

OPTIMIZING THE CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING LEARNING MODEL TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Fasyawalyra Putri Arvina, Muhammad Akmansyah, Era Octafiona

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung

Jl. Letnan Kolonel H. Endro Suratmin Sukarame, Bandar Lampung, Lampung
e-mail: fasyawalyra@gmail.com, akmansyah@radenintan.ac.id, era@radenintan.ac.id

Abstrak: Rendahnya kemampuan berpikir kritis peserta didik dalam pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam masih menjadi persoalan serius, terutama akibat dominasi metode pembelajaran konvensional yang bersifat teacher-centered. Menanggapi permasalahan tersebut, penelitian ini mengkaji penerapan model pembelajaran Creative Problem Solving dalam meningkatkan kemampuan berpikir kritis peserta didik pada mata pelajaran Pendidikan agama Islam di SMP IT Cahaya Ilmu, Bandar Lampung. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain eksperimen semu dengan melibatkan kelompok eksperimen dan kelompok kontrol. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui pre-test dan post-test, observasi, serta angket. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan model Creative Problem Solving secara signifikan meningkatkan kemampuan berpikir kritis siswa, khususnya dalam aspek pemecahan masalah dan penerapan konsep-konsep Pendidikan agama Islam. Selain itu, Creative Problem Solving juga mampu meningkatkan keterlibatan aktif siswa dan memperdalam pemahaman mereka terhadap nilai-nilai ajaran Islam. Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya integrasi model pembelajaran berbasis pemecahan masalah dalam kurikulum Pendidikan agama Islam sebagai upaya strategis untuk menjawab tuntutan pembelajaran abad ke-21 dan membentuk peserta didik yang kritis, reflektif, serta berkarakter Islami.

Kata Kunci: Creative Problem Solving, Berpikir Kritis, Pendidikan Agama Islam

Abstract: The low level of critical thinking skills among students in Islamic Religious Education remains a serious problem, mainly due to the dominance of conventional teacher-centered learning methods. In response to this problem, this study examines the application of the Creative Problem Solving learning model in improving the critical thinking skills of students in Islamic Religious Education at SMP IT Cahaya Ilmu, Bandar Lampung. This study used a quasi-experimental design involving an experimental group and a control group. Data collection was conducted through pre-tests and post-tests, observations, and questionnaires. The results showed that the application of the Creative Problem Solving model significantly improved students' critical thinking skills, particularly in problem solving and the application of Islamic Religious Education concepts. In addition, Creative Problem Solving was also able to increase students' active involvement and deepen their understanding of Islamic values. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of integrating problem-solving-based learning models into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum as a strategic effort to respond to the demands of 21st-century learning and shape students who are critical, reflective, and have Islamic character.

Keywords: Creative Problem Solving, Critical Thinking, Islamic Religious Education

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of human resources capable of competing in the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement (Nasution et al., 2025; Purba et al., 2025; Tusriyanto et al., 2024). Nevertheless, based on the results of the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment, Indonesian students' higher-order thinking skills remain relatively low, as indicated by a reading literacy score of 359 and a ranking of 71st out of 81 participating (Rochim et al., 2024). This condition suggests that, particularly at the junior high school level, students continue to face challenges in developing critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills, including in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning. Therefore, the development of critical thinking skills in schools especially within the context of Islamic Religious Education needs to be urgently strengthened through the implementation of more innovative learning models (Fadhilah et al., 2025; Ilma et al., 2025; Noer & Fitria, 2024).

In the twenty-first century (21), critical thinking has become one of the core competencies that students must possess (Patras et al., 2024). Theoretically, this skill is particularly strategic in Islamic Religious Education, as it enables students to understand Islamic values in a rational and applicable manner (Muhyidin et al., 2025; Nuruni'mah, 2025). Problem-based learning approaches within the context of Islamic religious Education have been proven effective in enhancing students' critical and reflective thinking skills when interpreting

