

**Implementation of the Dialectical Session Program in Building a Student
Critical Thinking Culture**

**Meva Dwi Wulandari¹, Bambang Pratandi², Nurushshofia Rahmawati³, Anggi
Rosita⁴, Jauharul Manasik⁵**

IAI Al - Muhammad Cepu¹²³⁴⁵

mevaa23.76@gmail.com¹, albamsadventure@gmail.com²,

nurushshofiar@gmail.com³, anggirosita612@gmail.com⁴,

manasikjauharul@gmail.com⁵

Abstract

A culture of critical thinking is an important competency for Islamic Education Management students, but its development through student organizations is still not sufficiently documented. This study aims to describe the implementation of the Dialectical Assembly program, analyze its impact on students' critical thinking culture, and identify supporting and inhibiting factors. A qualitative approach with case study design is used. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, & Saldana model. Findings: (1) The Dialectical Assembly was held as a regular discussion forum on Tuesdays with topics relevant to Islamic Education Management; (2) improvements were observed in confidence to express opinions, argumentation quality, and participation among introverted students; (3) The main supporting factor is leadership regeneration, while the inhibiting factors include suboptimal documentation and limited access to literature. The practical implication is that structured discussion forums need to be institutionalized in the student's academic calendar.

Keywords: Implementation, Critical Thinking, Dialectical Assembly, Critical Thinking

Abstrak

Budaya berpikir kritis merupakan kompetensi penting bagi mahasiswa Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, namun perkembangannya melalui organisasi kemahasiswaan masih belum cukup terdokumentasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pelaksanaan program Majelis Dialektika, menganalisis dampaknya terhadap budaya berpikir kritis siswa, dan mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung dan penghambat. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus digunakan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña. Temuan: (1) Majelis Dialektika dilaksanakan sebagai forum diskusi rutin

Selasa dengan topik yang relevan dengan Manajemen Pendidikan Islam; (2) perbaikan diamati dalam kepercayaan diri untuk mengungkapkan pendapat, kualitas argumentasi, dan partisipasi di antara siswa introvert; (3) Faktor pendukung utama adalah regenerasi kepemimpinan, sedangkan faktor penghambat termasuk dokumentasi yang tidak optimal dan akses literatur yang terbatas. Implikasi praktisnya adalah bahwa forum diskusi terstruktur perlu dilembagakan dalam kalender akademik mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci: Implementasi, Berpikir Kritis, Majelis Dialektis, Berpikir Kritis

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking skills are one of the most fundamental skills of the 21st century in the context of higher education¹. The World Economic Forum consistently ranks critical thinking as one of the top ten most in-demand skills in the job market of the future. Within the framework of Bloom's revised taxonomy, critical thinking falls within a high-level cognitive realm that includes the ability to analyze, evaluate, and create².

For students engaged in Islamic Education Management (MPI), this ability is very strategic because it is directly related to their capacity in managing educational institutions, formulating policies, and dealing with the complexity of Islamic education issues in Indonesia. MPI graduates who are not equipped with critical thinking skills will find it difficult to adapt to the dynamics of changes in national education policies and the ever-growing demands of society. This is even more relevant considering that Islamic educational institutions are facing an era of digital transformation that requires education leaders to think analytically, adaptively, and innovatively in every decision-making.

Various studies show that the culture of critical thinking among students of Islamic religious universities (PTKI) still needs serious attention³. Students tend to be passive-receptive in the learning process, reluctant to express different opinions, and unfamiliar with constructive discursive traditions. This condition is inseparable

¹ Miqro' Fajari Lathifah, "Analysis of the Use of Learning Media on Students' Critical Thinking Skills in the 21st Century," *Scientific Journal of the Education Profession* 5, no. 2 (November 30, 2020): 133–37, <https://doi.org/10.29303/jipp.v5i2.98>.

² Welas Listiani and Rachmawati Rachmawati, "Bloom Taxonomic Transformation in HOTS-Based Learning Evaluation," *JENDELA PENDIDIKAN JOURNAL* 2, no. 03 (August 20, 2022): 397–402, <https://doi.org/10.57008/jjp.v2i03.266>.

³ Rehani³ Hendrayadi¹, Syafruddin², "CRITICAL THINKING IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION," *Journal of Education and Teaching Review* 6, no. 2 (2023): 2382–91, <https://doi.org/10.31004/jrpp.v6i4.21870>.

from the legacy of the education system which tends to emphasize memorization and reproduction of knowledge rather than critical analysis and evaluation. The lack of structured discussion practice space is one of the main factors for the low culture of critical thinking in the PTKI environment. This condition is exacerbated by a still hierarchical academic culture, where students often feel free to express different ideas from lecturers or academic authorities.

