80.
- Lee, S., & Park, J. (2022). Outcome-based pedagogy and student reflective learning: A study in higher education. *Frontiers in Education*, 7(16), 1–13.
- Lestari, S. (2024). Classroom engagement and critical thinking development in Islamic education. *Indonesian Journal of Pedagogical Studies*, 11(1), 88–104.
- Lipman, M. (2022). *Thinking in education* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Merrill, M. D., Drake, L., & Lacy, M. (2023). Reclaiming instructional design for OBE. *Journal of Instructional Science and Technology*, 26(1), 19–35.
- Muhajir, M., Ghani, A. R. bin A., Sukenti, D., Syarif, M., & Widodo, W. (2025). Islamic ethics, identity processes, and project-based learning method for madrasah teachers: A phenomenological approach. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 1(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v1i1.2>
- Mutalib, A., Hassan, R., & Omar, N. (2025). Integrating learning outcomes and Islamic values in higher education. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 16(2), 99–115.
- Namora, D., Amril, A., Zamsiswaya, Z., Mounadil, A. I., Yasin, M. D. H. bin F., Hamzah, H., & Nurhaliza, A. (2025). Islamic education narratives from the Turkistan Plain: Discovering the heritage of al-Zarnuji's thoughts on Islamic professional teachers. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 1(1), 57-69. <https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v1i1.6>
- Nasir, M., & Tambak, S. (2023). Designing a reflective OBE curriculum for Islamic education. *Islamic Higher Education Review*, 9(3), 55–71.
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2021). *The mini guide to critical thinking concepts and tools*. Foundation for Critical Thinking.
- Pellegrino, J. W., & Hilton, M. L. (Eds.). (2021). *Education for life and work: Developing transferable knowledge and skills in the 21st century*. National Academies Press.

- Posner, G. J., Strike, K. A., Hewson, P. W., & Gertzog, W. A. (2022). *Philosophy of science and the education of scientists*. Routledge.
- Qois Al Hadi, A. F. M., Anggraini, F. N., Jinan, M., Maksum, M. N. R., & Jamaludin, R. (2025). Digital pedagogy in action: Enhancing critical thinking through YouTube in Islamic religious education. *Tadibia Islamika*, 5(2), 60–70.
- Rahman, A., & Ismail, N. (2025). Outcome-based learning in Islamic higher education: Reflections on student critical thinking development. *Journal of Islamic Education Studies*, 13(2), 201–218.
- Rahman, M., & Siddiqui, T. (2024). Islamic epistemology and learning outcomes in 21st-century education. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 22(3), 130–146.
- Rasyidi, R., Hafizoh, A., Masrom, M. binti, Astuti, D., Narongraksakhet, I., Husti, I., & Nurhaliza, A. (2025). Inquiry-based learning method: Is it effective in improving madrasah teacher social competence in student-centered learning. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 1(1), 29-44. <https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v1i1.4>
- Sambell, K. (2024). Aligning assessment with learning outcomes: Innovations in OBE. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 49(5), 721–737.
- Spady, W. D. (2021). *Outcome-based education: Critical issues and answers*. American Association of School Administrators.
- Sukenti, D., & Fauzan, A. (2024). Self-esteem, Islamic Behavior, and Writing Assessment for Indonesian Language Madrasa Teachers: An Empirical Phenomenological Investigation. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 7(3), 570-589. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i3.31>
- Sukenti, D., & Tambak, S. (2020). Developing Indonesian Language Learning Assessments: Strengthening the Personal Competence and Islamic Psychosocial of Teachers. *International Journal of Evaluation and research in education*, 9(4), 1079-1087. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v9i4.20677>
- Sukenti, D., & Tambak, S. (2025). The impact of teacher professional identity and psychological capital on learning assessment: Exploring emotional intelligence in language teachers. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 10(1), 18-36. <https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.202638001>
- Suryana, D., & Aziz, M. (2024). Interactive learning and critical thinking in Islamic higher education. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Islam*, 12(1), 45–62.
- Suryani, N., & Hidayat, M. (2024). Digital pedagogy and critical thinking in Islamic education. *Educational Research International*, 11(1), 87–101.
- Taha, R., & Mohamad, S. (2023). Critical thinking and faith integration in Islamic pedagogy. *Journal of Muslim Education Research*, 5(3), 172–189.
- Tambak, S., & Sukenti, D. (2024). Student Involvement Within Islamic Teacher Education: For a Future Profession. *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)*, 11(2), 317-352. <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v11i2.8141>
- Tambak, S., & Sukenti, D. (2025). Islamic professional madrasa teachers and motivation for continuous development: a phenomenological approach. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, 19(1), 81-90. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v19i1.21301>
- Tambak, S., Amril, A., & Sukenti, D. (2021). Islamic Teacher Development: Counstructing Islamic Professional Teachers Based on The Khalifah Concept. *Nazhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 4(1), 117-135. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v4i1.1055>

- Tambak, S., Hamzah, H., Ahmad, M. Y., Siregar, E. L., Sukenti, D., Sabdin, M., & Rohimah, R. B. (2022). Discussion method accuracy in Islamic higher education: the influence of gender and teaching duration. *Cakrawala Pendidikan: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 41(2), 507-520. <https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v41i2.40644>
- Tambak, S., Sukenti, D., Razak, A. Z. A., Agustina, A., Ahmad, K. A., Firdaus, F., & Syarif, M. (2025). Continuous professional development for madrasa teacher professionalism: engaging motivation for engagement. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, 14(4), 3171-3182. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v14i4.33501>
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2023). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners* (3rd ed.). ASCD.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2021). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- West, R. E., & Graham, C. R. (2022). *Trends in educational technology and blended learning. Computers & Education*, 182, 104484.
- Widodo, W., Hoogervorst, T. G., Syarif, M., Yueming, L., Mamat, M., Fauziah, V. N., & Suyitno, S. (2025). The impact of professional commitment on madrasa teacher performance: A study of professional learning communities in Indonesian madrasa. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 1(2), 105-120. <https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v1i2.173>
- Wulandari, I., Julianto, J., Hasyim, F., & Admoko, S. (2025). Research trends on critical thinking skills based on Scopus database. *Studies in Physics Teaching and Learning*, 1(1), 16–30.
- Yasin, M. M. H. bin F., Restyani, D., Ahmad, M., Abdel-Latief, S., Duhani, E. M., Ismawan, Y., & Fidzi, R. (2025). Wahdah method for madrasah teacher professionalism: Is it effective for improving al-Qur'an reading skill?. *Journal of Instruction and Islamic Religious Education*, 1(1), 45-55. <https://doi.org/10.63826/jiire.v1i1.5>