Qur'anic verses and Hadith (Firmansyah et al., 2025; Zakiyah et al., 2025). Therefore, the development of critical thinking skills in IRE serves not only to improve students' intellectual capacity but also to strengthen their faith (iman) and piety (taqwa) (Rasyidi, 2024; Tarik et al., 2025). Based on interviews and information obtained from the Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMP IT Cahaya Ilmu Bandar Lampung, it was found that students' critical thinking skills still require improvement. Several indicators reflect this condition, including students' difficulties in identifying the core issues within narratives, Qur'anic verses, or Hadith, as well as in distinguishing between facts, opinions, and assumptions in religious texts. In addition, students continue to require substantial guidance in constructing clear, evidence-based arguments when responding to religious questions and in evaluating ideas according to Islamic principles. Observational data further indicate that the current instructional practices tend to be teacher-centered, with teachers playing a dominant role in the learning process. As a result, opportunities for students to actively engage in learning and to practice critical thinking remain limited. This condition highlights the need for further evaluation and development of instructional models that can foster critical thinking skills and support students in achieving a deeper and more contextual understanding of learning materials, particularly through structured activities that promote reasoning, dialogue, and principled judgment grounded in authentic Islamic sources and everyday contexts.

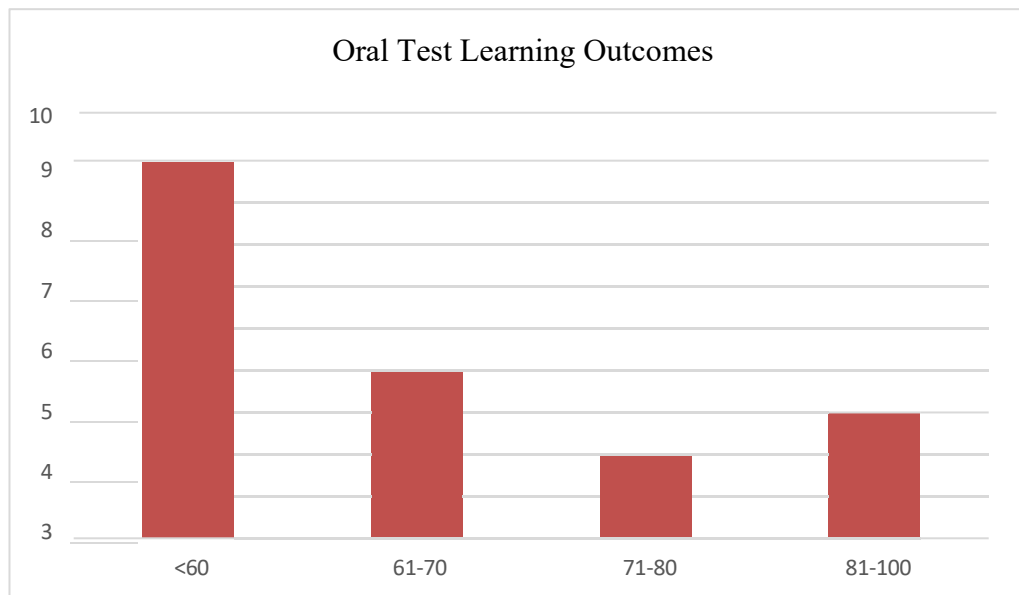


Figure 1. Oral Assessment Scores in Islamic Religious Education

Students' critical thinking skills and scientific attitudes can be enhanced through the implementation of appropriate learning models, one of which is the Creative Problem Solving model (Patras et al., 2024). This model not only creates an engaging and motivating learning environment but also connects instructional content to real-world situations, thereby enabling students to relate knowledge to everyday life while enhancing creativity and critical thinking skills (Azmi & Khaira, 2024a; Departement et al., 2023). The Creative Problem Solving approach emphasizes the development of broader and deeper thinking processes, allowing students to actively solve problems rather than merely memorize information. Theoretically, Creative Problem Solving is classified as a constructivist learning model that positions students as the center of the learning process, making it effective in promoting active student engagement (Arfandi et al., 2023; Octadianti et al., 2023). Research further indicates that the application of Creative

Problem Solving in Islamic Religious Education can enhance students' critical thinking skills and religiosity, in line with Osborn's perspective, which emphasizes that Creative Problem Solving trains students to identify facts, generate ideas, and evaluate solutions reflectively (Rahanyiar et al., 2024b; Syahril, 2025). Consequently, the use of appropriate learning models in IRE can make the learning process more effective and provide deeper understanding for students, aligning with the national education objectives of developing individuals who are faithful, morally upright, and adaptive to scientific and technological advancements without abandoning Islamic values (Nursobah et al., 2025; Prihantoro & Ata, 2025).

