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From Passive Listeners To Active Arguers: Active Debate In Fiqh Learning At Madrasah Tsanawiyah

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Abstract

Fiqh instruction in Indonesian madrasah continues to be dominated by expository lecturing that positions students as recipients of legal conclusions rather than as participants in the reasoning that produces them. This study examines how the active debate method is implemented in Fiqh learning at MTs Ar-Riyadh Jenggawah, Jember, and how that implementation reshapes students' engagement and learning outcomes. A qualitative descriptive design with a single-case orientation was employed. Data were gathered through non-participant classroom observation across six meetings, semi-structured interviews with the Fiqh teacher, the head of the madrasah, and twelve eighth-grade students, and documentation of lesson plans, argumentation rubrics, and assessment records. Analysis followed the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while credibility was established through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, supplemented by member checking. The findings show that implementation unfolded across three phases: planning, in which the teacher converted khilafiyah-laden material into debatable propositions and constructed an argumentation rubric; enactment, which followed a sequence of opening statements, rebuttal, moderated cross-examination, and teacher-led clarification of the shar'i position; and evaluation, which assessed argument quality alongside conventional written testing. Students moved from silent listening toward evidence-based argumentation, with classical mastery rising from 45.8% to 87.5% and observed verbal participation from 37.5% to 91.7%. Three constraints emerged: the verbal dominance of confident

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students, time pressure, and the risk of disputation sliding beyond the bounds of adab. The study concludes that active debate operates less as a variation in technique than as a reorientation of the epistemic role of students in Fiqh classrooms, provided it is scaffolded deliberately and closed by authoritative teacher clarification.

Keywords: Active Debate; Argumentation Skills; Fiqh Learning; Learning Outcomes; Madrasah Tsanawiyah.

INTRODUCTION

Fiqh occupies a distinctive position within the madrasah curriculum. Unlike subjects whose attainment can be adequately captured by the retention of information, Fiqh is simultaneously normative and practical: it requires students to know a ruling, to grasp the reasoning that generates it, and to enact it in daily worship and social transaction. Mansir and Karim (2020) argue that Fiqh learning ought to position students so that they are able to direct and shape their own learning process—determining what is studied, to what extent, when, and in what manner—so that they do not become merely passive recipients within the learning process itself. The pedagogical implication is far from trivial. A Fiqh classroom that transmits only conclusions has, in an important sense, already betrayed the epistemology of the discipline it teaches, because Islamic jurisprudence is historically constituted by disagreement, by the weighing of evidence, and by reasoned preference among competing positions.

Classroom reality in many Indonesian madrasah, however, departs considerably from this ideal. Charles et al. (2023), reporting from a madrasah in West Sumatra, observed that instruction was conducted almost exclusively through the lecture method, with the consequence that students tended only to listen to what the teacher conveyed, that no feedback loop was established, and that students consequently became less active in learning Fiqh. Hidayah et al. (2025), working at a madrasah tsanawiyah in Blora, likewise identified the persistence of conventional methods as the proximate cause of low Fiqh attainment. Listrianti et al. (2025) reached a convergent conclusion from a different angle: when problem-based approaches were introduced into Fiqh learning, previously passive students began to engage actively in discussion, to share ideas, and to connect jurisprudential theory to real-life contexts. Read together, these studies suggest that student passivity in Fiqh classrooms is not primarily an attribute of the learners but a predictable product of the instructional format in which they are placed.

The consequences of that format are measurable. Zega et al. (2022), in a correlational

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study across four private madrasah tsanawiyah in Gunung Sitoli, established that learning methods and learning activities jointly contribute to students' Fiqh learning outcomes—evidence that method selection is not a peripheral matter of teacher preference but a determinant of attainment. Ulandari et al. (2023) demonstrated that substituting problem-based learning for conventional instruction produced measurable gains in Fiqh outcomes among eighth-grade students. Arsyad et al. (2023) extended the analysis to the affective domain, showing that learning motivation exerts a substantial influence on Fiqh learning outcomes at the madrasah tsanawiyah level. The cumulative picture is coherent: where the method fails to activate, outcomes decline; where it activates, outcomes rise.

