Improving Thinking Skills Through Usul Al-Fiqh Learning: An Action Research on Prospective Islamic Religious Education Teachers

Sapiudin[1,] Tedi Supriyadi[2,] Wawan Hermawan[3], Momod Abdul Somad[4], Nan Rahminawati[5], Aep Saepudin[6]

Abstract

As part of the study of Islamic law, ushul fiqh demands that one be able to practically handle religious issues by using the ulama's defined principles of Islamic law. Applying Islamic legal theory practically calls for critical thinking abilities. Therefore, this research aims to find a learning formulation in Ushul fiqh that integrates efforts to improve thinking skills. To achieve this goal, action research was chosen as a research design which was carried out in three research stages, namely pre action, implementation action and post action. This design was chosen considering that the context of this research is oriented towards finding solutions to learning problems. This research involved 35 prospective Islamic religious education teachers who took Ushul Fiqh courses from one of the government-owned Islamic universities, which is quite popular in Indonesia. Data was collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews which were analyzed using a descriptive quantitative approach and qualitative with content analysis. This research produced seven stages as learning formulations that need to be implemented in the ushul fiqh learning process. The study concludes that the proposed seven steps effectively elevate students' thinking skills to the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) level while applying usul al-fiqh principles. The findings suggest a promising pedagogical approach for cultivating advanced thinking skills within the context of Islamic law education. The main contribution of this study is to present a practical methodological guide regarding the steps for teaching usul fiqh, which is oriented toward improving students' thinking skills.

Keywords: *Usul Al-Fiqh Learning, Action Research, Prospective Teachers, Islamic Religious Education, Thinking Skills.*

INTRODUCTION

For prospective Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers, having competence in the field of Islamic disciplines is a necessity (Tuna, 2022). One of these Islamic disciplines is *usul al-fiqh* (Çeliktaş, 2019). Having competence in *usul fiqh* is significant as it provides a methodology for interpreting instructional materials and a framework for scientific problem-solving in the area of Islamic law (Lohlker, 2021; Purkon, 2022). However, in practice, *Usul Fiqh* learning process is typically expository, teacher-centered, and employs the classical lecture approach, which is similar to the learning process in many Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia (Alkouatli, 2018; Wang, 2022).

This situation has a direct influence on educational outcomes, which often focus on the memorization of *Usul Fiqh* concepts and regulations, but fall short in terms of practical application, which is the primary goal of *Usul Fiqh* (Elmahjub, 2021; Jenkins, 2005). Achieving *Usul Fiqh* objectives undeniably necessitates changes in the chosen learning methods and design, crafting an educational process that nurtures students' skills to think in a more constructive and context-specific manner when comprehending *Usul Fiqh* principles. Hence, it becomes imperative for educators to develop a practical and efficient approach that equips prospective IRE teachers with skills that extend beyond mere rote memorization of *Usul Fiqh* principles, enabling them to understand and apply these principles contextually and constructively.

[1] Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Jakarta-Indonesia, E-mail: sapiudin09@gmail.com

[2] Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia, tedisupriyadi@upi.edu

[3] Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia, wawanhermawan@upi.edu

[4] Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia, somad100@upi.edu

[5] Universitas Islam Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia, nan@unisba.ac.id

[6] Universitas Islam Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia, aepsaepudinunisba@gmail.com

A number of studies on *Usul Fiqh* in education context have attracted the attention of academics from various countries, such as Cardinal (2005) from Canada who explored the tendency of Islamic law learning at Arabic sharia faculties to adopt the European legal system, that as a result European law, procedures and courts have reshaped Arab-Muslim legal education over the past century. Despite on a small scale, the Islamic law concept is maintained. An analysis of the curriculum and lecture materials of the sharia faculties of five universities: al-Zaytūna, al-Qarawiyyn, al-Azhar, Damascus University, and Jordan University was conducted by reviewing 42 modern text books on Islamic law theories. The findings highlighted the differences between textbooks on contemporary Islamic legal theories and classical Islamic legal theories.

In terms of students' readiness for learning Usul Fiqh, for instance, it was discovered in the study conducted by Kamis et al. (2020) from Malaysia, who examined the significance of mastering Arabic language for readiness to study and understand *Usul Fiqh*. The study emphasized on the skill to read Arabic by involving 248 students of the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Universitas Kebangsaan Malaysia in comprehending ten terms in *Usul Fiqh*. The results of their study revealed that students needed Arabic reading skills to understand the terms in *Usul Fiqh* in the Islamic Studies lessons they were studying.

Zakaria et al. (2015) conducted a study in Brunei Darussalam, focusing on *Usul Fiqh* learning methods. Their research aimed to assess the effectiveness of collaborative learning techniques *Usul Fiqh* through an experimental design involving 42 students. The study compared the achievement levels of two groups: the experimental group, which was taught using collaborative methods, and the control group, which received conventional instruction. The results indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Furthermore, students' perceptions of *Usul Fiqh* learning did not change significantly when they applied collaborative strategies. The use of collaborative approaches resulted in a moderate level of difficulty for students in their UF learning, with an average rating of 3.5. A study regarding *Usul Fiqh* learning design was explored by Rusli (2014) from Indonesia, who specifically studied the importance of learning *Usul Fiqh* based on multicultural education. He claimed that sixteen values need to be integrated in the learning process, including equality, compassion, empathy, justice, nationalism, cooperation, tolerance, good faith, solidarity, mutual trust, confidence, responsibility, honesty, sincerity, trustworthiness, and discussion. In the process of fostering these values, the paradigm that serves as the basis is humanist-progressive emphasizing approaches and principles of respecting differences and engaging in cooperative activities that the competitive ones.

In response to thorough previous research derived from the Scopus database over the 20-year period (2002 to 2022), there has been no studies exploring practical steps in teaching *Usul Fiqh* for prospective teachers of IRE. Therefore, to fill in the gaps in previous studies, this study seeks to address the practical steps involved in teaching *Usul Fiqh* to prospective IRE teachers to enhance their thinking skills and assist them to achieve *Usul Fiqh* learning objectives by using problem-based learning design to solve problems related to Islamic law. To achieve its objective, this study was formulated in a research question "what are the effective learning steps in improving students' thinking skills through *Usul Fiqh* learning?". Thus, the significance of this study is providing practical methodological guidance regarding the steps for teaching Islamic jurisprudence, which is oriented towards improving students' thinking skills.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sharia, Usul Fiqh, and Fiqh

Sharia study is part of Islamic studies, therefore several colleges and universities exploring sharia as a branch of Islamic studies (Eyadat, 2013; Fletcher, 2006). Sharia studies are interpreted as a study of Islamic social understanding includes law, politics, economics, administration, management, trade, social relations, family issues, as well as studying religious practices and human behavior in relation to their worship of Allah (Eyadat, 2013; Fletcher, 2006; Rusli, 2014). Sharia studies consists of several fields of study such as *fiqh*, *Usul Fiqh*, *qawaid fiqh* (legal maxim), *siyasah sharia* (Islamic political science), *maqasid sharia* (objectives of sharia) (Mustafa et al., 2016).

