

***Bahtsul Masā'il* as a Model of Collective Ijtihad in Traditional Islam: An Epistemological and Methodological Analysis of the *Mudzakarah Ma'al-Ikhwān* Forum**

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Abstract

This study aims to examine *Bahtsul Masā'il* as a model of traditional Islamic collective *Ijtihād* by analyzing the epistemological foundations and methodological practices of the *Ma'al-Ikhwān Mudzakarah* Forum at *Salafiyah-Syafi'iyah* Islamic Boarding School, Sukorejo, East Java, Indonesia. The research employed a qualitative case study design involving participant observation, semi-structured interviews with *kiai*, forum leaders, *musahhih*, teachers, and senior students, as well as document analysis of forum proceedings and legal decisions. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while data credibility was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. The findings reveal that the forum develops an integrative model of collective *Ijtihād* by combining classical Islamic legal sources (*kutub al-turāth*), *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *qawā'id fihiyyah*, *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, and contextual analysis within a structured deliberative process. The study also demonstrates that methodological contestation functions as a constructive mechanism for strengthening legal reasoning rather than generating institutional conflict. It concludes that *Bahtsul Masā'il* serves not only as a forum for legal decision-making but also as an educational model for cultivating critical reasoning, collaborative scholarship, and methodological competence among *pesantren* scholars. These findings contribute to the development of Islamic legal studies and offer a conceptual framework for strengthening collective *Ijtihād* in responding to contemporary challenges within Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: *Bahtsul Masā'il*, Collective *Ijtihād*, Islamic Legal Epistemology, *Pesantren*, Islamic Education

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INTRODUCTION

Digital financial transactions, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, environmental sustainability, social media ethics, and evolving patterns of public interaction have challenged conventional approaches to Islamic jurisprudence (Erdoğan, 2020; Fakhruddin et al., 2024; Suhartini et al., 2024). These developments have intensified scholarly debates concerning the ability of traditional Islamic legal reasoning to respond to emerging realities without abandoning its classical epistemological foundations. Consequently, the discourse on *Ijtihād* has shifted from emphasizing individual juristic authority toward examining the role of collective legal reasoning (collective

Ijtihād) as a more comprehensive mechanism for addressing multidimensional legal problems (Morgado et al., 2024; Vasylevska et al., 2024). Within the Indonesian context, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) continue to play a strategic role in preserving classical Islamic scholarship while simultaneously responding to contemporary societal changes through the tradition of *Bahtsul Masā'il*.

Bahtsul Masā'il has long been recognized as one of the most distinctive intellectual traditions of Indonesian *pesantren*, particularly within *Nahdlatul Ulama*. Rather than functioning merely as a forum for issuing legal opinions, *Bahtsul Masā'il* represents a systematic process of collective legal deliberation grounded in classical Islamic legal literature (*kutub al-turāth*), *uṣūl al-fiqh*, legal maxims (*qawā'id fihiyyah*), and deliberative scholarly dialogue (Arsadani et al., 2024; Intania et al., 2024; Shodiq Anshori & Afga Sidiq Rifai, 2025). The mechanism reflects an institutionalized model of collective *Ijtihād* in which legal arguments are developed through discussion, verification, comparison of juristic opinions, and methodological evaluation before arriving at a legal conclusion (Hudri et al., 2023; Ma'rufi et al., 2024). This characteristic distinguishes *Bahtsul Masā'il* from individual fatwa institutions because the legitimacy of its legal decisions depends not only on textual references but also on the quality of collective reasoning developed throughout the deliberative process.