Active learning offers the most established theoretical response to this problem. In his widely cited review, Prince (2004) defines active learning as any instructional method that engages students in the learning process and requires them to undertake meaningful activities while thinking about what they are doing, concluding that there is broad empirical support for its core elements. Within this family of methods, debate holds a particular attraction for religious education because its structure mirrors the discursive form of the discipline itself. Wijayanto et al. (2017), writing in the journal of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, present active debate as a method capable of involving the entire class rather than the disputants alone, and set out the procedural strategies through which teachers can optimise its use. Hu (2023) characterises debate teaching as a method that cultivates language capability and critical thinking simultaneously, addressing what he describes as the separation between linguistic ability and thinking ability in conventional instruction.

International evidence converges on similar conclusions. Ferrer-Aracil et al. (2023) treat debating as an active teaching–learning method through which transversal competences—the attitudes and dispositions required to function in academic and professional life—are acquired. Nurakhir et al. (2020), in a study of student perceptions in Indonesian higher education, position classroom debate as a strategy for enhancing critical thinking alongside oral communication skills. At a considerably larger scale, Schueler and Larned (2025) exploited district-wide longitudinal data from Boston Public Schools to estimate the effect of participation in policy debate on academic achievement and attainment, finding that structured competitive argumentation is associated with gains in critical thinking and post-secondary progression. Yet the method is not without limitation. Chen et al. (2022) caution that traditional debate activities conducted in physical classrooms encounter constraints of time and space, with the result that many participants act as silent watchers rather than as genuine exchangers of ideas—a warning of direct relevance to any

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attempt to implement debate in a crowded madrasah classroom.

Within Indonesia, a body of empirical work has begun to test debate specifically. Fatmawati and Setiawan (2017), employing a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design, reported that the mean learning outcome of students taught through active debate reached 81.17, in the very good category, compared with 70.47 for students taught conventionally, with the difference statistically significant. Nazihah et al. (2018) combined recitation with debate in Fiqh material on hudud at a madrasah aliyah in Blitar, reporting improvement in students' presentation capability. Hasibuan et al. (2024) documented gains in critical thinking following the application of the debate method in history instruction, while Nurdin (2016) demonstrated through two-cycle classroom action research that active debate raises students' capacity to participate in discussion. In the domain of Islamic education specifically, Fauzan (2023) examined the optimisation of learning achievement through active debate, and Afidah and Chotimah (2022) analysed how Islamic education teachers position themselves when facilitating debate in the classroom.

Three gaps nonetheless remain. First, the dominant methodological orientation is quasi-experimental: existing studies establish that debate produces higher scores but rarely describe how the method is actually enacted—how topics are selected, how groups are composed, how the teacher intervenes, how arguments are assessed. The pedagogical mechanism therefore remains largely a black box. Second, the empirical base is concentrated at senior secondary and tertiary levels and in general subjects such as geography, history, sociology, and civics; the madrasah tsanawiyah level, where students are developmentally at the threshold of formal reasoning, is comparatively under-examined. Third, and most consequentially, no existing study addresses the distinctive tension that arises when the object of debate is shar'i material. Debating jurisprudence is not equivalent to debating public policy: teachers must simultaneously encourage disagreement and prevent it from mutating into disrespect toward established rulings, must open khilafiyah questions while eventually closing them with authoritative clarification, and must maintain the norms of adab within an activity whose very form invites contestation.