Empirical data shows that the low culture of critical thinking has a direct impact on the quality of PTKI graduates. Many alumni who enter the world of work in the field of management of Islamic educational institutions experience difficulties in systematically identifying problems, designing evidence-based solutions, and making decisions in the midst ⁴of uncertainty. This is a serious challenge considering that Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia are currently facing increasingly complex transformation pressures, ranging from digitizing learning to competition with public educational institutions⁵. The urgency of developing the critical thinking capacity of MPI students is thus not only an academic agenda, but a real need that will determine the quality of Islamic education leadership in the future.

Theoretically, critical thinking in the context of Islamic education cannot be separated from the classical Islamic scientific tradition which is rich in the traditions of *ijtihad*, *munazarah*, and *halaqah*. These traditions are actually an early form of a culture of critical thinking that has taken root in Islamic civilization. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Khaldun have exemplified how analytical acuity, courage to question assumptions, and openness to intellectual debate are the main pillars of Islamic scientific progress. Ironically, this great intellectual heritage has not been fully revived in the context of contemporary Islamic education, especially in the environment of PTKI which should be at the forefront of continuing this critical tradition.

In response to these challenges, the Student Association of the Islamic Education Management Study Program (HMPS MPI) of the Al Muhammad Cepu Islamic Religious Institute presents a flagship program called the Dialectical

⁴ Rojiid Arbi Muhyardho and Imamul Muttaqin, "Challenges and Leadership Strategies in Islamic Education Management in the Digital Era," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 3, no. 1 (December 10, 2024): 65–75, <https://doi.org/10.61132/jbpai.v3i1.860>.

⁵ Rojiid Arbi Muhyardho and Imamul Muttaqin.

Council. This program was initiated by Mr. Jauharul Manasik, S.H., M.Pd., as a lecturer who initiated the importance of structured discussion spaces for MPI students. Fakhiroh⁶ showed that student organizations that have structured discussion programs are able to become an incubator for the development of effective critical thinking outside the classroom. The Dialectical Assembly was first held in the 2025/2026 MPI HMPS management period under the leadership of Meva Dwi Wulandari, and was successfully continued in the 2026/2027 period, showing the sustainability of the program that goes beyond one generation of management.

The Dialectical Assembly is designed as a weekly routine discussion forum held every Tuesday with themes relevant to the field of Islamic Education Management. In one year of implementation, the program has shown a real impact: students in semesters 2 to 6 begin to dare to express their opinions, their analytical abilities improve, and students who were previously inclined to be introverted begin to actively engage in group discussions. This initial success makes the Dialectical Assembly an interesting model to be studied and documented systematically so that it can be adapted by other PTKIs.

In terms of scientific relevance, research on critical thinking development programs based on student organizations within PTKI is still very limited. Most of the existing research focuses on interventions in formal classrooms, such as the application of Problem Based Learning (PBL) learning models⁷ or debate learning strategies⁸. Meanwhile, the great potential of student organizations as informal learning spaces almost escaped the attention of the research. In fact, interactions between students in organizational forums have different dynamics and are often more authentic than discussions that take place under the direct supervision of

⁶ ZAKIYATUL FAKHIROH, "ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN IMPROVING STUDENT CRITICAL THINKING IN STUDENT INSTITUTIONS, FACULTY OF DA'WAH UIN PROF. K.H. SAIFUDDIN ZUHRI PURWOKERTO" (UIN PROF. K.H. SAIFUDDIN ZUHRI PURWOKERTO, 2025), <https://share.google/Jt84KbqdCcoy7moZ>.

⁷ Theresje Mandang³ Megumi Hana Kowaas¹, Treesje Katrina Londa², "THE APPLICATION OF THE PROBLEM BASED LEARNING (PBL) MODEL IN IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES," *Journal of Social Sociology, Science, and Education* 7, No. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.32531/jsoscied.v7i2.847>.

⁸ Salamat Riadi⁴ Arlina¹, Putri Rahayu Naibaho², Rina Susanti³, "Implementation of Debate Learning Strategies in Fiqh Learning at Al-Hidayah High School Medan," *Tambusai Education Journal* 8, no. 1 (2024): 3559–67, <https://doi.org/10.31004/jptam.v8i1.12947>.

lecturers, because they take place in a more equal atmosphere and free from the pressure of formal academic assessment.