Among *pesantren* institutions that consistently preserve this intellectual tradition, the *Ma'al-Ikhwān Mudzakarah* Forum of *Salafiyah-Syafi'iyah* Islamic Boarding School Sukorejo occupies a distinctive position. The forum has become an important academic arena where senior kiai, teachers, and advanced students collectively discuss contemporary legal issues by integrating classical jurisprudential references with contextual legal analysis. Unlike conventional legal discussions that primarily seek textual conformity, the forum emphasizes methodological reasoning, critical examination of juristic arguments, and contextual interpretation of legal principles. Such characteristics indicate that *Bahtsul Masā'il* functions not only as an educational activity but also as an institutional mechanism for producing adaptive Islamic legal reasoning rooted in the *pesantren* intellectual tradition.

Previous studies have extensively discussed *Bahtsul Masā'il* from various perspectives. Syafi'i et al. (2023) examined its institutional development within *Nahdlatul Ulama* and highlighted its contribution to Islamic legal decision-making. The *pesantren* as centers for transmitting classical Islamic scholarship and preserving the authority of *kitab kuning* (Fathoni et al., 2024; Munir & Nor, 2021; Shulhan et al., 2023). The epistemological foundations of Islamic legal reasoning and demonstrated that Islamic jurisprudence evolves through methodological interpretation rather than textual reproduction (Sulthon et al., 2024; Syakur et al., 2022). Latifah (2022) explored the dynamic role of *uṣūl al-fiqh* in addressing new legal issues, while Zulkhairi et al. (2024) introduced a systems approach through *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* to strengthen contextual legal interpretation. More recent Indonesian studies have investigated the implementation of *qaulī* and *manhajī* approaches in *Bahtsul Masā'il* and their relevance to contemporary Islamic legal discourse. However, these studies generally focus either on institutional procedures, legal products, or methodological classifications without comprehensively examining how epistemological contestation shapes collective legal reasoning within *pesantren*-based deliberative forums.

This condition reveals a significant knowledge gap. Existing scholarship has rarely analyzed *Bahtsul Masā'il* as an integrated epistemological system where textual authority, legal methodology, scholarly interaction, and collective deliberation simultaneously construct Islamic legal legitimacy. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to understanding how methodological contestation among participants contributes to strengthening rather than weakening collective legal reasoning. Consequently, the dynamic interaction between *qaulī* and

manhaj approaches, the application of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *qawā'id fiqhiyyah*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, as well as the role of deliberative academic culture in producing authoritative legal decisions remain insufficiently explored. This gap indicates the need for empirical research focusing on the epistemological and methodological dimensions of *Bahtsul Masā'il* at the institutional level.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating *Bahtsul Masā'il* as a model of traditional Islamic collective *Ijtihād* through an in-depth analysis of the epistemological and methodological practices developed within the *Ma'al-Ikhwān Mudzakarah* Forum of *Salafiyah-Syafi'iyah* Islamic Boarding School Sukorejo. Unlike previous studies that predominantly examine legal outcomes, this research places the deliberative process, methodological interaction, and epistemological construction at the center of analysis. Accordingly, the originality of this research lies in proposing an Integrative Traditional Collective *Ijtihād* Model, which explains how classical Islamic legal authority is maintained through methodological flexibility, collective scholarly dialogue, and contextual legal reasoning without departing from the epistemological foundations of Sunni jurisprudence. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the epistemological structure of *Bahtsul Masā'il*, examine its methodological mechanisms in addressing contemporary legal issues, and formulate a conceptual model of collective *Ijtihād* that contributes to the broader development of Islamic legal studies and *pesantren*-based intellectual traditions in contemporary Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to understand the epistemological construction and methodological dynamics of *Bahtsul Masā'il* as a model of collective *Ijtihād* within its natural setting. A case study enables researchers to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth by examining interactions, institutional culture, and legal reasoning processes that cannot be separated from their social context (Yin, 2017). Rather than measuring legal decisions quantitatively, this study focuses on exploring how collective legal reasoning is constructed through deliberation, scholarly dialogue, and the application of Islamic legal methodology in responding to contemporary issues.