At a conceptual level, *usul* is the plural of *"asl"*, which means basis, foundation, and principle, and *fiqh*, which means "Islamic law." Therefore, *Usul Fiqh* is defined as the discipline of legal references, basics, and general

principles (Rusli, 2014; Zakaria et al., 2015). Islamic jurists define it as information and theoretical legal concepts that enable one to study and acquire practically applied sharia laws on issues from various sources (Jenkins, 2005; Lohlker, 2021).

In sharia, *Usul Fiqh* occupies the most central position (Juandi & Yasid, 2016), considering its practice that strictly follows a certain methodology to develop *fiqh* (Kamis et al., 2020; Rusli, 2014; Zakaria et al., 2015). In other words, *Usul Fiqh* is similar to following a certain methodology when conducting scientific experiments (Kamis et al., 2020). If students grasp this methodology, they will easily understand the depths of *Usul Fiqh*.

Usul Al-Fiqh Learning and Teaching

A quality learning process plays a central role in influencing student achievement (Fung et al., 2017; Luetz et al., 2020). In addition, the teacher's knowledge and techniques in the classroom lead to key factors in the success of the learning process (Baumert et al., 2010). Likewise, training and teaching experience have an impact on students success variables (Ismail et al., 2021)). Student achievement is significantly influenced by a good learning environment (Fung et al., 2017; Luetz et al., 2020). Additionally, the effectiveness of student learning is greatly influenced by the teacher's knowledge and teaching techniques in the classroom (Baumert et al., 2010). Similarly, training and teaching experience have an impact on student success variables (Ismail et al., 2021).

In relation to this study, educators actually play a crucial role and are strategically positioned to help students successfully learn *Usul Fiqh*. Hence, the teaching and learning process is influential on mastery of knowledge and understanding to enable students to apply concepts, principles and the process of applying the principles of *fiqh* that are learned in an applicative way (Mu'adzah, 2022). This success requires educators to continue to do innovation in carrying out the teaching process (Gulikers et al., 2018; Llewellyn, 2019; Ovbiagbonhia et al., 2020). Thus, the learning and teaching process has a significant impact on students' skills to master concepts, principles, and the implementation of *fiqh* principles so they have learned to real-world situations (Ismail et al., 2021). To achieve this accomplishment, educators must keep implementing innovative teaching techniques (Gulikers et al., 2018; Llewellyn, 2019; Ovbiagbonhia et al., 2020).

In conjunction with the qualities and qualifications of educators, including their knowledge, training, experience, and instructional techniques, it is necessary to introduce innovative teaching approaches in the realm of *Usul Fiqh*. This is essential to challenge the traditional belief that the door to the ijtihad process has been permanently shut. The logical consequence of these doctrines is that they lead to decreased motivation and attention in studying *Usul Fiqh*. This has contributed to a growing perception that the discipline of *Usul Fiqh* is a complex and challenging classical science to both learn and teach (Çeliktaş, 2019; Fletcher, 2006). When this perception solidifies into an ideological belief, it poses a risk of stagnation for Islamic disciplines. Consequently, there is an urgent need for innovation in the teaching of *Usul Fiqh* to ensure effective instruction and learning, enhance the mastery and application of *Usul Fiqh* principles, and maintain the relevance of Islamic law and its teachings in contemporary times (Goos, 2013). In a study conducted by Ismail, et al., (2021), one drawback in *Usul Fiqh* learning is the continued use of outdated examples in teaching materials. Their meta-analysis study revealed that many previous researchers prioritized updating *fiqh* knowledge while neglecting *Usul Fiqh*, despite the fact that *fiqh* itself would not exist without *Usul Fiqh*.

Usul al-fiqh and Thinking Skills

Usul Fiqh requires advanced reasoning, hence it is relevant to Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in learning. It becomes a benchmark for a person's thinking, indicating whether they have low-level or high-level thinking (Kosasih et al., 2021). This is a development of Bloom's Taxonomy in learning objectives which include Knowledge, Understanding, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation (Musliha 2010). It was also brought about by Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) who revised the taxonomic division from nouns to verbs so that the terms of the Bloom's taxonomy became memorizing (C1), understanding (C2), applying (C3), analyzing (C4), evaluating (C5), and producing (C6). As a concept of thinking skills, HOTS is a capability that is necessary to have in order to meet the demands of the twenty-first century(Kosasih et al., 2021). In the context of 21st-century education, Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) play a crucial role, aligning with the global educational objective of fostering advanced cognitive skills (Yeung, 2015). By designing learning strategies, teachers can

shift their focus from simply conveying knowledge into promoting memorization among students to fostering learning processes that enhance higher-level cognitive skills, such as analysis, judgment, and creativity (Miri et al., 2007). These skills are considered as part of the cognitive domain at a more advanced level (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

Design

In order to enhance thinking skills through the study of *Usul Fiqh*, Action Research (AR) design was selected as the research method. It is important to note that Action Research is a systematic process aimed at investigating issues and uncovering solutions to address those problems (Creswell, 2002) and has successfully met the intended objectives (McNiff, 1995; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). This is in line with the focus of this study on the challenge of prospective Islamic religious education teachers implementing *Usul Fiqh* principles into practical religious issues. The current focus on memorization in *Usul Fiqh* learning falls short of the skills required for real-world application. Action steps are necessary to improve thinking skills in *Usul Fiqh* learning. The selection of AR design allows for flexibility in finding innovative solutions that adapt to changing conditions and needs (Darwis, 2016). In accordance, AR is also a popular design used by researchers in solving problems in the field of education (Catelli et al., 2000; Kember & Gow, 1992; Somekh & Zeichner, 2009).

