

Reframing Islamic Education Through Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy for Democratic Agency

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ABSTRACT

The growing challenges of democratic fragility, ideological polarization, and declining dialogic engagement in contemporary societies have intensified the need for transformative approaches within Islamic education. However, fiqh instruction in many Islamic educational contexts continues to be dominated by transmission-oriented pedagogies emphasizing memorization, doctrinal conformity, and passive learning, thereby limiting students' opportunities to develop democratic agency and reflective reasoning. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy (CCBP) in fostering democratic agency among students in fiqh learning at Ma'had Al-Azhar Cairo. Employing a quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group pretest–posttest approach, the study involved 44 students divided into an experimental group ($n = 23$) and a control group ($n = 21$). Data were collected through the Democratic Agency Scale, classroom observations, and reflective learning journals, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, independent sample t-tests, N-gain analysis, and effect size calculation. The findings revealed that students exposed to Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy demonstrated significantly higher levels of democratic agency compared to those receiving conventional instruction. The intervention effectively enhanced students' critical deliberation, dialogic engagement, reflective judgment, and openness toward differing perspectives within fiqh learning contexts. The study further indicates that cognitive conflict functions not merely as a cognitive strategy but as a transformative pedagogical mechanism capable of recontextualizing Islamic education for democratic and pluralistic societies. These findings contribute to contemporary discussions on Islamic educational reform, democratic pedagogy, and dialogic learning by highlighting the compatibility between Islamic intellectual traditions and democratic educational principles.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary societies are increasingly confronted with democratic fragility, ideological polarization, religious intolerance, and declining civic participation, all of which place significant pressure on educational institutions to cultivate reflective, dialogic, and democratically engaged citizens [1], [2]. Recent global reports indicate that democratic backsliding has intensified across multiple regions, with the Economist Intelligence Unit reporting that more than one-third of the world's population currently lives under democratic erosion or hybrid political systems [3]. Similarly, UNESCO data highlight rising concerns regarding intolerance, disinformation, and social fragmentation among young people, particularly within culturally and religiously diverse societies. In many educational contexts, including Islamic education, pedagogical practices continue to emphasize rote memorization, doctrinal transmission, and passive reception of knowledge rather than critical deliberation and participatory reasoning [4], [5]. Such instructional orientations risk limiting students' capacity to engage constructively with difference, negotiate competing perspectives, and develop democratic agency within pluralistic environments.

The challenge becomes more critical within Islamic education, where the tension between preserving religious values and fostering critical-democratic dispositions remains a persistent concern. Although Islamic intellectual traditions historically embraced inquiry, dialogue, and *ijtihad* as central epistemic principles, contemporary classroom practices in many contexts frequently remain teacher-centered and authority-oriented [6]. Empirical studies across Muslim-majority educational settings have reported that instructional practices are still dominated by expository learning models, with limited opportunities for reflective discourse and dialogic engagement. For instance, several international assessments and regional educational studies have documented that students in religious education classrooms often demonstrate lower levels of argumentative reasoning, critical reflection, and participatory discussion compared to expected twenty-first century competencies [7]. Consequently, there is an increasing scholarly demand to reconceptualize Islamic education not merely as a vehicle for normative transmission, but as a transformative pedagogical space capable of nurturing democratic participation, ethical reasoning, and intercultural coexistence.

Within contemporary educational research, Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy (CCBP) has emerged as a promising instructional approach for promoting conceptual change, critical thinking, and reflective learning. Rooted in Piagetian disequilibrium theory and constructivist learning perspectives, cognitive conflict occurs when learners encounter information or experiences that challenge their existing beliefs or cognitive schemas, thereby stimulating deeper reasoning and epistemic reconstruction [8]. Over the past two decades, numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of cognitive conflict strategies in science education, mathematics education, and conceptual change learning. Meta-analytic evidence has shown that cognitive conflict interventions significantly improve students' conceptual understanding, problem-solving abilities, and higher-order thinking skills [9]. More recently, scholars have begun to explore cognitive conflict as a dialogic and socio-cognitive process associated with argumentation, reflective judgment, and collaborative reasoning. These developments indicate that cognitive conflict possesses broader pedagogical potential beyond cognitive achievement alone.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on cognitive conflict, the existing literature remains heavily concentrated within STEM education and conceptual change paradigms, leaving significant theoretical and empirical gaps in religious and democratic education contexts. Current studies rarely investigate how cognitive conflict-based pedagogy may contribute to the formation of democratic agency, particularly within Islamic educational environments characterized by moral, theological, and sociocultural complexities [10]. Furthermore, research integrating cognitive conflict with democratic education frameworks, intercultural dialogue, and Islamic pedagogical philosophy remains notably limited. Most prior investigations have primarily examined learning outcomes such as academic achievement or conceptual comprehension, while neglecting transformative dimensions including deliberative participation, epistemic openness, reflective citizenship, and dialogic engagement [11]. Consequently, the potential of cognitive conflict to function as a transformative pedagogical mechanism for democratic formation within Islamic education has not yet been sufficiently theorized or empirically validated.