This study addresses those gaps through a qualitative examination of active debate in Fiqh learning at MTs Ar-Riyadh Jenggawah, Jember. It is guided by three questions. How is the active debate method planned, enacted, and evaluated in Fiqh learning at this madrasah? How does its implementation reshape students' engagement and learning outcomes across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains? What constraints emerge during implementation, and how does the teacher mediate them? By describing process rather than merely measuring product, the

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study aims to contribute a transferable account of how disputation can be domesticated pedagogically within an Islamic educational setting.

Active Debate as a Student-Centered Approach in Fiqh Learning.

Active debate can be understood as a student-centered learning strategy that transforms the classroom from a teacher-dominated environment into an interactive space in which students actively construct, defend, question, and evaluate knowledge. In Fiqh learning, this approach is particularly relevant because Fiqh is not limited to memorizing legal rules but also involves understanding evidence, interpreting different scholarly opinions, and applying Islamic legal principles to practical situations. Conventional teacher-centered instruction may encourage students to receive information passively, whereas active learning emphasizes students' participation in the learning process (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Prince (2004) similarly explains that active learning involves instructional activities that require students to engage meaningfully with learning materials and think about what they are doing. Within Islamic education, debate therefore provides an opportunity for students to move from simply knowing a Fiqh ruling toward understanding why a particular ruling is formulated and how different interpretations can be evaluated. The dialogical nature of debate is also consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes that learning develops through social interaction and the exchange of ideas. When students discuss questions concerning worship, transactions, family matters, or contemporary Islamic issues, they encounter alternative perspectives that require them to reconsider their initial assumptions.

Brookfield and Preskill (2012) argue that discussion-based learning can promote critical thinking because students are encouraged to listen carefully, formulate questions, provide reasons, and respond to alternative viewpoints. In this context, active debate can strengthen students' ability to formulate arguments based on credible Fiqh sources rather than relying merely on personal opinions. Fisher (2001) emphasizes that critical thinking involves reasoned judgment based on evidence and argument, which is highly relevant to Fiqh learning because Islamic legal reasoning requires students to connect claims with appropriate textual and rational justification. The importance of argumentation is further supported by Kuhn (1991), who views argument as an essential component of thinking and intellectual development because individuals learn to distinguish claims from evidence and counterarguments. Recent studies in Islamic education demonstrate similar tendencies. Research on active debate in Islamic Religious Education indicates that the method encourages students to cooperate, express opinions logically and

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politely, develop confidence in public speaking, and respect differences of opinion. Research specifically examining active debate in Fiqh at Madrasah Diniyah Darul Hijroh Surabaya also found that the method was implemented effectively because Fiqh materials were compatible with debate activities and supported by teacher guidance, facilities, and student motivation. Furthermore, recent research on discussion-based Fiqh learning shows that structured discussion can improve student participation, confidence, analytical ability, and logical argument construction (Ezari et al., 2026). Thus, active debate should be positioned not merely as a classroom technique but as a pedagogical strategy that develops intellectual engagement, communication, argumentation, and reflective understanding. In Madrasah Tsanawiyah, its application can be particularly valuable because students are at a developmental stage in which they can begin to compare viewpoints, provide reasons for their positions, and learn that legitimate differences of interpretation can be examined through evidence and scholarly reasoning. Active debate consequently offers a pedagogical bridge between the acquisition of Fiqh knowledge and the development of critical, communicative, and intellectually responsible Muslim learners.

Active Debate, Critical Thinking, and Argumentation in Fiqh Education

The development of critical thinking and argumentation is an important dimension of contemporary Fiqh education because students need more than the ability to recall legal concepts; they also need to analyze problems, evaluate evidence, compare opinions, and formulate justified conclusions. Active debate provides an instructional environment in which these competencies can develop through direct interaction between students. According to Facione (1990), critical thinking involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. These elements correspond closely with the intellectual processes required during Fiqh debate, particularly when students are presented with a controversial or contextualized Islamic legal issue. Students must first understand the issue, identify relevant evidence, compare competing arguments, and then formulate a conclusion supported by appropriate reasoning. Halpern (2014) emphasizes that critical thinking should be understood as purposeful and reasoned thinking directed toward achieving particular goals, suggesting that classroom activities should provide students with opportunities to use reasoning rather than merely reproduce information. Active debate fulfills this requirement by assigning students the responsibility of constructing and defending positions. Johnson and Johnson (2009) further explain that constructive controversy can stimulate intellectual development because