Based on the explanation above, this research is here to fill the void systematically. The objectives of this study are: (1) to describe the implementation of the Dialectical Assembly program at HMPS MPI IAI Al Muhammad Cepu; (2) analyze the impact of the program on students' critical thinking culture; and (3) identify supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. The results of this research are expected to provide theoretical contributions in the form of a discussion forum model based on student organizations that can be adapted by other PTKIs, as well as practical contributions in the form of policy recommendations for the institutionalization of similar programs in the student academic calendar.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the implementation of Dialectical Assembly in student organizations at the IAI Al Muhammad Cepu, in the even semester of 2025/2026 to early 2026/2027. Subjects were selected by purposive sampling⁹, including the Chairman of HMPS MPI for the 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 periods as well as active members in semesters 2, 4, and 6. Data analysis follows Miles, Huberman, & Saldana interactive models¹⁰ data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification to capture contextual patterns and meanings. Validity is ensured through triangulation of sources and methods by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.¹¹ Information was collected through a combination of in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation studies to gain a holistic understanding of organizational activities and governance practices. The research focuses on examining the ways in which the Dialectical Assembly method promotes constructive dialogue, critical analysis, and collective decision-making among

⁹ Ika Lenaini, "PURPOSIVE SAMPLING AND SNOWBALL SAMPLING TECHNIQUES," *HISTORICAL : Journal of Study, Research & Development of History Education* 6, no. 1 (2021): 33–39, <https://doi.org/10.31764/historis.v6i1.4075>.

¹⁰ Rony Zulfirman, "Implementation of Outdoor Learning Method in Improving Student Learning Outcomes in Islamic Religious Subjects at MAN 1 Medan," *Journal of Research, Education and Teaching: JPPP* 3, no. 2 (August 5, 2022): 147–53, <https://doi.org/10.30596/jppp.v3i2.11758>.

¹¹ M Win Afgani³ Wiyanda Vera Nurfajriani², Muhammad Wahyu Ilhami¹ Arivan Mahendra³, Rusdy Abdullah Sirodj³, "Data Triangulation in Qualitative Data Analysis," *Scientific Journal of Education* 10, no. 17 (2024): 826–33, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13929272>.

student organization members. The findings are expected to reveal the significance of this approach in fostering active participation, democratic values, and leadership skills within the organization. Moreover, the study aims to contribute to broader discussions on organizational communication, student engagement, and participatory management in higher education contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Dialectical Assembly Program HMPS MPI IAI Al Muhammad Cepu

The findings of the study show that the Dialectical Assembly is held as a regular discussion forum every Tuesday with the strategic theme of Islamic Education Management (MPI), such as madrasah governance, national education policy, Islamic education leadership, and pesantren learning innovations. These themes are chosen collectively by administrators taking into account their relevance to the ongoing course and actual educational issues.

Each session lasts approximately 90 minutes with a structure divided into three parts: presentation of material by the moderator, question and answer sessions and open debates, and joint conclusions drawn. This three-stage structure indirectly implements the Kolb experiential learning cycle¹²: students gain real experience from presentations, make reflective observations through question and answer sessions, build abstract understanding in drawing conclusions, and will experiment with them in the next forum.

The Chairman of HMPS MPI for the 2025/2026 period explained the background of the formation of this program: "So initially it was from Mr. Jauharul Manasik, who suggested me to create a special discussion forum for MPI students..." (Interview, May 2025). This initiative demonstrates the importance of the role of mentors in initiating cultural change in student organizations. Without the initial encouragement of a trusted figure, demanding cultural changes outside of your comfort zone - such as getting used to public speaking and arguing—are often difficult to get started.

¹² Winja Kumari, "IMPLEMENTATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING METHODS TO IMPROVE THE LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS," *JOURNAL OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ISSUES (JPBISK)* 6, no. 1 (June 30, 2024): 39–50, <https://doi.org/10.56325/jpbisk.v6i1.117>.

The sustainability of the program is the most prominent indicator of success. When the Chairman of HMPS MPI for the 2026/2027 period took over the leadership, the Dialectical Assembly program was not only maintained but also developed by adding various formats, such as journal presentation sessions and the latest education policy studies. The success of this cross-generational legacy proves that the Dialectical Assembly has succeeded in transforming from a flagship program of one management to an organizational tradition that has institutional resilience.