Research Procedures

AR research within this study comprises three primary stage. Firstly, there are the pre-action analysis activities where the challenges faced by prospective teachers in *Usul Fiqh* learning are thoroughly examined. This is a crucial step to ensure that the subsequent actions directly address these problems. Secondly, action implementation stage that forms the core of the AR design and encompasses the planning, execution, and assessment of actions. In the AR framework, these stages are collectively known as cycles (Kemmis et al., 2013; Somekh & Zeichner, 2009). Each action is succeeded by reflection, serving as an endeavor to enhance and determine the necessary steps for the next stage (Kember, 2001). Thirdly, a thorough evaluation is conducted to assess the outcomes of the actions and ascertain whether they align with the practitioner's objectives. This stage allows us to gauge the number of cycles necessary to reach the desired goal. These three stages have been borrowed from previous research focused on pedagogic contexts (Abdussalam et al., 2021; Safrullah et al., 2022; Syahid et al., 2023). Visually, these three steps are presented in Figure 1 below:
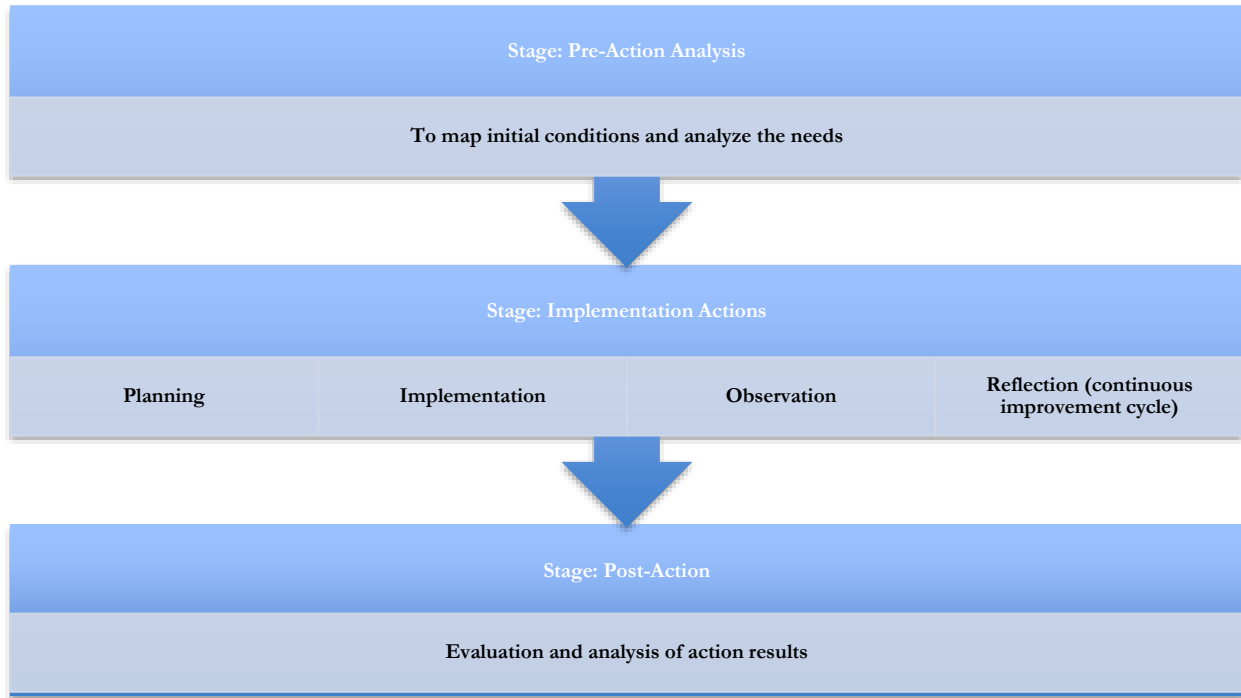
Stage: Pre-Action Analysis
To map initial conditions and analyze the needs

Stage: Implementation Actions			
Planning	Implementation	Observation	Reflection (continuous improvement cycle)

Stage: Post-Action
Evaluation and analysis of action results

Figure 1. Research Stage and Activities

Collaborative Aspect

In carrying out this study, collaboration with various parties was established. This is significant considering that action research design emphasizes collaboration (Jaipal & Figg, 2011). Heil's (2005) method was used as a step in building collaboration. Building collaboration entailed two steps: declaring what was required for this project and then offering it to other parties who wanted to be involved in this study and met the required criteria. From this step, two people expressed their interest to participate in this study. First, one professor in the field of pedagogic and an expert in the field of Islamic Religious Education. These two collaborators are the ideal alternative to strengthen the position of researchers who have expertise in *Usul Fiqh* in their involvement in a number of designs and actions to be implemented. In addition to these two professors, there are three Islamic Religious Education lecturers who declared willing to be involved. This collaborative team has role in giving suggestion and consideration in each activity stage and aspects needed in the study by conducting focus group discussion (FGD). FGD was done three times to cover these topics: (1) issues and research design (October 2022), (2) development of success indicators (December 2022), and (3) arrangement of question for validity and reliability tests (February 2023). In specific, the coverage of FGD topics are: determine the topic, recruit participants, preparation of materials, scheduling, execution, data collection, data analysis, reporting, validate results through FGD. Each FGD was done in 100 minutes and aimed at getting fully comprehension on the perspective, opinion and experiences related to the research topic. The collaborative team attended the FGD together with 10 IRE teachers who are members of the focus of KKG (Kelompok Kerja Guru/Teacher Working Group) and 1 IRE Teacher Superintendents. The result of FGD is as follows:
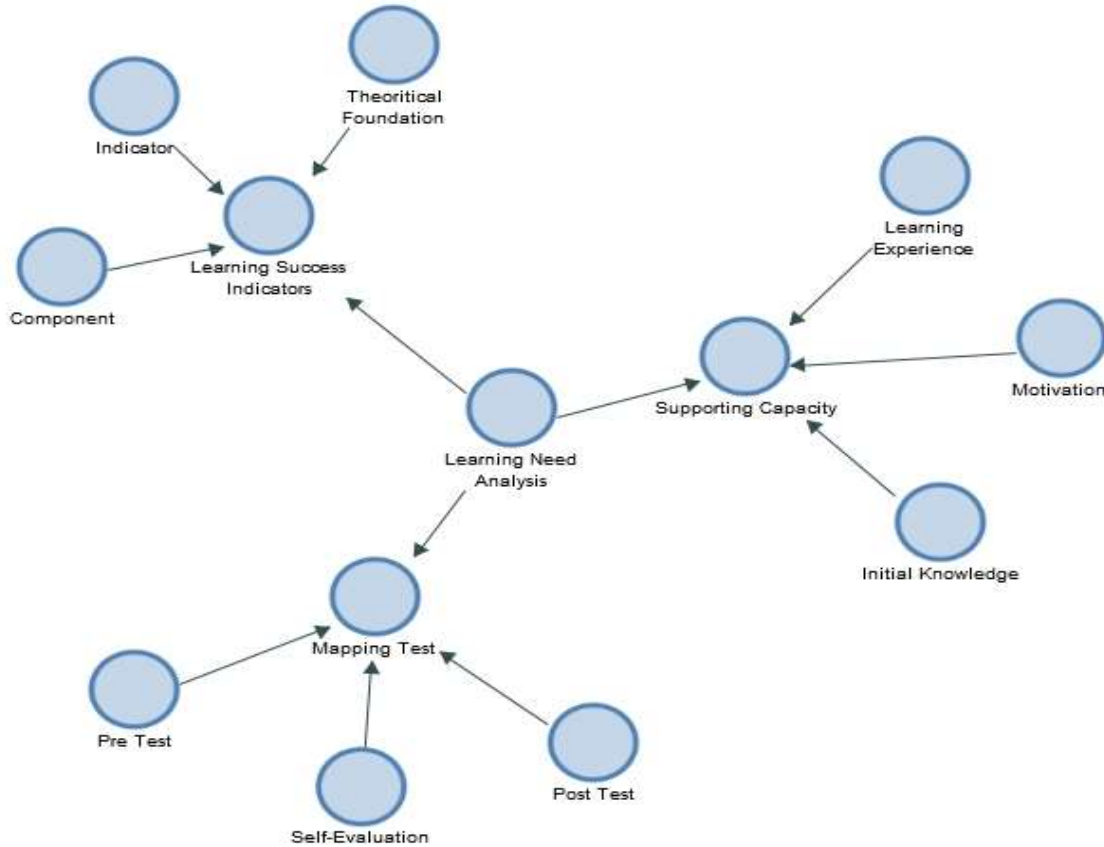
Figure 2. Result of Focus Group Discussion