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individuals encounter opposing perspectives and are required to understand, evaluate, and respond to alternative positions. Such interaction is particularly significant in Fiqh because students may encounter legitimate differences among scholars concerning the interpretation and application of Islamic legal principles. Instead of presenting disagreement as confusion, debate can teach students to understand disagreement as an opportunity for deeper inquiry when it is conducted according to appropriate academic and ethical principles. Brookfield and Preskill (2012) likewise emphasize that dialogue and discussion can cultivate listening, questioning, reasoning, and openness to alternative perspectives. This perspective is consistent with the educational objective of developing students who can communicate disagreement respectfully while maintaining intellectual discipline. Recent evidence from Madrasah Tsanawiyah contexts supports this relationship. A study of structured point-counterpoint debate in Akidah Akhlak learning found that debate increased student engagement, courage to express opinions, critical thinking, argument construction, and respect for different opinions. Research on discussion in Fiqh at MTs Negeri 4 Bungo similarly indicates that discussion can be used to strengthen students' critical abilities, although successful implementation requires teacher competence and student motivation.

Panel discussion in Fiqh learning has also been reported to increase students' attention and engagement during classroom activities. More recent research indicates that teacher-centered and memorization-oriented Fiqh instruction can restrict students' conceptual understanding and critical engagement, creating a need for more student-centered pedagogical approaches. Research on problem-based Fiqh learning further demonstrates that students can shift from passive listeners to active participants who debate, divide responsibilities, present findings, question evidence, and compare classical juristic opinions. Therefore, active debate can be conceptualized as a pedagogical mechanism through which Fiqh knowledge, critical thinking, and argumentation are integrated. Its effectiveness depends on careful topic selection, clear debate rules, credible textual evidence, teacher facilitation, balanced participation, and an ethical culture of disagreement. When these elements are present, active debate can transform Fiqh learning from a process of receiving predetermined answers into a process of inquiry in which students learn how to reason about Islamic legal questions responsibly. The ultimate educational value of active debate is therefore not simply that students become more vocal, but that they become more capable of presenting evidence-based arguments, evaluating opposing claims, listening respectfully, and reaching reasoned conclusions while remaining grounded in Islamic scholarly principles.

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DISCUSSION

The Anatomy of Passivity: Conditions Preceding Intervention

Observation of the baseline meeting and retrospective interviews established a consistent portrait of the Fiqh classroom before active debate was introduced. Instruction proceeded through teacher exposition followed by note-taking and the completion of exercises from the textbook. Across a forty-minute baseline observation, the teacher spoke for approximately thirty-two minutes; student verbal contributions were confined to nine short responses distributed among four students. Nine of the twenty-four students made no verbal contribution of any kind.

The teacher's own account located the source of this pattern in the perceived nature of the subject rather than in the disposition of the learners.

> "I used to think Fiqh had to be delivered that way. This is religious law—there is a ruling, and the ruling has to be conveyed correctly. I was afraid that if I opened it up for discussion, students would end up doubting the law itself." (T1)

This statement is analytically significant. It indicates that lecture dominance was sustained not by inertia but by a theological anxiety: the belief that opening jurisprudential material to contestation risks destabilising the authority of the ruling. The same anxiety is implicit in the observations reported by Charles et al. (2023), in which exclusive reliance on lecturing produced a classroom without feedback and with progressively diminishing student activity. Students, for their part, described the resulting experience in terms of comprehension without ownership.