In the perspective of Islamic education, the Dialectical Assembly revitalizes the halaqah tradition in the context of modern student organizations. The halaqah tradition has characteristics: it is collective and participatory, puts participants in an active position as students and critics, does not recognize rigid hierarchical obstacles, and is oriented towards the search for truth (haqiqah) through dialogue and deliberation. The Dialectical Assembly maintains the spirit of halaqah dialogue while adapting its content to the academic needs of the Islamic Education Management study program.

The fundamental difference between Dialectical Assembly and traditional halaqah lies in the structure of scientific leadership and authority. In classical halaqah, the discussion is led by a kiai or ustadz who has hierarchical authority. In contrast, the Dialectical Assembly is managed entirely by students (peer-led discussion) without the presence of lecturers as the sole authority. However, the Dialectical Assembly also sometimes invites lecturers as speakers to provide insights and academic perspectives that enrich the discussion material. Lecturers are present as resource persons who contribute to the discussion, not as leaders or process controllers. These peer-led characteristics create a safe space where all opinions are valued equally and criticism is seen as intellectual contribution.

In the perspective of Kurt Lewin's theory of organizational change¹³, the Dialectical Assembly has entered a phase of re-freezing, in which the values of critical discussion begin to become the norm that is collectively accepted and inherited intergenerationally within the HMPS MPI community. The process of

¹³ Richard Leonando Aoetpah, Bambang Ismanto, and Wasitohadi Wasitohadi, "The Application of PPDB Zoning in the Perspective of Kurt Lewin's Change Theory," *SAP (Educational Article Arrangement)* 7, no. 2 (December 5, 2022): 229, <https://doi.org/10.30998/sap.v7i2.13690>.

opening the freeze occurred when the first management introduced this forum as an alternative to the previously dominant passive-receptive habits. The phase of change lasts throughout 2025/2026 when new norms of critical discussion begin to take shape. Now, with the successful transfer of the program to the next management, the refreezing phase has been reached, signaling a real transformation of the organization's culture.

The Impact of Dialectical Programs on Students' Critical Thinking Culture

After running for one year, the Dialectical Assembly program showed an identified impact on actively participating students from semester 2 to semester 6. These impacts are observed in three main dimensions that are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

1. Increase the courage to express opinions (intellectual beliefs)

Before this program, students tended to be passive even in informal forums. After consistently participating in Dialectical Assemblies, students show significant changes in the courage to make arguments, ask critical questions, and respond constructively to the opinions of others. This impact was also felt in formal lectures, where several lecturers reported an increase in the activeness of students who routinely participated in the Dialectical Assembly. One of the participants said: "Since joining the Dialectical Assembly, I feel that I have experienced a great change in the courage to speak..." (Interview, October 2025).

This development is in line with Brookfield's thinking that the courage to express critical opinions is the result of consistent habituation practiced in a safe and appreciative environment¹⁴. The weekly habit of speaking in discussion forums gradually reduces what Brookfield calls cheater syndrome - the feeling of not being fit to speak in an academic space - and builds students' intellectual confidence. This change is not only an increase in the courage to speak, but a fundamental transformation in the way students view themselves as intellectual agents who have rights and are able to contribute to scientific discourse.

¹⁴ Fitriani Muh Amin⁴ Rosmiati Ramli^{1*}, Misbah², Kurnia Alex³, "The Role of Thinking Culture in Creating Meaningful Learning," *MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS FOR STUDENTS AND ACADEMICS* 1, no. 6 (2026): 54–65, <https://jurnal.yayasanmeisyarainsanmadani.com/index.php/intelektual>.

2. Increased social-academic interaction

Especially in students who previously tended to be introverts. Field findings revealed that some students who were very quiet and reluctant to participate at the beginning slowly began to open up and be active after a few months of participating in the Dialectical Assembly. A safe and appreciative discussion environment for a wide range of opinions creates a conducive space for introverted students to develop themselves. Within the framework of Vygotsky¹⁵'s theory, the Dialectical Assembly serves as a Proximal Development Zone (ZPD) that bridges the student's actual and potential abilities: interaction with peers who have more mature argumentative skills creates intellectual scaffolding conditions that encourage each participant to continue to grow.

3. Improve the quality of the arguments

Students who actively participate in Dialectical Assemblies demonstrate a better ability to formulate arguments systematically, find supporting references, and distinguish between personal opinions and arguments supported by data and facts. They also began to get used to using a more structured argumentation structure: stating claims, providing reasons, and backing them up with evidence. This development is in line with the critical thinking component that Facione puts forward¹⁶, namely inference—the ability to draw correct conclusions and explanation the ability to explain the reasons behind an assessment.