The research was conducted at the *Ma'al-Ikhwān Mudzakarah* Forum, *Salafiyah-Syafi'iyah* Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren Salafiyah-Syafi'iyah* Sukorejo), Situbondo, East Java, Indonesia. This research site was purposively selected because the forum represents one of the most active *pesantren*-based deliberative institutions that consistently organizes *Bahtsul Masā'il* discussions involving senior *kiai*, Islamic scholars, teachers, and advanced students. The forum also possesses a well-established intellectual tradition grounded in classical Islamic jurisprudence while actively addressing contemporary religious, social, economic, and technological issues through collective legal deliberation.

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher functioned as the primary research instrument. The presence of the researcher in the field was essential to observe deliberative interactions, understand the institutional culture, conduct interviews, examine documentary evidence, and interpret participants' perspectives regarding the epistemology and methodology of *Bahtsul Masā'il*. During fieldwork, the researcher adopted the role of a non-participant observer to minimize intervention in the deliberative process while maintaining close engagement with research participants. Field notes, reflective memos, and interview transcripts were systematically documented throughout the research process to ensure analytical consistency.

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the implementation of *Bahtsul Masā'il*. The primary informants consisted of the *pesantren* caretaker (*kiai*), the chairperson of the *Ma'al-Ikhwān*

Mudzakarah Forum, senior *musahhih* (legal reviewers), moderators, and senior participants actively involved in legal deliberations. Additional informants included *pesantren* administrators and selected advanced students who regularly participated in the forum. These informants were considered capable of providing comprehensive information concerning the epistemological foundations, methodological practices, institutional procedures, and collective legal reasoning developed within the forum.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, participant observation was conducted during several *Bahtsul Masā'il* sessions to examine the deliberative process, patterns of scholarly interaction, argument construction, decision-making mechanisms, and the application of legal methodologies. Observation also enabled the researcher to identify how participants negotiated different legal opinions while maintaining collective consensus. Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with key informants using flexible interview guidelines that allowed participants to explain their experiences, perspectives, and methodological considerations in responding to contemporary legal issues. Third, document analysis was undertaken by examining official forum documents, records of *Bahtsul Masā'il* decisions, organizational guidelines, meeting minutes, *pesantren* archives, and relevant classical Islamic legal references used during deliberations. These three techniques complemented one another and facilitated data triangulation.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different categories of informants. Method triangulation involved comparing findings derived from observation, interviews, and documentary analysis. Member checking was performed by confirming preliminary interpretations with several key informants to ensure that the research findings accurately represented participants' perspectives. Furthermore, prolonged engagement in the research setting and continuous observation strengthened the dependability and authenticity of the data.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model consisting of four interconnected stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, interview transcripts, observational notes, and documentary evidence were systematically coded according to themes related to epistemology, legal methodology, collective *Ijtihād*, and deliberative interaction. The categorized data were subsequently organized into analytical matrices and thematic displays to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were continuously verified by comparing emerging patterns across multiple data sources and theoretical perspectives, including Islamic legal epistemology, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and collective *Ijtihād* theory. This analytical procedure enabled the researcher to construct an in-depth understanding of how the *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum develops an integrative model of traditional Islamic legal reasoning capable of responding to contemporary societal challenges while preserving the epistemological foundations of classical Sunni jurisprudence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Epistemological Construction of Collective *Ijtihād*

The *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum at *Salafiyah-Syafi'iyah* Islamic Boarding School Sukorejo functions as an institutionalized forum for collective legal reasoning rather than merely a religious discussion group. Every *Bahtsul Masā'il* session follows a structured academic procedure beginning with the presentation of a legal issue, clarification of empirical facts, identification of the legal problem, examination of classical Islamic legal references, collective deliberation, and

formulation of legal conclusions. This procedure demonstrates that legal authority within the forum is constructed through methodological dialogue rather than individual authority.