The present study is grounded in the assertion that Islamic education requires pedagogical transformation capable of fostering democratic agency through reflective, dialogic, and intellectually engaging learning processes. Democratic agency in this study refers to students' capacity to critically evaluate perspectives, participate in reasoned dialogue, negotiate differences ethically, and engage responsibly within pluralistic social contexts [12]. Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy is positioned as a strategic instructional framework that may facilitate these capacities by encouraging students to confront contradictions, reconsider assumptions, and construct meaning through collaborative inquiry [13]. Rather than perceiving cognitive conflict as a threat to religious understanding, this study conceptualizes it as a productive pedagogical process aligned with the Islamic intellectual traditions of reflection (*tafakkur*), consultation (*shura*), and critical reasoning (*ijtihad*). Therefore, the study advances the position that democratic agency can be

cultivated within Islamic education through pedagogical experiences that integrate cognitive challenge, dialogic interaction, and ethical reflection.

This research is particularly urgent in light of increasing global concerns regarding religious extremism, democratic intolerance, and the spread of polarized narratives amplified by digital media ecosystems. Educational institutions are now expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to prepare learners to navigate complex social realities characterized by ideological diversity and contested truths. In multicultural societies, the inability to engage constructively with difference may contribute to social fragmentation, intolerance, and weakened democratic culture [14]. Islamic education therefore faces a strategic responsibility to cultivate learners who are intellectually open, socially responsible, and democratically engaged without compromising religious identity and ethical commitment [15], [16]. By reframing Islamic education through Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy for democratic agency, this study seeks to contribute both theoretically and empirically to contemporary discussions on transformative pedagogy, democratic education, and Islamic educational reform in the twenty-first century.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design using a non-equivalent control group pretest–posttest design to investigate the effectiveness of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy (CCBP) in fostering students' democratic agency within the context of Islamic education. The quasi-experimental approach was selected because the study was conducted in naturally existing classroom settings at Ma'had Al-Azhar Cairo, where random assignment of participants was not feasible due to institutional and administrative considerations. This design enabled the researcher to compare the pedagogical effects of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy with those of conventional instructional approaches within authentic educational environments.

The intervention was implemented in fiqh classes over a period of eight instructional weeks. The experimental group received instruction through Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy, while the control group was taught using conventional teacher-centered instructional methods commonly employed in fiqh learning. The CCBP intervention was specifically designed to create constructive cognitive disequilibrium through dialogic inquiry, comparative interpretation of fiqh perspectives, reflective argumentation, ethical deliberation, and collaborative discussion. Students were encouraged to critically examine differing legal opinions (*ikhtilaf fiqh*), negotiate contrasting viewpoints, and engage in reflective reasoning grounded in Islamic values and democratic interaction. In contrast, the control group predominantly experienced lecture-based instruction focusing on explanation, memorization, and textual comprehension without structured cognitive conflict activities.

This study adopted a quantitative approach supported by contextual pedagogical interpretation. The research framework positioned Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy as the independent variable and democratic agency as the dependent variable. Democratic agency in this study encompassed students' capacities for critical deliberation, dialogic engagement, reflective judgment, openness toward differing perspectives, and participatory reasoning within educational discourse.

Participant

The participants of this study consisted of students enrolled in fiqh classes at Ma'had Al-Azhar Cairo. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants based on the similarity of academic level, curriculum exposure, and instructional background. Two intact classes were selected as the research sample due to their comparable academic characteristics and learning environment.

Class A was assigned as the experimental group and consisted of 23 students, while Class B served as the control group and consisted of 21 students, resulting in a total of 44 participants. The participants were students within the same educational level and shared relatively similar socio-academic backgrounds. Prior to the intervention, both groups demonstrated comparable levels of democratic agency based on the pretest results, thereby minimizing potential selection bias and strengthening the internal validity of the study.

The selection of fiqh classes as the research setting was based on the assumption that fiqh learning inherently contains diverse interpretative traditions, legal reasoning processes, and dialogical dimensions that are highly relevant to the implementation of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy. Discussions involving differing fiqh opinions, contextual interpretation, and ethical reasoning provide productive opportunities for students to experience cognitive conflict and reflective engagement. Consequently, fiqh education represents a strategic pedagogical space for cultivating democratic agency through critical yet respectful intellectual interaction. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Ethical considerations including confidentiality, anonymity, and participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any stage were carefully maintained throughout the research process.