Based on prior studies conducted by Rosita Rahanyiar (2024), Dewa Putra Cisnaulin (2025), Siti Maryam Ulfa (2025), Cepi Septian (2025), and Brwa A. Saed (2025) the Creative Problem Solving learning model has been empirically proven

to be effective in improving students' critical thinking skills across various subjects. Rahanyiar et al. (Rahanyiar, 2024) demonstrated that the implementation of Creative Problem Solving in Islamic Religious Education at SMP Negeri 21 Malang had a significant effect on enhancing students' critical thinking skills, as evidenced by differences between pre-test and post-test scores and statistical significance values below 0.05. Similar findings have been reported in studies applying CPS to other subjects, such as biology and mathematics, further confirming that CPS encourages students to analyze problems, generate ideas, and evaluate solutions logically and systematically. However, most of these studies have focused on public schools, general subjects, or specific educational levels, and have not explicitly integrated the distinctive characteristics of Islamic Religious Education, which is inherently value-laden and contextually grounded in religious principles.

Based on these findings, the research gap of the present study lies in the absence of research that specifically examines the effect of the Creative Problem Solving learning model on students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education within the context of integrated Islamic schools, particularly at SMP IT Cahaya Ilmu Bandar Lampung. Moreover, previous studies have generally addressed the effectiveness of Creative Problem Solving in a broad sense without adapting the Creative Problem Solving syntax to the unique characteristics of IRE, which demands the integration of

values, attitudes, and religiously grounded problem-solving processes. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in the contextualized application of the Creative Problem Solving model within Islamic Religious Education in an integrated Islamic school setting, taking into account students' characteristics, the religious learning environment, and Islamic issues embedded in the problem-solving process. This study not only examines the impact of CPS on critical thinking skills but also contributes to the enrichment of IRE instructional models through a creative problem-solving approach that aligns with the demands of twenty-first-century learning and the strengthening of Islamic character.

The development of students' critical thinking skills is essential for addressing increasingly complex challenges in the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement. The primary objective of fostering these skills is to equip students with the ability to analyze, evaluate, and generate logical and creative solutions to various problems. The implementation of learning models that support critical thinking, such as Creative Problem Solving, has important implications, including the creation of more interactive and engaging learning environments that enhance students' motivation and participation. Furthermore, this model helps students connect academic knowledge with real-life situations and develop scientific attitudes necessary for adapting to social and technological changes.

Accordingly, this study is directed to address the observed gap between the expected development of students' critical

thinking in Islamic Religious Education and the actual learning outcomes and classroom practices at SMP IT Cahaya Ilmu Bandar Lampung, as reflected in the oral assessment profile and the teacher's account of students' difficulties in identifying issues, differentiating claims, and constructing evidence-based arguments. The study therefore aims to empirically examine the effect of the Creative Problem Solving learning model on students' critical thinking skills in IRE within an integrated Islamic school context, using clearly defined critical thinking indicators as the basis for assessment. In addition to testing effectiveness, this research seeks to provide a contextual adaptation of Creative Problem Solving learning steps that aligns with the value-oriented and principle-based nature of Islamic Religious Education, so that the results can inform teachers' instructional decisions and contribute a feasible model for strengthening critical thinking while maintaining the integrity of Islamic learning objectives.

METHOD

The research methodology described in this study is based on a quantitative approach using a Posttest Non-Equivalent Control Group Design, where two naturally formed student groups—experimental and control—are compared to measure the impact of the Creative Problem Solving learning model on students' critical thinking abilities. While this design is useful for understanding the effects of different teaching methods, there are inherent weaknesses in the approach that could limit the interpretation of the results.

Firstly, one major limitation of the non-equivalent control group design is the lack of random assignment. Since the groups were naturally formed, there is a possibility that the groups differ in ways that are unrelated to the intervention, such as prior knowledge, motivation, or other external factors. Without randomization, it becomes difficult to rule out alternative explanations for any observed differences between the groups. This could lead to selection bias, where the groups may have inherent differences that affect the outcomes, thus making it challenging to attribute the observed effects solely to the Creative Problem Solving model.