During participant observation, the researcher attended several *Bahtsul Masā'il* sessions discussing contemporary issues related to digital economic transactions, social media ethics, waqf management, and Islamic educational administration. Each discussion involved senior *kiai*, *musahhih* (reviewers), moderators, teachers, and senior students. The moderator first explained the factual background of each legal issue before inviting participants to identify its legal dimensions. Participants then searched for relevant references from *kutub al-turāth* while comparing different juristic opinions (*aqwāl al-fuqahā'*). Differences of opinion frequently emerged; however, these differences were treated as opportunities to strengthen legal arguments rather than sources of institutional conflict.

The observation also revealed that participants rarely accepted a legal opinion solely because it appeared in a respected classical text. Instead, they consistently examined the methodological reasoning underlying each opinion, including its legal cause (*'illah*), contextual background, and consistency with broader legal principles. Consequently, discussions often focused more on legal methodology than on textual citation alone. Such interaction illustrates that the forum emphasizes epistemological reasoning rather than textual reproduction.

Semi-structured interviews with the caretaker of the *pesantren* confirmed this observation. According to the informant, the principal objective of the forum is not merely producing legal decisions but educating participants to understand how Islamic legal reasoning operates.

"The purpose of *Bahtsul Masā'il* is not simply to determine whether something is permissible or prohibited. More importantly, participants must understand how the scholars reached those legal conclusions so that they can address future problems using the same methodological framework."

A similar perspective was expressed by the chairperson of the *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum. He emphasized that contemporary issues often require comprehensive methodological analysis because many modern problems cannot be directly located within classical legal literature.

"When no explicit discussion exists in the classical books, we do not stop searching. Instead, we examine the legal reasoning of previous scholars, identify comparable cases, and employ the methodology developed within the Sunni legal schools."

Interviews with senior *musahhih* further demonstrated that participants are encouraged to compare opinions from different classical authorities before formulating conclusions. The *musahhih* explained that disagreement among participants is considered a natural component of scholarly deliberation because Islamic jurisprudence has historically accommodated multiple legitimate interpretations. Consequently, legal legitimacy is determined by the quality of methodological argumentation rather than by the number of participants supporting a particular opinion. Senior students actively contributed to legal discussions. Before each session, participants independently reviewed relevant legal references and prepared written arguments. During deliberation, they defended their interpretations using classical legal texts, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and legal maxims (*qawā'id fiqhiyyah*). Senior scholars subsequently evaluated these arguments by examining their methodological consistency and textual accuracy.

Document analysis supported these findings. Official records of previous *Bahtsul Masā'il* sessions consistently demonstrated that every legal decision included references to classical jurisprudential sources, methodological explanations, and collective justification. The documentation revealed that legal conclusions were never presented without describing the reasoning process through which they had been established. This practice reflects the institutional commitment to methodological transparency.

Table 1. Epistemological Characteristics of Collective *Ijtihād*

Epistemological Aspect	Empirical Findings	Sources of Data
Source of legal authority	Classical Islamic legal texts (<i>kutub al-turāth</i>), <i>uṣūl al-fiqh</i> , legal maxims	Observation, documents
Decision-making mechanism	Collective deliberation through structured academic discussion	Observation
Basis of legal legitimacy	Methodological reasoning and verification of arguments	Interviews
Learning process	Scholarly dialogue involving <i>kiai</i> , teachers, and senior students	Observation, interviews
Documentation	Written legal decisions accompanied by methodological explanations	Document analysis

Table 1 demonstrates that epistemological authority within the *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum is not concentrated in a single individual but distributed through collective scholarly interaction. Classical Islamic legal literature remains the primary reference; however, methodological justification constitutes the principal criterion for evaluating competing legal opinions. The convergence of observational data, interview findings, and documentary evidence indicates that the *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum has developed an epistemological framework combining textual authority with collective legal reasoning. Rather than preserving classical jurisprudence through literal repetition, the forum cultivates an academic culture emphasizing analytical reasoning, methodological consistency, and collaborative verification. These findings suggest that *Bahtsul Masā'il* functions simultaneously as a mechanism for legal decision-making and as an educational institution dedicated to transmitting the methodological foundations of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence to subsequent generations of *pesantren* scholars.