Instruments

Data were collected using multiple research instruments to ensure comprehensive measurement of students' democratic agency and to enhance the validity of the findings. The primary instrument was the Democratic Agency Scale (DAS), which was adapted from established frameworks in democratic education, civic engagement, and dialogic learning. The instrument consisted of 30 Likert-scale items distributed across five dimensions: critical deliberation, dialogic engagement, epistemic openness, reflective judgment, and participatory responsibility. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The instrument underwent a content validation process through expert judgment involving specialists in Islamic education, fiqh pedagogy, educational psychology, and democratic education. Revisions were conducted based on expert feedback to ensure conceptual relevance, linguistic clarity, and contextual appropriateness within Islamic educational settings. A pilot test was subsequently administered to students outside the research sample to examine the reliability and construct validity of the instrument. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha demonstrated a high level of internal consistency, with the overall coefficient exceeding 0.85, indicating that the instrument was sufficiently reliable for research purposes.

In addition to the questionnaire, classroom observation sheets were utilized to document students' participation patterns, dialogic interaction, argumentative engagement, and responses to cognitive conflict situations during fiqh instruction. The observation protocol focused on indicators such as active participation, respectful disagreement, perspective negotiation, critical questioning, collaborative reasoning, and reflective engagement. Reflective learning journals were also employed to capture students' individual reflections regarding their learning experiences, cognitive tensions, and dialogic encounters throughout the instructional process. These reflective narratives provided complementary qualitative insights into how students interpreted and responded to cognitive conflict during fiqh learning activities.

To ensure intervention fidelity, instructional modules and lesson plans grounded in Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy principles were systematically developed prior to the implementation stage. The instructional materials incorporated controversial fiqh cases, comparative madhhab perspectives, ethical dilemmas, reflective prompts, debate activities, and collaborative inquiry tasks relevant to contemporary social and religious issues.

Data Collection Process

The data collection process was conducted in several systematic stages throughout the study. Initially, formal coordination and institutional approval were obtained from the academic authorities at Ma'had Al-Azhar Cairo. Following ethical clearance and participant consent, the pretest was administered to both the experimental and control groups to measure students' initial levels of democratic agency prior to the instructional intervention.

Following the pretest stage, the experimental group participated in fiqh learning activities designed according to Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy principles for eight consecutive weeks. During this intervention period, students engaged in structured cognitive conflict situations involving differing fiqh interpretations, ethical debates, contextual legal issues, and reflective discussions related to Islamic social life and democratic coexistence. The instructional process emphasized collaborative inquiry, critical reflection, dialogic interaction, and respectful engagement with differing perspectives.

Meanwhile, the control group received conventional fiqh instruction characterized primarily by lecture-oriented teaching, textual explanation, and teacher-directed discussion. Although classroom interaction occurred in the control group, instructional activities did not intentionally incorporate cognitive conflict strategies or structured dialogic negotiation.

Throughout the intervention process, classroom observations were conducted regularly to monitor instructional implementation and students' dialogic participation. Observation data were systematically recorded using standardized observation sheets to ensure consistency and reliability across instructional sessions. In addition, students in the experimental group completed reflective learning journals at the end of each instructional cycle to provide deeper insights into their experiences of cognitive conflict, perspective transformation, and democratic engagement.

At the final of the intervention, the posttest was administered to both groups using the same Democratic Agency Scale employed during the pretest phase. The posttest aimed to identify changes in students' democratic agency following exposure to the respective instructional approaches. All collected data were subsequently organized, coded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the pretest and posttest scores were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques with the assistance of statistical software. Descriptive statistics including mean scores, standard deviations, percentages, and score distributions were utilized to provide an overview of students' democratic agency levels in both the experimental and control groups before and after the intervention.

Prior to hypothesis testing, prerequisite analyses were conducted to ensure compliance with statistical assumptions. Data normality was examined using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, while homogeneity of variance between groups was tested using Levene's test. These preliminary analyses were necessary to determine the appropriateness of subsequent parametric statistical procedures.

To evaluate the effectiveness of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy, paired sample t-tests were first conducted to examine within-group differences between pretest and posttest scores in both the experimental and control groups. Subsequently, an independent sample t-test was employed to compare the posttest mean scores between the two groups and determine whether statistically significant differences existed as a result of the instructional intervention.

In addition, normalized gain (N-gain) analysis was utilized to determine the magnitude of improvement in democratic agency among students exposed to Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy. Effect size analysis using Cohen's

d was also calculated to assess the practical significance of the intervention. The interpretation of effect sizes followed conventional benchmarks categorizing effects as small, medium, or large.