Another potential weakness lies in the reliance on a single post-test as the sole measure of students' critical thinking skills. Although the post-test was designed to assess the ability to identify problems, construct arguments, draw conclusions, and conduct evaluations based on Qur'anic verses and Hadith, using only one form of assessment may not fully capture the complexity of critical thinking. Additionally, the post-test essays may be influenced by students' writing skills or other non-cognitive factors, which could confound the results. To address this limitation, the study could benefit from incorporating multiple forms of assessment, such as pre- and post-tests, performance-based tasks, or peer evaluations, to provide a more comprehensive view of students' critical thinking development.

Furthermore, the study relies on a t-test to analyze the post-test scores. While the t-test is commonly used to assess differences between groups, it assumes that the data are normally distributed and that the variances of

the two groups are equal. If these assumptions are violated, the results of the t-test may not be reliable. To improve the robustness of the analysis, the study could consider conducting additional statistical tests, such as analysis of covariance, which can control for pre-existing differences between the groups and provide a more accurate estimation of the intervention's effect.

To address these weaknesses, the study could employ random assignment to create more comparable groups, incorporate multiple forms of assessment to capture the complexity of critical thinking, and use more advanced statistical techniques to analyze the data more rigorously. These improvements would strengthen the validity of the findings and provide a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of the Creative Problem Solving learning model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section of this study aims to present and analyze the findings obtained from the data collection process. The primary focus is to evaluate the impact of the Creative Problem Solving learning model on students' critical thinking abilities in Islamic Religious Education. In

this section, the analysis will delve into the statistical tests conducted to assess the effectiveness of the Creative Problem Solving model in comparison to the conventional teaching methods employed in the control group. It is important to first verify the assumptions underlying the statistical analysis, as this ensures that the results are valid and reliable. One of the initial steps in analyzing the data is performing a normality test. This test helps to assess whether the distribution of the data is approximately normal, which is a prerequisite for conducting further parametric tests. The following section presents the findings from the normality test, which are essential for determining the appropriate analysis method.

Normality Test

The normality test aims to determine whether the data obtained follow a normal distribution. A dataset is considered normally distributed if its significance value is greater than 0.05. The results of the normality test in this study are presented as follows:

Table 1. Results of the Normality Test

Tests of Normality				
	Group	Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
Data	1.00	.925	29	.061
	2.00	.960	30	.312

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Referring to the results of the normality test presented in Table 1, the experimental group and the control group obtained Shapiro–Wilk significance values of 0.061 and 0.312, respectively. Both values exceed the 0.05 significance threshold, indicating that the distribution of data in each group meets the assumption of normality. Therefore, the data are appropriate for further analysis using parametric statistical techniques, as no significant deviation from a normal distribution was detected in either group.

Homogeneity Test

The homogeneity test is used to determine whether the variances of the populations in the study are equal (homogeneous) or different (non-homogeneous). A dataset is considered homogeneous if its significance value is greater than 0.05. The results of the homogeneity test in this study are presented as follows.

Table 2. Results of the Homogeneity Test

Test of Homogeneity of Variances					
		Levene	df1	df2	Sig.
		Statistic			
DATA	Based on Mean	4.493	1	57	.068
	Based on Median	3.848	1	57	.055
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	3.848	1	48.226	.056
	Based on trimmed mean	4.278	1	57	.043

Based on the results of the homogeneity test presented in Table 2, all significance values were 0.068, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data exhibit homogeneous variances. This indicates that the assumption of homogeneity in this study has been fulfilled.

T-Test

The independent sample t-test in this study was used to analyze the final performance of the sample. The testing procedure was carried out as follows. To examine the proposed hypothesis, this study employed calculations using the pooled variance t-test formula.

Table 3. Results of the T-Test

Independent Samples Test						
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
DATA	Equal variances assumed	4.493	.038	-2.479	57	.016
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.462	48.115	.017

The results of the t-test indicate that the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, demonstrating a significant difference

between the mean scores of the two groups. Under both the equal variance and unequal variance assumptions, the test produced a

very small p-value (0.000), far below the 0.05 significance threshold, thereby confirming the presence of a statistically significant difference.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate a significant improvement in students' critical thinking skills. The implementation of the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) model in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning provides a systematic and structured approach to addressing problems by actively and creatively engaging students in the problem-solving process (Fauziah et al., 2023; Marjusa et al., 2025; Rahmawati, 2023). These findings are consistent with theoretical perspectives asserting that problem-based learning enhances students' critical thinking abilities, as learners are directly involved in activities that require them to analyze, evaluate, and seek solutions to the problems they encounter (Darmawati & Mustadi, 2023).