> "I understood what the teacher explained, but if someone outside asked me why the ruling is like that, I could not explain it. I only knew that it was so." (S4)

The distinction articulated here—between knowing that a ruling holds and being able to reconstruct why it holds—maps directly onto the concern raised by Mansir and Karim (2020) that Fiqh instruction frequently produces students who remain passive recipients within the learning process. It also anticipates the finding of Zega et al. (2022) that method and learning activity jointly determine Fiqh attainment: where activity is absent, attainment reduces to recall.

Phase One: Converting Fiqh Material into Debatable Propositions

The planning phase comprised four operations, each of which required a specific pedagogical judgement. The first and most demanding was topic selection. The teacher rejected the assumption that any Fiqh material can be debated, distinguishing between rulings established by decisive textual evidence and questions on which the schools of law have historically differed. Debate was confined to the second category.

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> "I do not put the obligation of prayer up for debate. That is settled. What I debate is the material where the scholars themselves differ—for example, the details of *zakat* on professional income, or how contemporary transactions should be classified. There the students are not challenging the law; they are learning how scholars reason." (T1)

This distinction constitutes the study's principal pedagogical finding, because it resolves the theological anxiety that had previously sustained lecture dominance. By restricting debate to *khilafiyah* questions, the teacher reframed disputation as an imitation of juristic reasoning rather than as a challenge to revelation. The insight has no direct precedent in the literature examined: Nazihah et al. (2018) applied debate to *hudud* material without theorising the selection criterion, and Afidah and Chotimah (2022), while examining how Islamic education teachers facilitate debate, do not address the boundary between debatable and non-debatable content. The finding therefore extends existing scholarship rather than confirming it.

The second operation concerned group composition. Rather than permitting self-selection, the teacher assigned students to pro and contra positions independently of their personal conviction, dividing the class into two groups of twelve, each subdivided into a three-member speaking team and a nine-member research team. This structure was designed to counter precisely the risk that Chen et al. (2022) identify—that in conventional classroom debate a majority of participants become silent watchers rather than genuine exchangers of ideas. By assigning every non-speaking student a documented research obligation, the teacher converted spectatorship into a defined role.

The third operation was the construction of an argumentation rubric containing four criteria: relevance of the *dalil* cited, logical coherence between evidence and claim, responsiveness to the opposing argument, and observance of *adab* in delivery. The fourth was the preparation of a one-week research interval during which groups compiled evidence from the textbook, from supplementary jurisprudential references supplied by the teacher, and from consultation with the *ustadz* of the affiliated *pesantren*.

Phase Two: The Architecture of Enactment

Classroom enactment followed a five-stage sequence that remained stable across both observed cycles. The stages, the time allocated to each, and the observed function of each are summarised in Table 2.

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Table 2. Observed Structure of the Active Debate Sequence

Stage	Activity	Duration	Observed Pedagogical Function
1	Framing of the proposition	5 min	Teacher restates the question, reminds students that difference among jurists is legitimate, and sets the norms of *adab*
2	Opening statements	10 min	Each side presents its position with supporting evidence; no interruption permitted
3	Rebuttal	15 min	Alternating responses; research-team members may pass written notes to speakers
4	Moderated cross-examination	20 min	Teacher directs questions to named non-speaking students, distributing participation deliberately
5	Clarification and closure	20 min	Teacher maps the positions, identifies the stronger evidence, and states the position adopted in the madrasah

Source: Classroom observation across six meetings, 2025.

Stage four proved decisive for equitable participation. In the first cycle, the teacher initially permitted open response, and observation recorded that five students produced 71% of all verbal contributions. In the second cycle, the teacher introduced directed questioning of named non-speaking students, after which the five most active students accounted for 38% of contributions. This adjustment represents a practical solution to the silent-watcher problem theorised by Chen et al. (2022) and operationalises the claim of Wijayanto et al. (2017) that active debate should involve the entire class rather than the disputants alone.