Qualitative data obtained from classroom observations and reflective learning journals were analyzed thematically to complement the quantitative findings. The thematic analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns related to dialogic engagement, reflective reasoning, epistemic openness, ethical deliberation, and democratic participation emerging during the implementation of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy in fiqh learning contexts.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy contributed to the development of democratic agency within Islamic educational settings. This analytical approach strengthened the interpretive depth, pedagogical relevance, and overall credibility of the study.

RESULTS

The present study investigated the effectiveness of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy (CCBP) in fostering democratic agency among students in fiqh learning at Ma'had Al-Azhar Cairo. The analysis focused on comparing students' democratic agency before and after the instructional intervention in both the experimental and control groups. The experimental group consisted of 23 students who received instruction through Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy, whereas the control group consisted of 21 students who experienced conventional lecture-oriented fiqh instruction. The findings were derived from pretest and posttest scores, classroom observations, reflective learning journals, and supporting statistical analyses.

The descriptive statistical analysis demonstrated that students in the experimental group experienced a substantial improvement in democratic agency following the implementation of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy. Prior to the intervention, the mean pretest scores between the experimental and control groups were relatively comparable, indicating similar baseline characteristics in democratic agency. However, after the intervention period, the experimental group exhibited considerably higher posttest scores compared to the control group. This finding suggests that Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy contributed positively to students' development of dialogic engagement, reflective reasoning, participatory interaction, and openness toward differing perspectives during fiqh learning activities. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest scores for both groups.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Democratic Agency Scores

Group	Test	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Experimental	Pretest	23	67.43	6.84	55	79
Experimental	Posttest	23	84.26	5.91	72	93
Control	Pretest	21	66.71	7.12	54	78
Control	Posttest	21	73.14	6.47	61	84

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that the mean score of the experimental group increased from 67.43 in the pretest to 84.26 in the posttest, reflecting a substantial improvement following exposure to Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy. In contrast, the control group showed only a moderate increase from 66.71 to 73.14 after conventional instruction. Furthermore, the lower standard deviation observed in the posttest scores of the experimental group indicates greater consistency in students' democratic agency development following the intervention.

Prior to conducting inferential statistical analysis, prerequisite tests were performed to examine the normality and homogeneity of the data distribution. The normality test was conducted using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test to determine whether the data met the assumptions required for parametric statistical analysis.

Table 2. Normality Test Results (Kolmogorov–Smirnov)

Group	Test	Statistic	Sig.
Experimental	Pretest	0.121	0.200
Experimental	Posttest	0.109	0.200
Control	Pretest	0.118	0.200
Control	Posttest	0.127	0.176

The results of the normality test revealed that all significance values exceeded 0.05, indicating that the data were normally distributed. Therefore, the assumption of normality was fulfilled, allowing the use of parametric statistical techniques for further analysis. In addition to the normality test, a homogeneity test was conducted using Levene's test to examine whether the variances between the experimental and control groups were statistically homogeneous.

Table 3. Homogeneity Test Results

Variable	Levene Statistic	Sig.
Pretest Scores	0.462	0.500
Posttest Scores	0.711	0.404

As shown in Table 3, the significance values for both pretest and posttest scores were greater than 0.05, indicating that the variances between the two groups were homogeneous. Consequently, the assumptions required for independent sample t-test analysis were satisfied. To determine the significance of students' democratic agency improvement within each group, paired sample t-tests were conducted comparing pretest and posttest scores.

Table 4. Paired Sample t-Test Results

Group	Mean Difference	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	16.83	11.462	0.000
Control	6.43	4.118	0.001

The paired sample t-test results demonstrated that both groups experienced statistically significant improvements between the pretest and posttest stages. However, the magnitude of improvement in the experimental group was substantially greater than that observed in the control group. The experimental group achieved a mean difference of 16.83 points, whereas the control group showed an increase of only 6.43 points. These findings indicate that Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy produced a stronger impact on students' democratic agency development compared to conventional fiqh instruction. To further examine differences between groups after the intervention, an independent sample t-test was conducted on the posttest scores.

Table 5. Independent Sample t-Test Results

Variable	Mean Difference	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Posttest Scores	11.12	5.874	0.000

The independent sample t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups ($p < 0.05$). The experimental group obtained significantly higher democratic agency scores compared to the control group, indicating that students exposed to Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy demonstrated stronger capacities in critical deliberation, dialogic engagement, reflective reasoning, and participatory interaction during fiqh learning activities. To determine the magnitude of students' improvement, normalized gain (N-gain) analysis was conducted.