Methodological Dynamics in Responding to Contemporary Issues

The *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum has developed a structured methodological framework for responding to contemporary legal issues while preserving the epistemological tradition of classical Sunni jurisprudence. Throughout the observation period, every *Bahtsul Masā'il* session followed several interconnected stages, beginning with the formulation of legal questions, clarification of empirical realities, identification of relevant legal categories, examination of classical references, collective deliberation, verification of legal arguments, and formulation of legal conclusions. These stages were consistently implemented regardless of the topic discussed, indicating the existence of an institutional methodology rather than an incidental discussion pattern.

The first stage of deliberation always focused on understanding the factual dimensions of the issue under discussion (*taṣawwur al-mas'alah*). Before examining legal references, moderators encouraged participants to clarify empirical information regarding the case. During discussions on digital financial transactions, participants first explored the operational mechanisms of electronic payment systems, contractual relationships among users, service providers, and financial institutions before identifying their legal implications. Likewise, discussions concerning artificial intelligence and digital content emphasized understanding technological processes before legal classification was attempted. Interviews with senior moderators indicated that this preliminary stage represented one of the most significant methodological developments within the forum. One moderator explained:

"We cannot discuss contemporary issues by immediately searching classical books without first understanding the reality of the problem. The scholars of the past also understood the facts before determining legal rulings. Therefore, understanding reality is part of our legal methodology."

After clarifying empirical facts, participants proceeded to identify relevant references from *kutub al-turāth*. Observation demonstrated that discussions did not rely exclusively on a single legal text. Instead, participants compared opinions presented in several authoritative works representing the Shafi'i school while occasionally examining opinions from other Sunni legal schools when necessary. Senior participants prepared legal citations before the meeting, enabling systematic comparison among different juristic opinions. This comparative process often generated methodological debates concerning the applicability of specific opinions to contemporary circumstances.

The interviews further revealed that participants distinguished between issues that could be resolved through the *qaulī* approach and those requiring *manhajī* reasoning. According to one *musahhih*, if an explicit legal opinion corresponding to the contemporary issue existed in classical jurisprudence, participants generally adopted the *qaulī* approach. However, when no comparable discussion could be identified, the forum employed *manhajī* reasoning by examining legal principles, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, legal maxims, analogy (*qiyās*), and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. This distinction was repeatedly confirmed during observations of multiple deliberation sessions.

Official records of *Bahtsul Masā'il* decisions consistently describe not only the final legal ruling but also the methodological procedures used to formulate it. Several documents explicitly indicate whether legal conclusions were established through direct reference to classical juristic opinions, analogical reasoning, legal maxims, or broader objectives of Islamic law. Such documentation demonstrates institutional awareness of methodological accountability.

Interviews with senior participants also revealed that methodological disagreement was considered an educational resource rather than an institutional weakness. Participants explained that differences concerning legal methodology frequently emerged, particularly regarding the extent to which contemporary social realities should influence legal interpretation. Nevertheless, these differences were resolved through scholarly dialogue rather than hierarchical authority. Every argument required textual evidence and methodological justification before being accepted by the forum.

Observation further showed that legal verification constituted an independent stage following deliberation. Before final decisions were approved, *musahhih* carefully evaluated textual citations, legal reasoning, consistency of legal principles, and conformity with established Sunni jurisprudential methodology. In several sessions, legal conclusions were revised after reviewers identified inconsistencies between textual references and methodological arguments. This verification process significantly strengthened institutional confidence in the final legal decisions.