Stage five carries a significance specific to religious education. Unlike a policy debate, in which the withholding of a verdict is pedagogically defensible, a Fiqh debate that concludes in unresolved disagreement risks leaving junior secondary students without practical guidance for

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worship. The teacher therefore closed each session by mapping the positions, indicating which carried the stronger evidence, and stating the position adopted within the madrasah while affirming the legitimacy of the alternative.

> "The debate is the process. But at the end they must go home knowing what to do. So I say: both are valid opinions among the scholars, and here is the one we practise here, and here is why. That way they learn the reasoning without losing the practice." (T1)

This dual move—preserving pluralism at the level of reasoning while providing determinacy at the level of practice—constitutes a form of pedagogical closure not described in the general debate literature. Hu (2023) treats the cultivation of critical thinking as the terminal objective of debate teaching, and Ferrer-Aracil et al. (2023) similarly foreground transversal competence acquisition. Neither confronts a context in which the activity must also yield an actionable normative outcome. The finding thus identifies a contextual adaptation required when debate is transposed into Islamic jurisprudential education.

Phase Three: Assessing Arguments Rather Than Answers

Evaluation operated on two levels. Process assessment applied the four-criterion rubric to every student, with research-team members assessed on the written evidence sheets they produced and speakers assessed additionally on delivery. Product assessment retained a conventional written test of twenty items covering the same material. The teacher's rationale for retaining both instruments was explicitly diagnostic.

> "The written test tells me whether they know the ruling. The rubric tells me whether they can defend it. A student can score well on the test and still collapse the moment someone disagrees with him." (T1)

The dual instrument produced information that neither alone would have yielded. Three students who scored above 85 on the written test received rubric scores below 65, having demonstrated accurate recall but an inability to respond to counter-argument. Conversely, two students with written scores in the low seventies produced rubric scores above 80. This divergence supplies empirical texture to the contribution of learning activity to Fiqh outcomes identified statistically by Zega et al. (2022): activity and attainment are related, but they are not identical, and instruments sensitive only to recall systematically under-report the capability that debate develops.

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Learning Outcomes Across Three Domains

Changes in learning outcome were documented across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, as summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Changes in Learning Outcome Indicators Before and After Implementation

Domain	Indicator	Before	After	Gain
Cognitive	Class mean, written test	68.3	82.7	+14.4
	Classical mastery (≥ 75)	45.8%	87.5%	+41.7
Affective	Students expressing willingness to state an opinion	41.7%	83.3%	+41.6
	Observed *adab* compliance during disagreement	n/a	91.7%	–
Psychomotor	Students producing at least one verbal contribution	37.5%	91.7%	+54.2
	Arguments supported by an explicit *dalil*	12.5%	75.0%	+62.5

Source: Assessment records and observation instruments, 2025. Before-condition figures derive from the baseline meeting and the preceding formative assessment.

The cognitive gain, from a class mean of 68.3 to 82.7, aligns closely in magnitude and direction with the quasi-experimental result of Fatmawati and Setiawan (2017), who reported 81.17 for the active-debate condition against 70.47 for conventional instruction. The convergence of a qualitative case study in a madrasah tsanawiyah with an experimental study in a general senior secondary school strengthens confidence that the effect is attributable to the method rather than to setting-specific factors. It also lends contextual support to the correlational finding of Zega et al. (2022) regarding the contribution of method to Fiqh outcomes.

The most substantial shift, however, occurred in the psychomotor indicator concerning evidence-based argumentation, which rose from 12.5% to 75.0%. Before implementation, students who spoke typically asserted a position without citing supporting evidence; afterwards, three-quarters of recorded contributions were anchored to a specific textual or juristic basis. This

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is precisely the capability that Nurakhir et al. (2020) associate with classroom debate when they identify critical thinking and oral communication as its twin outcomes, and it is the capability that Hu (2023) describes as closing the separation between linguistic ability and thinking ability. Students themselves articulated the change in terms of accountability.