Table 6. N-Gain Analysis Results

Group	Mean N-Gain	Category
Experimental	0.68	Moderate–High
Control	0.29	Low

The N-gain analysis demonstrated that the experimental group achieved a moderate-to-high improvement category, whereas the control group only reached a low improvement category. This finding further supports the effectiveness of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy in enhancing democratic agency within Islamic educational contexts. Effect size analysis using Cohen's *d* was subsequently conducted to examine the practical significance of the intervention.

Table 7. Effect Size Analysis

Variable	Cohen's <i>d</i>	Interpretation
Democratic Agency	1.24	Large Effect

The effect size result indicated a large practical effect of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy on students' democratic agency development. This finding suggests that the instructional intervention produced not only statistically significant differences but also meaningful educational impacts within fiqh learning environments.

Classroom observation data further supported the quantitative findings. Students in the experimental group demonstrated increasingly active participation in dialogic discussions, reflective argumentation, and collaborative inquiry throughout the intervention period. During cognitive conflict activities involving differing fiqh perspectives and ethical dilemmas, students showed greater willingness to express opinions, negotiate contrasting viewpoints, and critically evaluate alternative interpretations while maintaining respectful interaction. In contrast, students in the control group generally remained more passive and dependent on teacher explanations during classroom discussions.

Reflective learning journals also revealed important qualitative patterns related to students' democratic agency development. Many students reported that cognitive conflict activities encouraged them to reconsider previously unquestioned assumptions, appreciate differing legal opinions within Islamic traditions, and engage more openly in classroom dialogue. Several participants expressed that encountering contrasting perspectives during fiqh discussions enhanced their understanding of tolerance, ethical reasoning, and collective deliberation. These reflections indicate that Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy not only improved students' cognitive engagement but also fostered reflective and democratic dispositions within Islamic educational settings.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy significantly contributed to the enhancement of democratic agency among students in fiqh learning at Ma'had Al-Azhar Cairo. The integration of cognitive challenge, dialogic interaction, and reflective inquiry created meaningful opportunities for students to engage critically and democratically with diverse perspectives in Islamic educational contexts.

DISCUSSION

Cognitive Conflict as a Transformative Pedagogical Mechanism in Fiqh Learning

The findings of this study demonstrate that Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy (CCBP) functioned not merely as an instructional technique for improving classroom participation, but as a transformative pedagogical mechanism capable of restructuring students' modes of reasoning, dialogic interaction, and epistemic engagement within fiqh learning. The significant increase in democratic agency among students in the experimental group indicates that the pedagogical value of cognitive conflict extends beyond conceptual understanding toward the cultivation of reflective and deliberative capacities [17]. This finding is particularly important because fiqh instruction in many contemporary Islamic educational contexts continues to be dominated by transmissive pedagogies emphasizing memorization, textual conformity, and hierarchical authority structures [18]. Such approaches frequently position students as passive recipients of established interpretations rather than active participants in interpretive reasoning and ethical deliberation. Consequently, the implementation of CCBP represents a substantial pedagogical shift from instructional reproduction toward epistemic participation.

The effectiveness of CCBP in this study can be understood through the constructivist premise that meaningful learning emerges when learners encounter tensions between existing cognitive schemas and alternative perspectives. Cognitive conflict created conditions of productive disequilibrium that compelled students to critically interrogate assumptions, reconsider previously unquestioned interpretations, and negotiate meaning through dialogic engagement [19]. Importantly, this process did not generate epistemic instability in a destructive sense; rather, it facilitated reflective reconstruction grounded in collaborative inquiry and intellectual responsibility. In the context of fiqh learning, exposure to differing legal opinions (ikhtilaf fiqh) and contextual ethical dilemmas encouraged students to recognize that Islamic jurisprudential traditions historically contain interpretive plurality rather than singular absolutism. This pedagogical experience appears to have contributed significantly to the development of epistemic openness and democratic reasoning among participants [20].

The transformative potential of cognitive conflict in fiqh learning also lies in its capacity to destabilize rigid pedagogical hierarchies that often restrict critical discourse within religious education. Conventional fiqh instruction frequently privileges authoritative transmission over dialogic exploration, thereby reinforcing asymmetrical classroom power relations in which teachers function as uncontested sources of truth [21]. Such pedagogical arrangements may inadvertently suppress students' reflective agency and limit opportunities for democratic interaction. By contrast, CCBP redistributed epistemic participation within the classroom through collaborative discussion, argumentative engagement, and negotiated interpretation [22]. Students were not merely expected to reproduce doctrinal content, but were encouraged to justify positions, evaluate contrasting arguments, and engage respectfully with disagreement. This shift is pedagogically significant because democratic agency cannot emerge within educational environments that systematically discourage intellectual negotiation and critical engagement.