Based on Figure 2 above, there are three aspects being considered. First, there is a need to establish the formulation of achievement learning result according to theories used, components of success rate and their indicators. It is supported by the statements:

> *For the success of a lesson, a measurement instrument is needed to be used as a guide to measure learning achievement (Collaborator 1).*

> *In designing the instruments, consideration is needed regarding the theoretical basis that is used as a basis and clear indicators (Collaborator 4).*

As a response, the formulation of these indicators was based on Bloom's theory (1956), known as Bloom's Taxonomy, which was later developed by Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) with six levels of thinking, namely memorizing (C1), understanding (C2), applying (C3), analyzing (C4), evaluating (C5), and creating (C6). Through further examination and discussion, this formulation of each thinking level is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Indicators of Success in IUF Learning

Level	Indicators	Success Assessment	Learning Achievement Category
Memorizing (C1)	1. Able to write down the *Usul Fiqh* principles correctly 2. Able to read the *Usul Fiqh* principles and translate them correctly 3. Able to memorize the *Usul Fiqh* principles with the meaning correctly	Very unsuccessful	Not yet achieved
Understanding (C2)	1. Able to categorize the *Usul Fiqh* principles correctly 2. Able to explain the *Usul Fiqh* principles 3. Able to provide examples for each *Usul Fiqh* principle	Not yet successful	Not yet achieved

Applying (C3)	1. Able to identify problems and refer to the *Usul Fiqh* principles that are appropriate to the context of the problem 2. Sequencing the steps for determining the law by applying the *Usul Fiqh* principles correctly 3. Stating legal conclusions based on the selection and application of the *Usul Fiqh* principles	Less successful	Not yet achieved
Analyzing (C4)	1. Able to correct the application of *Usul Fiqh* principles in a legal case or a legal conclusion 2. Able to assess the *Usul Fiqh* principles used in an example of a legal case or a legal conclusion 3. Able to connect one principle of *Usul Fiqh* proposal with other principles in drawing a legal conclusion	Quite successful	Achieved
Evaluating (C5)	1. Able to criticize the application of *Usul Fiqh* principles in examples of legal cases or legal conclusions 2. Able to clarify and strengthen a legal conclusion by using *Usul Fiqh* principles 3. Able to decide to draw a legal conclusion from a number of legal conclusions in the same sample case based on an analysis of the application of the proper *Usul Fiqh* principles	Successful	Achieved
Creating (C6)	1. Able to compile the *Usul Fiqh* principles and provide examples of its application in different contemporary cases. 2. Able to categorize the *Usul Fiqh* principles in a new format 3. Able to design a scenario of a possible case and how to solve it through the application of the rule of thumb.	Very successful	Achieved

Table 1 above is used as a parameter to measure and map students' skills in mastering *Usul Fiqh* during both pre-action and post-action. Then, the second aspect is to provide analyzed information regarding supporting capacity of the participants such as initial knowledge, motivation and perception before participants are given action. The last aspect is to map students' skills as formulated in Table 1 by using a certain set of instruments. These two aspects are related to the data collection instrument.

Participants and Site of Study

This study involved 35 university students, specifically prospective IRE teachers enrolled in an *Usul Fiqh* course at a prominent Islamic university in Jakarta. The group consisted of 16 male and 19 female students. These students were preparing to address religious matters, both within the academic setting and in society, where the application of *Usul Fiqh* knowledge is essential. They hailed from various provinces, including Central Java, West Java, the Special Capital Region of Jakarta, and Banten Provinces. The selection of these participants was purposeful, taking into consideration specific criteria aligned with the research objectives. The study was conducted over a semester from February to July 2023, at one of Jakarta's well-known Islamic universities, renowned for its mission to produce Muslim scholars. This particular university was chosen due to its status as a government institution, high public trust, and its reputation as a reference in Islamic disciplines, including Islamic education. It has also produced numerous world-class scholars in the field of Islamic studies.

Instruments

Three instrument were utilized in this study. First, a survey was self-developed and used to dig information on participants' learning experience, understanding, motivation, and perceptions regarding *Usul Fiqh*. This survey was developed using Google Form considering it its benefits and easy to use (Brigham, 2014) using Guttman Scale. The Google Form link was distributed via WhatsApp to research participants. Second, semi-structured interview was used to examine more information on data obtained from the survey. Third, test of thinking skills was carried out to map participants' thinking skills. The test consisted of 18 multiple choice questions.