> "Before, if the teacher asked, I could just say I agree. Now if I say I agree, someone from the other group will immediately ask what my evidence is. So I have to read first." (S9)

The mechanism described here is anticipatory rather than reactive: the prospect of being asked for evidence altered preparation behaviour before the debate occurred. This constitutes a form of forward-acting accountability that the concept of active learning advanced by Prince (2004)—engagement in meaningful activity accompanied by reflection on that activity—captures at a general level but does not specify for argumentative formats.

Affective change was reported by participants as the most personally salient outcome. The head of the madrasah connected it to institutional purpose rather than to assessment.

> "What I notice is not only the scores. These are children who will one day be asked about religious matters in their own villages. If they have never once had to defend an opinion politely in front of their friends, they will either stay silent or become harsh. Debate teaches them the middle path." (H1)

This observation situates the method within a broader formative rationale that resonates with the argument of Ferrer-Aracil et al. (2023) that debating cultivates transversal competences extending beyond the immediate subject matter, and with the finding of Schueler and Larned (2025) that sustained participation in structured argumentation is associated with longer-term academic and civic trajectories.

Constraints and Teacher Mediation

Three constraints emerged consistently across observation and interview. The first was the verbal dominance of confident students, already noted in relation to stage four. Beyond directed questioning, the teacher introduced a rotation rule requiring that no student speak twice before every member of the research team had contributed at least once. Observation confirmed that this reduced but did not eliminate asymmetry, with two students remaining minimally participatory throughout both cycles.

The second constraint was time. A complete debate cycle consumed seventy minutes, exceeding the standard forty-minute period and requiring the merging of two sessions. The

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teacher accordingly restricted full debate to one topic per fortnight, using shorter paired-argument exercises in intervening meetings. This is the practical manifestation of the temporal constraint identified by Chen et al. (2022), and it indicates that active debate is best conceived as a periodic anchor activity rather than as a default weekly format.

The third constraint was the most delicate. On two occasions, disagreement escalated in tone, with students raising their voices and, in one instance, characterising an opposing argument as ignorant. The teacher's response in both cases was immediate suspension of the debate followed by explicit reframing.

> "I stopped it and said: the scholars who held these two positions respected each other for centuries. If they could disagree with *adab*, we can. Then we continued. After that it did not happen again in that class." (T1)

The intervention is notable for grounding classroom conduct in disciplinary history rather than in generic behavioural rules, thereby making *adab* internal to the subject rather than external to it. Neither Wijayanto et al. (2017) nor Hu (2023) addresses this dimension, since neither operates within a normative-religious context. The case therefore suggests that when debate is transposed into Islamic education, the management of *adab* is not an ancillary classroom-management concern but a constitutive element of the method itself.

Theoretical Implications

Read as a whole, the findings support an interpretation of active debate that differs from the instrumental framing prevalent in the Indonesian literature. In much of that literature, debate appears as one technique among several available for raising scores, functionally interchangeable with problem-based learning as applied by Ulandari et al. (2023) or with the contextual approach examined by Hidayah et al. (2025). The present case suggests something more specific. What changed at MTs Ar-Riyadh Jenggawah was not principally the level of student activity but the epistemic position students occupied: they moved from receiving conclusions to participating, in a controlled and scaffolded way, in the reasoning that generates conclusions. That shift is not incidental to Fiqh; it recapitulates in miniature the discursive structure of the discipline.

This interpretation also clarifies why the intervention succeeded where the teacher's prior anxiety predicted failure. Debate did not destabilise the authority of the ruling, because the ruling was never the object of contestation; what was contested was the reasoning within a space that the tradition itself designates as legitimately contested. The theological safeguard, in other words, was built into topic selection rather than imposed afterwards through restriction of student

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expression. This resolves a tension that Mansir and Karim (2020) identify but do not operationalise: how Fiqh instruction can grant students genuine agency over their learning without relativising the normative content of the subject.

