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The Effect of the Use of Small Group Discussion Type Active Learning Strategy on Students' Critical Thinking Skills in the Subject of Moral Beliefs at MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya

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Abstract: Learning of Moral Faith is still dominated by a one-way learning strategy that causes students to be passive and poorly trained in critical thinking, especially in the material of the Kalam science streams. This condition encourages the need for the use of more active learning strategies. This study aims to determine the influence of the Small Group Discussion type Active Learning strategy on students' critical thinking skills. This study uses a pre-experimental quantitative approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design. The population in this study was all students in grade XI of MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya, while the research sample consisted of 26 students of class XI A. The results showed that there was an effect of the use of Active Learning type Small Group Discussion on students' critical thinking skills in the subject of Moral Faith at MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya, with a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05).

Keywords: Active Learning, Small Group Discussion, Critical Thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Learning is the process of interaction between students, teachers, and learning resources in a certain learning environment (Fajriah et al., 2022). Through this process, students are expected to gain deeper knowledge as a provision to become the next generation of the nation in the future (Syar & Supriadi, 2021). Therefore, systematic learning planning is very necessary to ensure the implementation of effective learning, including in the subject of Moral Faith.

The subject of Moral Faith not only focuses on mastering the concepts of faith and morals theoretically, but also emphasizes students' ability to understand, analyze, and practice them in daily life. Learning Akidah Akhlak requires the active involvement of students and the development of critical thinking skills so that the material learned is not memorized, but can be understood deeply and contextually (RIZQI, 2025). This ability is the link between understanding the subject matter and its application in daily life.

Critical thinking includes the ability to think effectively and identify the relationships between different systems, concepts, and disciplines in an effort to solve problems and make decisions (Putri et al., 2025). According to Norris & Ennis, critical thinking is defined as reasonable, reflective thinking that emphasizes a person's ability to determine the right beliefs and actions (Kusmaryono & Risky, 2024).

Learning Akidah Akhlak in its application is still faced with low student involvement, so the learning process tends to take place in one direction. This is accompanied by students' difficulties in understanding the material, as well as the presentation of learning that is less varied (Norhidayah, Ajahari, 2025). In addition, the learning of Akidah Akhlak still focuses on memorisation, which makes students less likely to understand the material in depth (Ernawati et al., 2023). Contextual Moral Faith learning materials often cause boredom if only delivered by the lecture method. Therefore, an effective and efficient learning strategy is needed to improve the quality of the learning process. One of the solutions that can be applied is the use of a strategy *Active Learning* type, *Small Group Discussion.*

Active learning is a concept of learning strategies that places students as the main subject in the learning process (L.Sibermen, 2006). *Active Learning* is a learning process that gives students the opportunity to do more learning activities, in the form of interactive relationships with the subject matter so as to encourage students to conclude understanding rather than just accepting the lessons given (Auliyah, 2026). Strategy *Active Learning* type *Small Group Discussion* is one of the learning strategies that can actively involve students in the learning process (Ridha et al., 2025). Strategy *Active Learning* type *Small Group Discussion* aims to increase students' learning responsibilities through group work. Students are invited to actively discuss, exchange opinions, and understand the material together Through active and fun learning (Susanto, 2020).

According to Masrufa in his research, the implementation of active learning strategies in Islamic religious education subjects can increase students' conceptual understanding by up to 35% compared to traditional methods (Hasan, 2024). In line with these findings, the implementation of *Active Learning* Models, such as *Small Group Discussion* proven to be able to make students more active in learning, practice critical thinking through discussions, and improve their ability to do assignments and daily tests (Hapsah et al., 2024). From this description, it can be concluded that the *Active Learning* type *Small Group Discussion* can improve students' critical thinking skills through group discussions that involve students actively in learning.

Based on the results of observations and interviews on May 10, 2025 with teachers of Moral Faith at MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya, students' activeness in learning is still low. This can be seen from the lack of attention of students when the teacher explains and the lack of student involvement such as asking, answering or expressing opinions, because the material is considered difficult to understand. This condition also has an impact on the low critical thinking ability of students, especially in the material of the Kalam science streams, whose discussions are wide. Therefore, the right learning strategy is needed in order to encourage students' critical thinking skills in the learning process.