These three dimensions of impact reinforce each other and create a positive development spiral. Students who are more courageous to speak will be more motivated to prepare more qualified arguments. Higher-quality arguments get a more appreciative response from peers, which in turn further strengthens intellectual belief. This positive spiral is one of the advantages of peer-led discussion forums compared to one-way learning in the classroom,

¹⁵ Begjo Tohari and Ainur Rahman, "Lev Semonovich Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner's Constructivism: Active Learning Models in the Development of Children's Cognitive Abilities," *Nusantara: Indonesian Journal of Education* 4, no. 1 (January 31, 2024): 209–28, <https://doi.org/10.14421/njpi.2024.v4i1-13>.

¹⁶ Mas Novandi et al., "CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS AND THEIR TEACHING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS," *PERKHASA POLICY EDUCATION JOURNAL* 11, no. 1 (2025): 649–69, <https://doi.org/10.31932/jpdp.v11i1.4509>.

where interpersonal dynamics between students are a driving force for development.

Supporting and Inhibiting Implementation Factors

The most prominent supporting factors are the commitment of management and the success of the program regeneration during the management period. This proves that the Dialectical Assembly has an institutional durability that surpasses that of its founding figures. The next supporting factor is the relevance of the content: the discussion themes that are collectively selected and adapted to current Islamic education issues guarantee high enthusiasm from the members. Informal support from initiation lecturers, although not present in person at the forum, also provides academic legitimacy that is essential for the sustainability of the program. In addition, an egalitarian organizational atmosphere - where members from different semesters interact without hierarchical barriers - creates an intellectual climate conducive to the free and responsible expression of ideas.

The inhibiting factors identified include limited student time due to busy lecture schedules and other organizational activities outside HMPS MPI. Even though Tuesday's schedule has been strategically chosen, some students still experience schedule conflicts in certain semesters. In addition, the lack of an optimal activity documentation system is a critical obstacle in tracking program progress longitudinally. This limitation also complicates the knowledge transfer process between generations of management due to the absence of standard archives. Limited access to supporting literature is also an obstacle; Not all students have easy access to cutting-edge scientific journals that are relevant to the topic of discussion, so the depth of the argument still needs to be improved.

Table 1. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of Dialectical Assembly Programs

Yes	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
1	Management commitment and successful program regeneration during the management period	Limited student time due to busy lecture schedules and other organizational activities

Yes	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
2	Content relevance: discussion themes are collectively selected and tailored to the latest Islamic education issues	Longitudinal and standard activity documentation systems are not optimal
3	Informal support from the initiative lecturer, which provides academic legitimacy for the program	Limited access to up-to-date scientific literature relevant to students
4	An egalitarian organizational atmosphere without hierarchical obstacles between semesters	-

Source: Research Results Data, 2025

Overall, the implementation of the Dialectical Assembly can be understood as an authentic epistemological revitalization: bridging the legacy of the classical Islamic scientific tradition with the needs of the development of critical thinking of 21st-century students. The program has succeeded in creating an informal learning ecosystem that complements—not replaces—formal classroom learning. The success of the Dialectical Assembly provides empirical evidence that discussion forums based on student organizations, if designed and managed consistently and carefully, can be a very effective vehicle in building a sustainable culture of critical thinking in the PTKI environment.

CONCLUSION

The Dialectical Assembly program implemented by HMPS MPI IAI Al Muhammad Cepu has proven effective as a forum for structured discussion in building a culture of critical thinking for students. The program is held regularly every Tuesday with a strategic theme in the field of Islamic Education Management, adopting a three-stage format that is in line with Kolb's experiential learning cycle. The impacts identified include three dimensions: increased intellectual confidence, increased social-academic interaction especially in introverted students, and improved quality of more systematic and evidence-based argumentation. These three dimensions reinforce each other and form a spiral of positive development. Key supporting factors include management commitment, successful regeneration

throughout the management period, content relevance, and an egalitarian organizational atmosphere. Inhibiting factors include time constraints, suboptimal documentation, and limited access to scientific literature. Overall, the Dialectical Assembly succeeded in revitalizing the halaqah tradition in a modern context and proved that discussion forums based on student organizations can be an effective vehicle to build a sustainable culture of critical thinking in the PTKI environment.

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