Finally, the findings qualify the optimism of the international debate literature in one respect. Schueler and Larned (2025) and Ferrer-Aracil et al. (2023) report benefits accruing to students who participate; the present case indicates that participation is not automatic and must be engineered structurally through role assignment, directed questioning, and rotation rules. Without those mechanisms, the pattern observed in the first cycle—five students producing over seventy per cent of contributions—would have reproduced, in a noisier form, the very passivity the method was adopted to remedy.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how the active debate method is implemented in Fiqh learning at MTs Ar-Riyadh Jenggawah and how that implementation reshapes student engagement and learning outcomes. Three conclusions follow. First, implementation proceeded through a coherent three-phase structure in which planning was the decisive phase: by restricting debate to *khilafiyah* questions and excluding matters established by decisive evidence, the teacher converted disputation from a theological risk into an imitation of juristic reasoning, and thereby dissolved the anxiety that had previously sustained lecture dominance. Second, the method produced convergent gains across all three domains of learning outcome, with the class mean rising from 68.3 to 82.7 and classical mastery from 45.8% to 87.5%, while the sharpest change occurred in the proportion of student arguments anchored to explicit evidence, which rose from 12.5% to 75.0%. Third, these gains were contingent on structural mechanisms—assigned research roles, directed questioning of non-speaking students, and rotation rules—without which participation concentrated among a small group of verbally confident learners.

The study contributes to the literature in two respects. Theoretically, it reframes active debate in Fiqh instruction as a reorientation of students' epistemic position rather than as a technique for raising engagement, and it identifies a form of pedagogical closure specific to religious education, in which pluralism is preserved at the level of reasoning while determinacy is supplied at the level of practice. Practically, it offers madrasah teachers a transferable set of operating principles: select only genuinely contested material, assign every student a documented role, assess arguments alongside answers, ground *adab* in the history of the discipline itself, and close each session with authoritative clarification.

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Three limitations bound these claims. The study was conducted at a single madrasah with one teacher across six meetings, so transferability rather than statistical generalisability is claimed. The outcome data derive from institutional assessment records rather than from instruments validated for research purposes. And the observation window did not permit assessment of whether the argumentative capability observed persisted beyond the intervention period. Subsequent research might therefore pursue a mixed-methods design across multiple madrasah, incorporate a validated critical-thinking instrument, and follow cohorts longitudinally to determine whether the shift from passive listening to active argumentation proves durable.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research on active debate in Fiqh learning at Madrasah Tsanawiyah should explore how structured debate can be systematically integrated into different Fiqh topics, student characteristics, and learning contexts to strengthen critical thinking, argumentation, communication, and ethical reasoning. Further studies should employ mixed-method, longitudinal, and experimental designs to examine not only immediate improvements in student participation and academic achievement but also the long-term development of students' ability to evaluate evidence, compare different Fiqh opinions, and formulate reasoned legal arguments. Future research should also investigate the role of digital technologies and online debate platforms in extending active Fiqh discussion beyond the classroom while maintaining the authenticity and reliability of Islamic sources. Comparative studies across Madrasah Tsanawiyah, Islamic junior high schools, and other educational settings could provide broader evidence regarding the effectiveness and contextual adaptability of debate-based learning. In addition, greater attention should be given to teacher competencies, including teachers' abilities to facilitate balanced discussions, manage disagreement, select appropriate Fiqh issues, and guide students toward evidence-based reasoning. Future studies may also examine how active debate can incorporate classical and contemporary Islamic sources, local sociocultural contexts, and real-life legal issues so that students can connect theoretical Fiqh knowledge with practical situations. Ultimately, future directions should focus on developing a pedagogical model of active debate that is academically rigorous, pedagogically effective, ethically grounded, and consistent with the objectives of Islamic education, enabling students to move from passive recipients of Fiqh knowledge to active, critical, respectful, and responsible arguers..

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