Based on this description, the author is interested in conducting a study titled "The effect of the use of Small *Group Discussion* type Active Learning *strategies* on students' critical thinking skills in the subject of Moral Beliefs at MA Darul Ulum".

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with the type of *Pre-experimental* The design used is a one–*group pretest–posttest design*. Design *One Group Pretest–Posttest* has a weakness due to the absence of a control group as a comparison. This weakness can be influenced by other factors, for example students obtaining additional information from outside the classroom (Andi, 2018).

Table 1.1 Research *Design one-group pretest–posttest*

Pretest	*Treatment*	*Posttest*
O1 ⟶	**X** ⟶	**O2**

Description:
O1 : Pretest score (Before being treated)
O2 : Posttest score (After treatment)
X : Treatment (small group discussion type active learning strategy)

The population in this study is all students of grade XI MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya totaling 54 students. The sample determination in this study uses non-probability sampling with purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is a sample selection technique based on certain considerations and characteristics that are relevant to the research objective. In this study, class XI A MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya totaling 26 students was selected as a sample because it has relatively homogeneous abilities and participates in learning material that is in accordance with the research focus, so it is considered to be able to represent research needs.

The data collection techniques used in this study include observation and tests. Observation was carried out directly in class XI A MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya to observe the implementation of the strategy Active Learning type Small Group Discussion during the learning process. The test is compiled based on critical thinking indicators according to Ennis, namely basic clarification, providing a reason for a decision, concluding, further clarification, conjecture or integration (Fauziah, 2022). The indicator is used to measure students' critical thinking skills through a written test in the form of an essay of ten questions.

The data analysis technique in this study began with expert validation and instrument trials. Validation is carried out to ensure the suitability of the questions with the material and indicators of critical thinking ability. The results of the trial were then analyzed through validity, reliability, differentiation, and difficulty levels to determine the quality of the questions. Furthermore, the data prerequisite test includes normality test, n-gain test, and hypothesis test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research was conducted at MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya, Jalan Gg. Sari No. 45, Pahandut District, Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan. The purpose of this study is to see the influence of *the* active *learning strategy* of the small group discussion *type* on the critical thinking ability of grade XI A students in the subject of Moral Faith. Before the research began, the instrument was first tested on 24 students of class XI B MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya to ensure the feasibility of the instrument.

The results of the instrument test were then analyzed using SPSS version 21 and *Microsoft Excel for Windows*, including tests of validity, reliability, differentiation, and difficulty of the question items. In addition, prerequisite tests were also carried out, namely the normality test, and *the N-gain test*, as well as the hypothesis test as follows.

1. Instrument Trials

Table 2.1
Statistical Data of Validity Test

R Table	0,3172	0,3172	0,3172	0,3172	0,3172	0,3172	0,3172	0,3172	0,3172	0,3172
R count	0,3482	0,6090	0,6544	0,3482	0,6444	0,7018	0,6719	0,4634	0,6805	0,7132
Status	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid

Based on the results of the validity test analysis using *Microsoft Excel for Windows* in Table 4.1, the results of the r calculation value 0.3482 are greater than the r table, namely, 0.3172. Thus, all question items are declared valid. These results indicate that the instrument used has been able to measure indicators that are in accordance with the research objectives, so it is suitable for use as a data collection tool.

Table 2.2
Statistical Data of Reliability Test

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.780	10

The results of the reliability test analysis using SPSS version 21 showed that the research instrument had a *Cronbach's Alpha value* of 0.78 which was included in the standard reliability category. Therefore, the instrument was declared reliable and feasible to collect data in this study. After the instrument is declared feasible based on the validity and reliability test, the analysis is continued with a differentiating power test to determine the ability of each question item to distinguish between high-ability and low-ability students.

Table 2.3
Statistic Data Differentiating Power

Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Question01	32.86	12.028	.258	.780
Question02	32.91	10.848	.509	.756
Question03	32.82	11.489	.603	.760
Question04	32.86	12.028	.258	.780
Question05	33.09	10.753	.552	.752
Question06	33.05	9.474	.562	.745
Question07	33.18	9.394	.504	.757
Question08	33.27	11.160	.318	.777
Question09	33.27	9.732	.543	.748
Question10	33.23	9.136	.559	.747

The results of the differentiating power analysis using SPSS version 21 showed that the test instrument had a fairly good ability to distinguish students with high and low ability levels. Of the ten questions analyzed, seven questions were in the good category and three were in the sufficient category. Thus, the results indicate that ten questions are worth using.