This study further reveals that the CPS model not only encourages students to think critically but also actively involves them in group discussions, idea exploration, and reflective evaluation of proposed solutions (Kurniasari & Fauziah, 2022). This result aligns with previous research conducted by Yusraningsih H. Pongoliu (2025) which demonstrated that problem-solving-based learning models increase student engagement and stimulate deeper thinking.

The results of the t-test indicate that the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, demonstrating a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups.

Under both the equal variance and unequal variance assumptions, the test produced a very small p-value (0.000), far below the 0.05 significance threshold, thereby confirming the presence of a statistically significant difference. Within the context of Islamic Religious Education, students' involvement in analyzing and reflecting on religious values and their application in everyday life fosters a more critical understanding of religious teachings and their implications (Pauzi & Jasiah, 2025; Rafi et al., 2025; Rosalinda et al., 2025).

The application of the CPS model also indicates that students tend to be more active in seeking solutions to issues related to IRE content. This model requires students not merely to memorize religious information but to comprehend and apply Islamic teachings across various contexts (Azmi & Khaira, 2024b). Research by Widiastuti et al (2023) supports this finding, showing that the use of CPS in religious education enhances students' critical thinking skills, particularly in their ability to analyze and evaluate existing problems. Consequently, students are encouraged to engage in more complex thinking, integrate multiple concepts, and generate creative solutions relevant to real-life situations grounded in religious values (Rahanyiar et al., 2024a; Wijaya et al., 2024).

The problem-based learning component inherent in CPS also enables students to develop their analytical and synthesis skills. Through tasks that require them to formulate problems, seek solutions, and present their findings, students are provided with opportunities to sharpen their

critical thinking abilities. This is consistent with the findings of Safitri et al (2025), who emphasized that problem-based learning approaches effectively support the development of critical thinking skills and problem-solving competence. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this approach helps students not only to understand religious teachings but also to apply them within broader social contexts (Wati et al., 2025).

Moreover, this study highlights the crucial role of teachers in guiding students throughout the CPS process. Teachers function as facilitators who assist students in analyzing problems, provide constructive feedback, and guide them in refining their understanding of the learning material (Dewantari & Oktaviani, 2025). Hal ini sejalan dengan hasil penelitian oleh Marjusa et al. (2025) which indicates that teachers' active involvement in the CPS model enhances students' understanding and promotes higher levels of critical thinking. With appropriate guidance, students are better able to comprehend religious concepts in greater depth and relate them to more relevant real-life situations (Nuraeni et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2023).

From a psychological perspective, the CPS model also contributes to increasing students' motivation and self-confidence in critical thinking. When students successfully solve problems or identify appropriate solutions, they experience a sense of achievement that encourages continued critical engagement (Wulandari & Wiarta, 2022). Martes et al. (2024) similarly reported that challenging, problem-based learning

environments can enhance students' confidence in addressing academic challenges. In Islamic Religious Education, this plays a vital role in shaping students' character, enabling them not only to understand religious teachings but also to apply them in their lives in a more critical and creative manner (Afifah et al., 2024).

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the view that the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) learning model is an effective approach for enhancing students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education at SMP IT Cahaya Ilmu Bandar Lampung (Arlingga et al., 2024; Fahrissa & Parmin, 2022; Yudhawardana, 2022). The implementation of this model not only encourages students to become more active and creative thinkers but also equips them with essential skills for solving problems relevant to their lives. Accordingly, the CPS model is expected to serve as an effective alternative for improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning by making it more challenging, interactive, and responsive to the needs of students in the twenty-first century (Putri & Miharja, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study addresses the issue of implementing the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) learning model to enhance students' critical thinking skills in the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Based on the research findings, the CPS model has proven to be effective in developing students' critical thinking skills by linking the learning material to real-world situations, while also encouraging students to actively engage in

the learning process. The application of this model not only enhances students' cognitive abilities but also enriches their social and emotional skills. This study emphasizes the importance of adapting a learning approach based on creative problem-solving to facilitate the development of critical thinking skills, which aligns with the demands of 21st-century education. The findings also highlight the need to integrate the characteristics of PAI material with a more interactive and holistic learning approach, in order to create a more relevant and profound learning experience for students. Therefore, the CPS model can be an effective and contextual learning model to enhance the quality of Islamic education that is more relevant to

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