The three instruments were validated by three experts consisting of one professor of Islamic religious education, one professor of pedagogic and one professor of language. By using an assessment scale of 1-5, the instruments got an average score of 4.45 or in a good category. In meaning that this instrument has a good level of feasibility to use. However, two expert teams suggested that the test instrument to be tested for validation and reliability. The validation test was carried out on 35 people outside the participant group. With a sample of 35 people, the r table (n-2) was 0.3338 assuming if the significance value is less than the r table value, then the instrument was declared valid. The results of validity and reliability tests was done using SPSS and the results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Result of Instrument Validity Test

		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	TOTAL
Total	Pearson Correlation	.475**	.614**	.776**	.614**	.475**	.475**	.776**	.614**	.614**	.776**	.408*	.607**	.408*	.387*	.408*	.465**	.408*	.579**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.000	.000	.004	.004	.000	.000	.000	.000	.015	.000	.015	.022	.015	.005	.015	.000	
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35

Based on the table above, the significance value of each question was obtained by a value below the r table value. Thus, this test instrument is declared valid. After that, the reliability test was done, which assumed that if the alpha value is > 0.7 then the instrument was declared reliable. The results of the reliability test on the instrument test are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Result of Instrument Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.865	18

Based on the table above, the value was 0.865 showing that the instrument was declared reliable. After that, before collecting data, all participants had received information about the objectives, procedures, also benefits and risks. In addition, they were given time to consider their voluntary participation in this study and were given an explanation regarding the confidentiality of their data. This was done as a form of moral-ethical considerations in conducting a study (Julia et al., 2022; Kosasih et al., 2021; Supriyadi et al., 2019).

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection unfolded in three stages. Initially, a survey was administered to prospective IRE teachers, spanning from March 19, 2023, to April 18, 2023, for a month. Secondly, a competency test was conducted to measure their thinking skills level. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to analyze the data from the first and second stages. Meanwhile, the third stage involved semi-structured interviews, which were carried out with both prospective IRE teacher students and several collaborating lecturers. The interview data consisted of student statements and was analyzed using the content analysis method. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to subjectively interpret text data by systematically categorizing, coding, and identifying themes and patterns (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Pre-action Analysis

In this stage, a mapping analysis of participants' skills was conducted to formulate actions in order to attain the goal of enabling them utilizing *Usul Fiqh* practically in solving the problems they face, especially in actualizing their profession as Islamic Religious Education teachers. A total of 35 (100%) participants were given a survey to map four factors including their learning experience, understanding, assessment of their skills from their perspective and motivation.

Table 4. Learning Experience

Questions	Yes	No
Have you learned *usul al-fiqh* principles before entering university?	35	0
Have you learned *usul al-fiqh* principles in formal schools?	14	21
Have you learned *usul al-fiqh* principles outside formal school?	19	16

According to Table 4, all participants (100%) stated that they had studied the *Usul Fiqh* principles. A total of 14 (40%) participants stated that they had studied the *Usul Fiqh* principles in formal schools, and 21 (60%) participants stated that they had experienced *Usul Fiqh* learning outside formal schools, such as Islamic boarding schools or religious education outside the national curriculum. In conclusion, the data showed that the experience of students regarding *Usul Fiqh* learning was dominated by non-formal education. Subsequently, we explored information on general understanding of the *Usul Fiqh* principles that they had learned.

Table 4. Understanding about IUF Principles

Questions	Yes	No
I have understood the purpose and benefits of the *usul al-fiqh* principles	30	5
I have understood the use of *usul al-fiqh* principles	29	6

According to Table 5 above, 30 (85.71%) participants stated that in general they understood the purpose and benefits of the material on *Usul Fiqh* principles, while 5 (14.29%) of them stated that they did not understand them. In addition, a number of 29 (82.86%) participants stated that they understood the use of *Usul Fiqh* principles, and 6 (17.14%) of them stated that they did not understand them. Based on the data, the majority of students stated that they understood the purpose, benefits and implementation of *Usul Fiqh* principles.

Following up on the survey results above, we attempted to map the participants' understanding level on the material of *Usul Fiqh* principles from their own perspective. The survey instrument refers to one of the indicators of success rate of *Usul Fiqh* learning as shown in Table 1. They were asked to evaluate themselves by instructing them to only complete one indicator. If C2 is chosen, it indicates that the participants have indirectly passed C1; if C3 is chosen, it indicates that the participants have passed C1 and C2; and so on.

Table 5. Self-Reflection Result

Self-Reflection Aspects	Total	Percentage
I have memorized more than *usul al-fiqh* principles (C1)	5	14.29 %
I have understood the purposes and content of *usul al-fiqh* principles that I have memorized (C2)	6	17.14 %
I have been able to implement *usul al-fiqh* principles that I have memorized in understanding the sources of Islamic teachings (C3)	3	8.57 %
I can assess *usul al-fiqh* principles used in examples of legal cases or legal conclusions (C4)	4	11.43 %
I can strengthen the legal conclusions of the scholars with the principles of *usul al-fiqh* (C5)	14	40.00%
I can provide examples of possible cases that will occur and the implementation of *usul al-fiqh* principles to obtain legal conclusions (C6)	3	8.57 %
Total	35	100%

According to Table 6 above, the results revealed the participants' level of understanding of *Usul Fiqh* principles as follows. First, 5 (14.29%) participants were at rote memorization level (C1); Second, 6 (17.14%) participants did not only memorize but also had come to understand the *Usul Fiqh* principles (C2); Third, 3 (8.57.14%) participants had the skills to apply *Usul Fiqh* principles (C3), in other words they had mastered C1 to C3; Fourth, 4 (11.43%) participants had reached the evaluating level (C4), in other words they had mastered C1 to C4; Fifth, 14 (40.00%) participants had the skills to evaluate (C5), in other words they had mastered C1 to C5. Lastly, 3 (8.57%) participants had reached the level of creation (C6), it means that they had mastered C1 to C6.

Referring to the category of achievement in *Usul Fiqh* learning principles presented in Table 1, there were 60% (21 participants) participants who have attained the level of achievement in *Usul Fiqh* learning principles in Level C4-C6. However, this is only based on students' acknowledgement, which needed further evidence. We designed a number of test questions to demonstrate this recognition distributed to 35 participants. There were 18 multiple choice questions and related to the indicators in Table 1. Figure 3 below shows the test results:
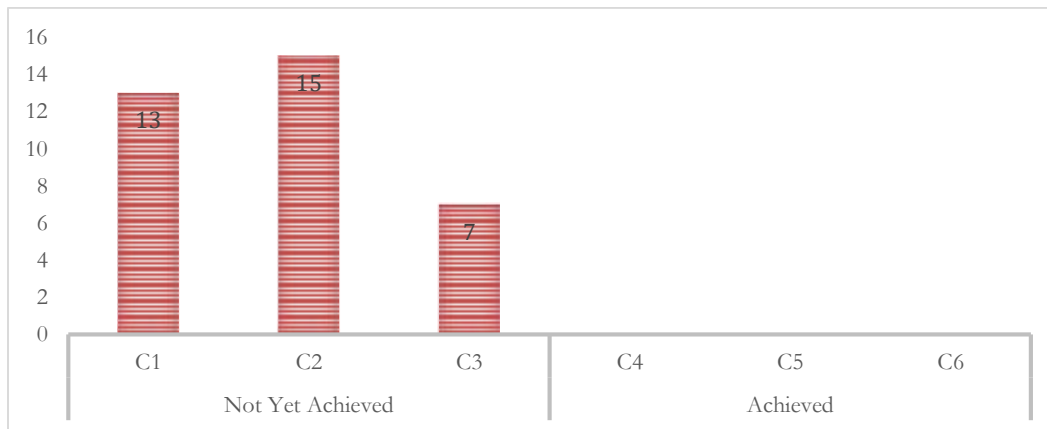
Figure 3. Mapping Results of Participants' Understanding Level