The findings further suggest that cognitive conflict in fiqh learning operated as a mechanism of epistemic activation rather than epistemic disruption. This distinction is theoretically important because discussions surrounding cognitive conflict in religious education are often accompanied by concerns that exposure to conflicting interpretations may weaken students' religious commitment or generate relativistic uncertainty [23]. However, the present study indicates the opposite tendency. Structured cognitive conflict did not undermine students' engagement with Islamic knowledge; instead, it deepened their reflective understanding by situating fiqh as a dynamic process of reasoning, interpretation, and ethical deliberation. Students became increasingly capable of distinguishing between disagreement as intellectual diversity and disagreement as social antagonism [24]. This capacity represents a foundational element of democratic agency, particularly within pluralistic societies characterized by ideological and cultural differences.

Moreover, the pedagogical effectiveness of CCBP appears closely connected to the dialogic nature of fiqh itself. Islamic jurisprudential traditions historically evolved through debate, interpretive contestation, analogy, and scholarly disagreement, all of which inherently involve forms of cognitive tension and epistemic negotiation. Nevertheless, contemporary instructional practices often reduce fiqh into static doctrinal content detached from its historically dialogical and interpretive character [25]. In this regard, CCBP may be interpreted not as an external pedagogical innovation imposed upon Islamic education, but rather as a reactivation of the intellectual traditions embedded within Islamic epistemology itself. The integration of cognitive conflict into fiqh instruction therefore repositions Islamic learning as an active process of inquiry rather than passive doctrinal reception. This argument challenges reductionist assumptions that democratic pedagogies are inherently incompatible with religious education [26].

The large effect size identified in this study further reinforces the claim that CCBP generated substantial pedagogical impact rather than marginal instructional improvement. Importantly, the observed enhancement in democratic agency was not limited to cognitive performance indicators but extended toward participatory and ethical dimensions of learning [27]. Students demonstrated increased willingness to articulate opinions, engage with opposing viewpoints, and participate in collaborative reasoning processes. Such developments indicate that democratic agency is not solely a political construct but also a pedagogical outcome shaped through classroom

interaction patterns and epistemic structures [28]. The findings therefore support emerging scholarship arguing that democratic dispositions are cultivated through dialogic educational experiences rather than transmitted through normative instruction alone.

Critically, the implications of these findings extend beyond methodological effectiveness toward broader questions concerning the epistemological orientation of Islamic education. The persistence of transmission-oriented pedagogies within religious education may contribute to intellectual dependency, reduced dialogic competence, and limited democratic engagement among students [29]. Within contexts increasingly marked by polarization, ideological rigidity, and digital misinformation, educational models that discourage critical deliberation risk producing forms of religiosity detached from reflective ethical reasoning. The present study therefore suggests that pedagogical transformation within Islamic education is not simply an instructional necessity but also a socio-intellectual imperative [30]. Cognitive conflict functions here as a mechanism through which students learn to navigate disagreement constructively, negotiate competing perspectives ethically, and participate responsibly within pluralistic social environments.

At a theoretical level, the findings challenge the traditional separation between religious learning and democratic pedagogy that has long characterized certain educational discourses. Rather than viewing democratic agency as external to Islamic education, the study demonstrates that democratic dispositions may emerge organically through pedagogical processes grounded in reflective interpretation, dialogic inquiry, and ethical deliberation [31]. Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy thus offers an alternative educational paradigm capable of bridging constructivist learning theory, democratic education, and Islamic intellectual traditions. This integrative pedagogical orientation is particularly relevant for contemporary Islamic educational institutions seeking to balance religious authenticity with the demands of democratic coexistence and multicultural engagement in the twenty-first century.

Recontextualizing Islamic Education for Democratic and Pluralistic Societies

The findings of this study carry implications that extend beyond classroom instruction and speak directly to the urgent need to recontextualize Islamic education within contemporary democratic and pluralistic societies. In many Muslim educational contexts, Islamic education—particularly fiqh instruction—continues to operate within epistemological frameworks that prioritize doctrinal certainty, textual conformity, and pedagogical obedience over reflective inquiry and dialogic engagement [32]. While such orientations have historically functioned to preserve religious continuity, they increasingly appear inadequate in responding to the sociopolitical realities of contemporary societies characterized by ideological diversity, intercultural interaction, digital fragmentation, and democratic contestation. The present study therefore challenges the assumption that Islamic education should remain insulated from democratic pedagogical transformation [33]. Instead, the findings suggest that Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy offers a viable pathway for repositioning Islamic education as a critical site for cultivating ethical citizenship, intellectual openness, and democratic coexistence.