Table 2.4
Difficulty Level Statistical Data
Statistics

		Question01	Question02	Question03	Question04	Question05	Question06	Question07	Question08	Question09	Question10
N	Valid	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Red		2.95	2.68	3.14	2.32	2.68	2.73	1.18	2.68	1.23	2.45
Maximum		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

According to Sudjana, the proportion of the difficulty level of the questions was compiled by a comparison of 30% of the questions in the easy category, 40% of the questions in the medium category, and 30% of the problems in the difficult category (Warju et al., 2020). Based on the results of the analysis using SPSS version 21, of the ten questions tested, it was known that two questions were included in the easy category, six questions in the medium category, and two questions in the difficult category. This indicates that the difficulty level of the instrument has been arranged proportionately and in accordance with the theoretical foundation used.

2. Prerequisite Test

Before the hypothesis test, the pretest and posttest data of students in class XI A MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya were calculated through SPSS version 21 to ensure their eligibility. then, the analysis was focused on improving students' critical thinking skills as measured through the N-gain test and the data distribution was measured using the normality test.

Table 2.4

N-Gain	N	Minimum	Maximum	Red	Std. Deviation
N-Gain_Score	26	.00	1.00	.6943	.23790
N-Gain_Persen	26	.00	100.00	69.4279	23.79003
Valid N (listwise)	26				

Statistical Data

Based on the results of the N-gain test in the table above, the average N-gain Score of 0.6943 was obtained while the N-gain percent value of 69.42% was in the category of quite effective. These results show that the use of the Small Group Discussion type Active Learning strategy is quite effective in improving students' critical thinking skills.

Table 2.5
Normality Test Data
Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	.112	26	.200*	.974	26	.739
Posttest	.202	26	.008	.937	26	.111

The normality test in this study was carried out using *the Shapiro–Wilk test* because the number of samples was less than 50. The results of *the Shapiro–Wilk* test showed a significance value of > 0.05, so it can be concluded that the data is normally distributed. With the fulfillment of these normality assumptions, statistical analysis was then carried out using *the paired samples t-test* hypothesis.

3. Hypothesis Test

After the data is declared to be normally distributed, the next step is to test the hypothesis using the SPSS version 21 program with *a paired samples t-test*. The hypotheses proposed in this study are as follows:

Ha: There is an effect of the use of the *Small Group Discussion* type Active Learning *strategy* on students' critical thinking skills in the subject of Moral Beliefs at MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya

With: There is no effect of the use of the Small Group Discussion *type Active Learning* strategy on students' critical thinking skills in the subject of Moral Faith at MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya

Table 2.6
Hypothesis Test
Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
		Red	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Red	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	*Pretest Posttest*	-20.077	9.533	1.870	-23.927	-16.227	-10.739	25	.000

Based on the results of the *paired samplest t-test* hypothesis in the table above, a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) **was obtained.** This is in accordance with the basis of decision-making that:

if α < 0.05 then Ho is rejected and Ha is accepted
if α > 0.05 then Ho is accepted and Ha is rejected

In accordance with the results of *the paired samplest T-test*, it can be concluded that H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted, which means that there is an effect of the use of the Small Group Discussion *type Active Learning* strategy on students' critical thinking skills in the subject of Moral Beliefs at MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya.

Discussion

Active learning is a student-centered learning strategy, one of which is through *the small group discussion* type. This strategy provides opportunities for students to speak, ask questions, and express opinions. Through these interactions, students exchange ideas in response to the views of their peers, as well as analyze the material in more depth. This process encourages students to draw conclusions independently, so that critical thinking skills can develop.

In its implementation , the Small Group Discussion type Active Learning strategy has the following steps:

a) The teacher divides the students into small groups of three to five members
b) The teacher provides case study questions related to the material studied to each group
c) The teacher gives directions to each group to discuss the answers to the questions
d) The teacher ensures that each group member actively participates in the discussion

e) The teacher instructs each group to present the results of their discussion in the class discussion through a designated spokesperson
f) The teacher clarifies, concludes and follows up (Azizah, 2022).