Figure 3 above shows the opposite results from the participants' acknowledgement. Based on the figure above, the participants' understanding level of *Usul Fiqh* material was at level C1 with a total of 13 (37.14%) participants, C2 with 15 (42.86%) participants, and C3 with a total of 7 (20.00%) participants. This data also signified that the level of achievement in the study of *Usul Fiqh* was in *not yet achieved* category. The data from this test served as the basis for designing an action in order to improve their understanding level. The participants' interest in learning about the *fiqh's* principles while serving as a prospective IRE teacher must be investigated in order to assure the efficiency of this series of actions. A survey about motivation was presented to a total of 35 participants.

A total of 23 (65.71%) participants agreed and 12 (34.29%) participants strongly agreed that the *Usul Fiqh* principles were necessary to understand the sources of Islamic teachings, and a total of 33 (94.29%) participants agreed and 2 (5.71%) participants strongly agreed that it was important for prospective IRE teachers to master the *Usul Fiqh* principles. In addition, a total of 34 (97.14%) participants agreed and 1 (2.86%) participant strongly agreed that mastery of *Usul Fiqh* principles supports the professionalism of prospective IRE teachers.

Thus, it can be concluded that their motivation was high enough to learn the *Usul Fiqh* principles with two considerations: First, the *Usul Fiqh* principles help them in understanding the sources of Islamic teachings. Second, the two prospective IRE teacher whose teaching materials come from Islamic sources, namely the Quran and Hadith, require the participants to master the *Usul Fiqh* principles. This conclusion was reinforced by the participants' answers from the interviews conducted with 3 participants. We asked the question "Is it important for prospective IRE teachers to learn *Usul Fiqh* principles?" The answers varied:

> *It is crucial for prospective IRE teachers to master IUF principles, considering that the material that we will teach comes from the Quran and hadith, and to understand them requires other knowledge, one of which is the mastery of IUF principles (Participant 1).*

> *Understanding the IUF principles is not only essential for prospective teachers, but anyone who wants to understand the Quran and Hadith requires the mastery of one of the fields of knowledge, that is the IUF principles (Participant 2).*

> *We, as prospective teachers need to understand the IUF principles because understanding this, especially the use of IUF principles can make it easier for us to understand the sources of Islamic teachings which are closely related to our responsibilities as prospective IRE teachers (Participant 3).*

Pre-Action Evaluation Results

Based on the results of the pre-action analysis, the aforementioned findings provide an understanding that the participants have had a number of experiences in learning the *Usul Fiqh* principles, that they were familiar with the term principles and in general they had understood the purposes and application of *Usul Fiqh* principles. However, the test results show that their understanding level of *Usul Fiqh* principles was still relatively minimal, their understanding skills were at the levels of memorizing (C1), understanding (C2) and applying them (C3), even though the category of learning success was still classified *not yet achieved*, they already had high motivation to improve their understanding on *Usul Fiqh* principles.

Action Implementation

Based on the pre-action analysis, to attain the objectives of *Usul Fiqh* learning, focus group discussions produced seven steps of learning as formulations that needed to be implemented in order to achieve objectives of the study, namely the participants' understanding to be at least at the level of analytical skills (C4). The implementation of the seven steps was as follows.

Determining Learning Objective, Design, and Materials

In this stage, the team and collaborators developed a learning design through focus group discussion (FGD) activities, including learning objectives, lesson plans, and learning materials. The FGD results determined that the *Usul Fiqh* learning should be oriented towards students' skills to respond to contemporary problems in

relation to Islamic law and provide the solutions by applying *Usul Fiqh*. This is significant considering the demands of current learning outcomes not only equip students with the skills to collect facts and data but also the skills to provide solutions to each problem (Kosasih et al., 2021; Supriyadi et al., 2020).

Based on these learning objectives, the problem-based learning design was the ideal and alternative learning design used in solving problems (Hallinger, 2021; Jørgensen et al., 2011). Through this design, students were assigned a project to study and analyze contemporary problems related to Islamic law in groups. The participants were divided into seven groups and each group would examine one problem topic as a learning project. Furthermore, learning materials were formulated to provide theoretical foundations in solving problems related to Islamic law, namely material related to the *istinbath al-ahkam* or the method of establishing law, including: 1) *Maqosid sharia* material, namely the intentions of Islamic law which consists of 5 things including *Hifdz ad-Din* (preserving the religion), *Hifzh Nafs* (preserving the soul), *Hifzh Aql* (preserving the mind), *Hifzh Nasl* (preserving honor) and *Hifzh Mal* (preserving wealth) (Auda, 2008; Malik, 2015) and the five matters in the *Maqosid Sharia* are the spirit or moral standards for every legal decision in a way that every decision or legal conclusion is not paradoxical with these five matters. 2) The material regarding *taarudh adillah* is examining solutions for conflicting arguments on the same issue, for instance according to one opinion one thing is obligatory but according to another opinion this is *sunnah* (optional). Therefore, it is necessary to master the concept of *tarjih*, namely the assessment of a proposition and its principles, including the principles of *naskh*. 3) Material on linguistic aspects which include "am" and "khas", "amr" and "nahyi", "mutlaq" and "muqoyyad", "mujmal" and "mubayyan", "mantuq" and "mafhum", and so on. These materials were presented in the form of a module. Substantially, the material in the module was presented in concept maps and explanations, complemented with exercises with systematic guidelines for students to learn and understand.