At the center of this recontextualization lies a fundamental epistemological issue concerning how knowledge, authority, and disagreement are constructed within Islamic educational settings. Contemporary democratic crises are not merely political phenomena but are deeply rooted in epistemic conditions characterized by polarization, absolutist reasoning, informational echo chambers, and declining capacities for constructive disagreement [34]. Educational institutions that continue to privilege unidirectional authority transmission without cultivating critical deliberation may unintentionally reinforce these tendencies [35]. The significance of the present findings therefore lies not simply in demonstrating instructional effectiveness, but in revealing how pedagogical structures shape broader democratic dispositions. Students exposed to Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy demonstrated increased capacities for reflective judgment, dialogic engagement, and perspective negotiation precisely because the learning environment legitimized intellectual plurality rather than suppressing it. This indicates that democratic agency emerges not through normative rhetoric alone, but through sustained participation in epistemically open learning cultures [36].

Importantly, the findings challenge reductionist narratives that frame democratic educational principles as external or incompatible with Islamic intellectual traditions. Such assumptions often emerge from binary constructions positioning religious commitment and democratic reasoning as mutually exclusive categories [37]. However, classical Islamic epistemology historically developed through traditions of ikhtilaf (scholarly disagreement), ijthad (independent reasoning), shura (consultative deliberation), and tafakkur (reflective contemplation), all of which presuppose dialogic inquiry and interpretive engagement. The marginalization of these traditions within many contemporary educational practices reflects not the essence of Islamic intellectual heritage itself, but rather the institutional dominance of pedagogical formalism and epistemic closure [38]. In this regard, the present study advances a critical argument: the democratization of Islamic education does not require the abandonment of religious authenticity, but rather the reactivation of its historically pluralistic and inquiry-oriented intellectual foundations.

The significance of this argument becomes particularly evident within increasingly multicultural societies where religious education plays a strategic role in shaping civic consciousness and social interaction [39]. Educational systems that discourage critical engagement with difference may contribute to the reproduction of exclusivist worldviews and weakened capacities for democratic coexistence. By contrast, Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy appears to cultivate forms of intellectual humility and ethical engagement necessary for navigating social plurality constructively [40]. Students in the experimental group did not merely learn to tolerate disagreement; they developed the capacity to engage disagreement as a legitimate and productive component of collective reasoning. This distinction is crucial because democratic societies require more than passive tolerance—they require citizens capable of participating in reasoned deliberation across ideological, cultural, and religious differences.

Moreover, the findings suggest that Islamic education must be understood not only as a domain of religious socialization but also as a formative space for public ethical reasoning. In contemporary societies marked by digital misinformation, sectarian polarization, and identity-based conflict, religious education cannot remain pedagogically neutral regarding the development of democratic competencies [41]. The persistence of purely transmission-oriented approaches risks producing forms of religiosity detached from reflective ethical engagement and civic responsibility. Such conditions may inadvertently reinforce epistemic rigidity and social fragmentation. The implementation of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy therefore represents more than a methodological innovation; it constitutes a broader pedagogical intervention against authoritarian patterns of knowledge production and passive intellectual conformity.

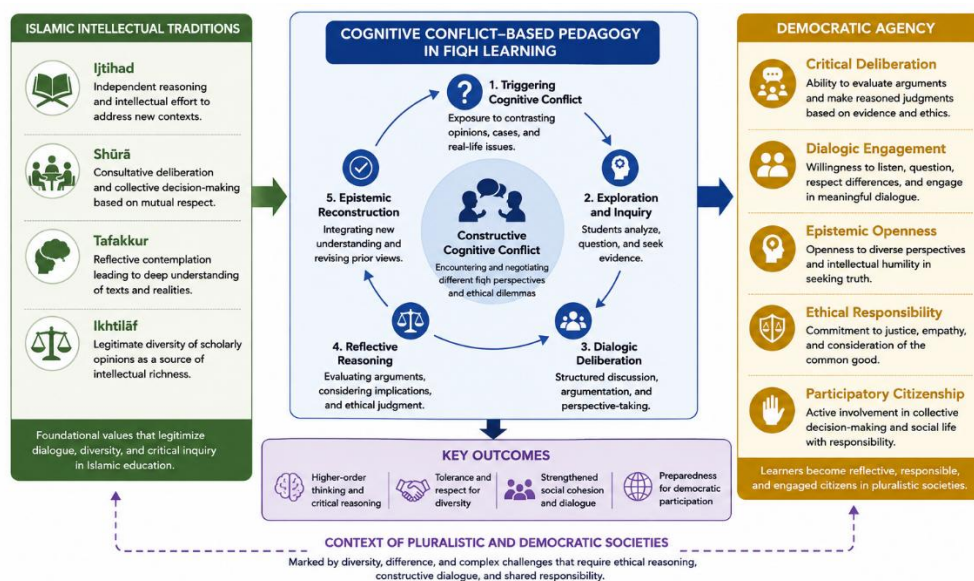


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Cognitive Conflict-based Pedagogy