This study uses one class as a research sample, namely class IX A with a total of 26 students. In its application, this research was carried out with 3 meetings. The first meeting of Akidah Akhlak learning was carried out using lecture and question and answer methods with the help of Powerpoint media, as well as pretest questions. However, the results obtained from the application of these methods have not shown optimal results. This can be seen from the low activity of students during the learning process, which is characterized by the lack of student attention when the teacher explains the material of the kalam science streams and there are still students talking to their peers. As a result, learning tends to be teacher-centered or known as *teacher-centered*.

The second meeting was held by applying a *small group discussion* type active learning *strategy*. The small group discussion *type active learning strategy* is carried out by dividing students into small groups consisting of 5 to 6 students. The goal is to encourage students to produce intensive, student-centered interactions (Student Centres). Students were given questions in the form of case studies to be discussed facilitated by teachers related to the material on kalam science streams. This provides an opportunity for students to build discussions, mutual understanding and come to critical conclusions. The results obtained from the application *of small group discussion*-type active learning in class XI A have changed significantly. The activeness of students who was originally low has increased and is active in exchanging ideas. This can be seen from the presentation of the results of discussions in the classroom forum which further strengthens student participation and creates a more communicative and student-centered learning atmosphere.

Furthermore, at the third meeting, students were given a posttest in the form of essay questions as many as ten questions that had been made with indicators of critical thinking ability according to Norris & Ennis theory. The goal is to see changes after implementing *the small group discussion* type active learning *strategy* in class XI A. The results of the data obtained from the pretest and posttest were calculated by the N-gain test obtaining an average N-gain Score of 0.6943 with moderate interpretable results. The average N-gain percentage value of 69.42%, which is included in the category, is quite effective. These findings show that the use of small group discussion-type active learning strategies can improve students' critical thinking skills. The results of the analysis were strengthened by the results of a hypothesis test using paired samples T-test with a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This value shows that H_0 is rejected and Ha is accepted, which means that there is an influence on the use of small group discussion-type active learning strategies on students' critical thinking skills.

Based on this description, it can be concluded that the use of small group discussion-type active learning strategies not only improves students' critical thinking skills, but also helps students develop their way of thinking. Through small group discussions, students become more accustomed to analyzing problems, expressing opinions, and drawing conclusions, especially in studying the material of the Kalam science streams.

According to Rizqi pUse of the *Active Learning* type *small group discussion* has advantages and disadvantages, as follows: First, Shaping students' creativity in the form of ideas, ideas, in solving a problem. Second, develop an attitude of respecting the opinions of others. Third, expanding students' scientific ways of thinking and attitudes are able to develop and grow better. Fourth, get used to deliberation in solving a problem. The disadvantages are as follows; First, discussions are often dominated by active students. Second, discussions take quite a lot of time. Third, too many students can hinder the opportunity to express the opinions of other students (Rizqi, 2025).

Based on the above opinion, it can be concluded that *the active learning type of small group discussion* has disadvantages and advantages. The advantages of *the active learning*

strategy of the small group discussion *type* include ; first, it can make students actively involved in learning. Second, it creates a more communicative learning atmosphere. Third, it can encourage students to cooperate with each other and respect differences of opinion. Meanwhile, the disadvantage of this learning strategy is that teachers need time to create case study questions. In addition, it also takes quite a lot of time to have discussions in learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the use of *the Small Group Discussion type Active* Learning strategy has an effect on improving students' critical thinking skills in the subject of Moral Beliefs at MA Darul Ulum Palangka Raya. This is proven by the results of the paired samples t-test with a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05). These findings also support the critical thinking theory according to Norris and Ennis that critical thinking skills can develop through activities such as analysis, reasoning, and drawing conclusions.

This research contributes that the application of the *small group discussion* type active learning *strategy* can be a solution in overcoming the learning of Akidah Akhlak which has tended to be teacher-centered and has not encouraged active student involvement. This strategy is able to create a more communicative learning atmosphere, thereby encouraging active student involvement, encouraging critical thinking in understanding the material of kalam science streams.

This study has limitations in the use of *pre-experimental* designs without control groups, so the results of the study cannot be fully generalized. Therefore, further research is recommended using a more robust experimental design involving a control group. In addition, the research can also be extended to different levels of education and subjects to test the consistency of the effectiveness of these learning strategies in various contexts.

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