The product of this stage was a lesson plan document. The product was then validated by a team of three experts, namely professor of pedagogic science, professor of Islamic Religious Education, and professor of *Usul Fiqh*. Assessment was conducted using a scale of 1 to 5. The results of the validator team's assessment are as follows. Each lesson plan component was evaluated by the validator team, with an average assessment result of 4.50 to 4.78. This suggests that, in the validators' opinion, the lesson plan which comprises learning objectives and design, fell into the very good category. In other words, it was possible to incorporate the learning design in the learning process.

Material Conceptualization

In this stage, the participants were equipped with an understanding of the material in the module. The material was presented in a classical manner, specifically in 3 face-to-face meetings in 3 weeks, and the duration of each face-to-face meeting was 150 minutes. This was done to provide enrichment and strengthen students' understanding of the concepts in the law determination method while at the same time facilitating the students in discussions regarding the material presented in the module and discussion of cognitive exercises; such as reading the *Usul Fiqh* principles, translating and interpreting them, and discussing examples of the problems. Each face-to-face activity was evaluated by a team of collaborators consisting of two lecturers of *Usul Fiqh* and IRE. The results of the evaluation of 35 students are presented in Table 7 below:

Table 6. Table of Assessment of IUF Material Mastery.

Assessment Aspects	Assessor 1	Assessor 2	Average
The skills to read the *Usul Fiqh* principles correctly	4.60	4.55	4.56
The skills to translate *Usul Fiqh* principles	4.53	4.44	4.49
The skills to memorize *Usul Fiqh* principles	4.63	4.61	4.62
The skills to explain the meaning of each principle	4.45	4.54	4.50
The skills to map the concept of legal decision	4.55	4.45	4.50

Based on Table 7, the average score obtained by participants for each aspect of the assessment was 4.50. This implies that their mastery of *Usul Fiqh* material was very good. This also indicated the consistency between the validator's assessment and the implementation results. Therefore, with this result, the next step was to implement this result into a number of legal issues.

Selection of Issues

In this stage, students were given topics that become an umbrella in a project they will work on covering the topics on *aqidah*, *sharia*, *mu'amalah*, and morals. These topics refer to the religion dimensions , namely credential, ritual, social and moral (Supriyadi et al., 2019). From these topics, each member of the group proposed issues on the topic chosen that must describe the actual issues, audience, problems, and feasibility. Following that, each member had a discussion to determine the priority issue priority using a scale of 1-5. The assessment included urgency, importance of the problem, and problem development. The execution of this step is outlined in Table 8 below:

Table 7. Issue Determination Criteria Form

No	Issue	Issue Criteria	Assessment (Scale of 1-5)				Priority (1-5)
			Urgency	Importance	Growth	Total Priority	
1		Actual:					
		Audience:					
		Problem:					
		Feasibility:					

In this stage, by using the above worksheet in Table 8, the participants were asked to analyzed 7 issues were brought up by each group that would be used as *Usul Fiqh* learning project, including: 1) Holiday greetings for other religions, 2) Non-Muslim leadership for Indonesian people, 3) Women's Leadership in Islam, 4) Umrah using bank bailout funds, 5) Pluralism and Islam, 6) Interfaith Marriage, and 7) Corpse autopsy.

Discussion of Research Design between Groups

Participants in each group were assigned to discuss research designs related to issues of Islamic law with other groups in an interactive, inspiring, challenging, and active participatory manner, as well as providing enough room for initiative, creativity, and independence to solve problems of Islamic law using the *Usul Fiqh* principles. This was done to sharpen the issues raised through input from other groups including exploring responses and enthusiasm from each participant. Based on the classroom observations, the issues raised by each group received very good responses and enthusiasm from other students.

Individual and Group Research Advocacy

In this stage, students were facilitated to define and organize learning tasks related to problems with the guidance of the team. They were encouraged to collect relevant information and use the *Usul Fiqh* principles in solving the issues raised. In the process of collecting information, especially information related to literature or reference sources that support research, they are directed to refer to articles that have been published by academics in various journals. For their convenience in browsing journals, they are directed to use the publish or publish application from harzing.com as in Figure 4. Lastly, they were guided to plan and prepare the results of group discussions in the form of presentation material and share assignments with their peers.
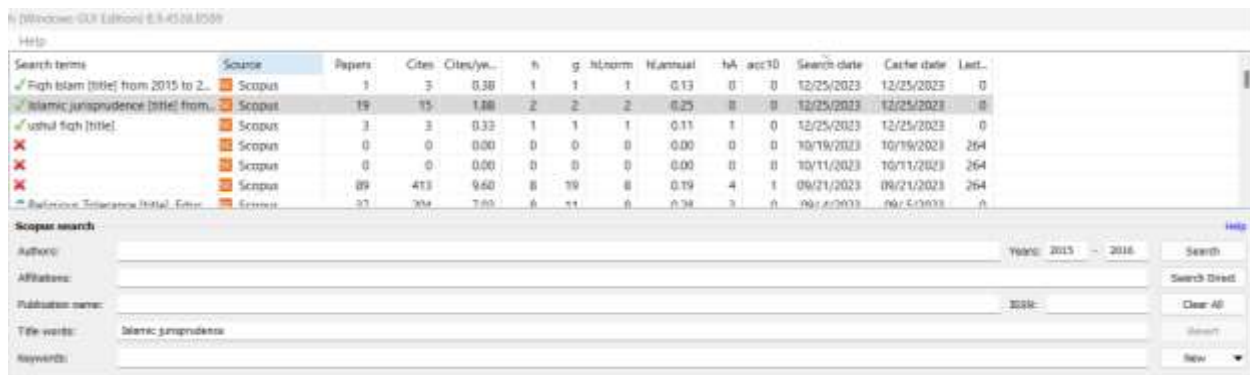

Figure 4. Publish or Perish Application (https://harzing.com/resources/publish-or-perish/windows)

Seminar on Results of Problem Solving

In this stage, each group was required to present the results of their respective group discussions to get responses and input from other groups. In group discussions, students were assigned to collect data, exchange individual ideas, study various reading sources, access the internet (if possible) and other learning resources, analyze the collected data by reviewing and questioning whether the data sufficient to answer the problem, develop hypotheses based on data in the form of temporary answers or conclusions, process available and analyzed data and make appropriate clarification towards solving Islamic law problems, and draw conclusions to the problems.

Evaluation of the Problem-Solving Process

In this stage, we provided explanations and reinforcement in oral or written form, expressed appreciation for students' success, helped solving problems, provided confirmation on students' exploration and elaboration, facilitated students to reflect on the learning experiences that, answered student questions, provided information for further exploration, and gave motivation to students who did not perform active participation.