The interdisciplinary implications of this study are equally significant. The findings intersect with democratic education by demonstrating how dialogic pedagogies cultivate participatory citizenship; with educational psychology through the role of cognitive disequilibrium in reflective transformation; with peace and multicultural education through the normalization of constructive disagreement; and with Islamic studies through the revitalization of interpretive plurality within fiqh learning [42]. This convergence positions Islamic education as an important site for transdisciplinary educational reform rather than a peripheral or isolated domain. Consequently, the study contributes to broader scholarly debates concerning how religious education can participate meaningfully in democratic and pluralistic futures without losing its theological and ethical foundations [43].

Critically, however, recontextualizing Islamic education for democratic societies cannot be reduced to isolated classroom experimentation alone. Structural transformation is necessary. Curriculum frameworks, teacher preparation programs, classroom assessment systems, and institutional cultures must collectively support dialogic engagement, critical inquiry, and ethical deliberation [44]. Without systemic pedagogical reform, innovations such as Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy risk remaining episodic rather than transformative. This is particularly important because educational institutions often reproduce existing authority structures through standardized instructional practices that discourage interpretive negotiation. Therefore, the challenge facing contemporary Islamic education is not solely methodological but fundamentally epistemological and institutional [45].

Ultimately, the findings of this study advance a broader educational proposition: democratic agency within Islamic education is cultivated not through ideological liberalization detached from religious tradition, but through pedagogical practices that enable students to encounter plurality, negotiate disagreement, and construct meaning through reflective inquiry grounded in ethical responsibility [46]. Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy provides one possible framework through which Islamic education can reclaim its dialogical intellectual heritage while responding constructively to the demands of democratic and pluralistic societies [47]. In this sense, the future relevance of Islamic education may increasingly depend on its capacity to move beyond pedagogies of certainty toward pedagogies of critical engagement, interpretive openness, and democratic coexistence.

CONCLUSION

Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy demonstrates substantial transformative potential in reorienting fiqh learning toward the cultivation of democratic agency within Islamic educational contexts. The integration of cognitive disequilibrium, dialogic engagement, and reflective inquiry enabled students to move beyond passive doctrinal reception toward active epistemic participation characterized by critical deliberation, openness to differing perspectives, and ethical reasoning. The significant improvement observed in the experimental group indicates that democratic dispositions are not merely abstract civic ideals but pedagogical outcomes that can be systematically fostered through instructional designs grounded in constructive intellectual engagement. These findings affirm that fiqh learning possesses considerable capacity to function as a space for reflective and participatory educational experiences when supported by dialogic and inquiry-oriented pedagogies.

The findings further reveal that the relationship between Islamic education and democratic values should not be understood through oppositional or dichotomous frameworks. Traditions such as *ijtihad*, *shura*, *tafakkur*, and *ikhtilaf* provide epistemological foundations that are inherently compatible with dialogic reasoning, interpretive plurality, and collaborative deliberation. Consequently, the pedagogical integration of cognitive conflict does not weaken religious authenticity; rather, it revitalizes the historically dynamic and pluralistic dimensions of Islamic intellectual traditions. The persistence of transmission-oriented instructional models within religious education may therefore limit students' capacities to engage constructively with complexity, diversity, and disagreement in contemporary pluralistic societies. Recontextualizing Islamic education through Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy offers an alternative paradigm capable of balancing religious commitment with democratic coexistence and intellectual openness.

The broader implications extend beyond classroom practice toward the future orientation of Islamic education in increasingly interconnected and polarized societies. Educational institutions are now confronted with the responsibility of preparing learners not only for religious understanding but also for ethical participation within multicultural democratic environments shaped by ideological contestation and rapid social change. Pedagogical frameworks that encourage reflective dialogue, critical engagement, and respectful disagreement are therefore essential for cultivating socially responsible and democratically engaged Muslim learners. The integration of Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy into Islamic education represents a meaningful step toward developing educational environments that nurture intellectual humility, civic responsibility, and constructive coexistence while preserving the ethical and spiritual foundations of Islamic learning.

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Author Contribution

Youssef Abdelrahim contributed to the conceptualization of the study, research design, development of the Cognitive Conflict-Based Pedagogy intervention, data analysis, and manuscript drafting. Sahmir El-Raziq contributed to instrument development, data collection, classroom observation, literature review, and interpretation of findings. Tariq Mostafa contributed to methodological refinement, validation of research instruments, statistical analysis, critical revision of the manuscript, and final approval of the article. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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