Post-Action Analysis

Following the seven steps, the participants were given a post-test to see the results of the actions implemented. The test results were obtained by comparing the previous test results as presented in Figure 7 below:
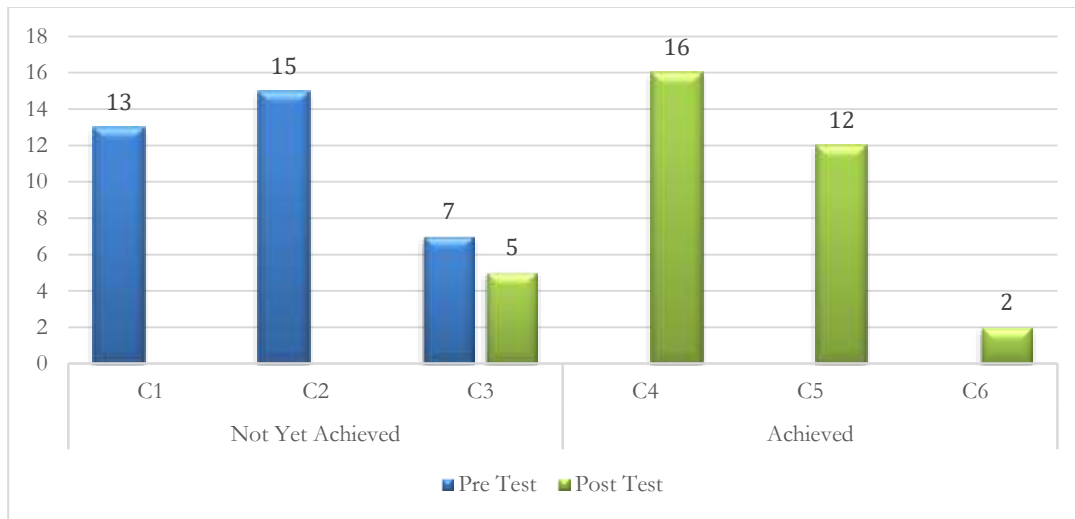

Figure 7. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Results.

Figure 7. Above indicates an improvement in learning outcomes. After the implementation of the action, 30 (85.71%) participants had reached the C4 level, with 16 (45.71%) participants, C5 with 12 (34.29%) participants, and C6 with 2 (5.71%) participants. However, 5 students (14.29%) were still at the C3 level. Despite the fact that these five participants were in the C3 category, they basically experienced an improvement, because originally these five participants were at the C1 level as seen from the pre-test result. A further investigation was done and showed that these five students had attendance issue during the implementation stages of the action. Thus, the seven steps carried out in the learning of *Usul Fiqh* were deemed to be able to improve the achievement of *Usul Fiqh* learning by 85.71%.

DISCUSSION

The seven steps that have been implemented in the study of *Usul Fiqh* are required to improve the participants' thinking skills in applying the *Usul Fiqh* as a solution to contemporary problems. Directing learning goals for problem solving is a necessity considering the demands of learning in the 21st century, learning is not just an activity to collect a number of concepts, facts and data but the skills to solve problems (Subri et al., 2012). In

addition, the seven steps done using problem-based learning design have answered the problems of *Usul Fiqh* learning that have been experienced by academics as expressed by Aminudin (2018) that the current teaching model of *Usul Fiqh* is carried out in a traditional way and relies on teachers. Besides, the level of understanding resulting from the learning model is very simple and low (Ihsan, 2017; Rusli, 2011) this also shows that the weaknesses of learning outcomes are influenced by innovation factors in the learning of *Usul Fiqh*.

Learning innovation in this globalization era with fast-paced changes is a necessity. It demands educators to adapt to every change, including changes in learning systems and ways by making these changes a challenge and opportunity (Tarman, 2016; Tarman & Dev, 2018). This indicates that every educator is required to be creative in all fields and must also be reformist to overcome problems including overcoming domestic, national and global problems (Tarman, 2016), especially in education and learning field (Supriyadi & Julia, 2019).

Educators need to possess both literacy skills (Supriyadi et al., 2020) and a strong motivation to innovate in the realm of learning. This innovation extends to exploring research on *Usul Fiqh* learning models and actively applying and enhancing these models through action research to address learning challenges (Supriadi et al., 2022). This challenge underscores the importance for educators to continuously develop themselves and enhance the overall quality of education. The educator plays a pivotal role in the success of the learning process (Abdussalam et al., 2021).

By implementing the seven steps of learning, students' intellectual development can be gauged through their skills to independently or collaboratively resolve Islamic law issues, guided by an instructor (Sapiudin, 2014). This cognitive skill aligns with human nature, as individuals typically engage actively in seeking knowledge and endeavor to find meaningful solutions by integrating acquired knowledge (Kosasih et al., 2021). Such a trait equips students to tackle Islamic law issues and even extend their problem-solving capabilities with support from instructors and peers who possess advanced skills. In problem-based *Usul Fiqh* learning, it is vital for instructors to consistently motivate and create opportunities for students to become proficient problem solvers in the domain of Islamic law, guided by their accumulated knowledge. This approach yields more meaningful knowledge and can have lasting effects on learning outcomes and cognitive skills. However, it's essential to anticipate the possibility of not fully covering the entire curriculum, and occasionally, students' discoveries may stray from the context of the discipline under study.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that in order to increase the level of thinking skills and the quality of *Usul Fiqh* learning so as to meet the objectives of *Usul Fiqh* materials, seven steps of learning are needed, namely setting goals, design, and appropriate learning materials, providing a comprehensive conceptualization of *Usul Fiqh* materials, encouraging students to discover issues in Islamic law as learning projects, facilitating discussions regarding issues to be studied, advocating research conducted by students, conducting seminars on results and evaluation related to the problem-solving process to find meaningful learning outcomes. These seven steps have been proven to improve the students' thinking skills and the quality of *Usul Fiqh* learning for 32 out of 35 students, or an increase of 85.75%

SUGGESTION

The seven steps proposed in this study can be put into practice for anyone who wants to improve students' thinking skills and the quality of *Usul Fiqh* learning in terms of realizing meaningful learning.

LIMITATION

This study has limitations in terms of the participants, as it only involved 35 prospective Islamic Religious Education teachers and it only focused on Islamic-themed universities that made it very feasible to design and carry out the study for students who specialized in Islamic law.

IMPLICATION

The implications of this study provide direction in developing *Usul Fiqh* learning methods emphasizing on enhancing thinking skills. This ensures that the goal of *Usul Fiqh* learning, as a scientific discipline in Islamic

law, goes beyond theoretical knowledge and rote memorization, enabling its practical application in addressing real-world issues within Islamic law.

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