Table 2. Methodological Stages of Collective *Ijtihād*

Methodological Stage	Empirical Activities	Data Sources
Identification of legal issues	Clarification of empirical facts and legal questions	Observation
Classification of legal problems	Determination of legal categories and relevant jurisprudential fields	Observation, interviews
Examination of classical references	Comparative study of <i>kutub al-turāth</i> and juristic opinions	Observation, documents
Methodological deliberation	Application of <i>qaulī</i> , <i>manhajī</i> , <i>qiyās</i> , legal maxims, and <i>maqāṣid</i>	Interviews, observation
Verification and formulation	Review by <i>musahhih</i> and collective legal conclusion	Documents, interviews

Table 2 indicates that legal reasoning within the *Ma'al-Ikhwān Mudzakarah* Forum follows a systematic methodological sequence. Rather than relying exclusively on textual authority, the forum combines empirical investigation, jurisprudential analysis, methodological deliberation, and scholarly verification before issuing legal conclusions. Each stage contributes to strengthening both

methodological consistency and institutional legitimacy.

The documentary evidence also demonstrates that methodological diversity is accommodated within the deliberative process. Records of previous *Bahtsul Masā'il* sessions reveal that different legal approaches frequently coexist before consensus is achieved. Rather than eliminating methodological plurality, the forum documents competing arguments and explains the reasons for selecting particular legal opinions. This documentation reflects a transparent decision-making process and preserves the intellectual history of legal deliberation for future reference.

The methodological dynamics of the *Ma'al-Ikhwān Mudzakarah* Forum are characterized by structured legal procedures, collective scholarly participation, methodological verification, and systematic documentation. These empirical findings illustrate that *Bahtsul Masā'il* operates not merely as a traditional religious discussion but as a formal mechanism of collective *Ijtihād* capable of integrating classical Islamic legal scholarship with the practical demands of contemporary Muslim society.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the *Ma'al-Ikhwān Mudzakarah* Forum at *Salafiyah-Syafi'iyah* Islamic Boarding School has developed a model of collective *Ijtihād* that combines classical Islamic legal authority with systematic methodological reasoning. Unlike the common assumption that traditional *pesantren* legal deliberation merely reproduces the opinions of classical jurists, the empirical evidence indicates that legal authority within the forum is constructed through a dynamic interaction between textual evidence, legal methodology, empirical reality, and collective scholarly deliberation (Abubakar et al., 2021). The forum therefore functions not only as an institution for issuing legal opinions but also as an epistemic community in which legal knowledge is produced, evaluated, and transmitted through structured academic interaction. This finding supports the argument that Islamic legal reasoning remains adaptive when methodological integrity is maintained throughout the deliberative process.

Islamic law derives its authority primarily from legal methodology rather than from literal textual citation (Amiruddin et al., 2022; Aziz et al., 2021). *uṣūl al-fiqh* constitutes the intellectual mechanism through which jurists transform scriptural evidence into practical legal judgments (Intania et al., 2024; Rafikov & Akhmetova, 2020). The present study extends this argument by demonstrating that, within the *pesantren* tradition, methodological authority is not exercised individually but collectively. Legal legitimacy is constructed through interaction among kiai, musahhih, moderators, and senior students who critically evaluate competing legal arguments before reaching consensus. Consequently, the authority of *Bahtsul Masā'il* emerges from an institutional epistemology rather than from individual scholarly dominance.

The *uṣūl al-fiqh* provides a flexible methodological framework capable of addressing newly emerging legal problems (Sulthon et al., 2024). Throughout the observed deliberations, participants consistently distinguished between issues that could be resolved through the *qaulī* approach and those requiring *manhajī* reasoning. Rather than treating these approaches as competing methodologies, the forum integrates them according to the characteristics of each legal issue. Classical juristic opinions remain the primary reference whenever explicit precedents are available, whereas methodological reasoning becomes dominant when contemporary issues lack direct discussion in classical legal literature. This integration demonstrates that methodological flexibility can coexist with strong adherence to the Sunni legal tradition (Baydar, 2023).

Although forum participants rarely introduced *maqāṣid* as an independent legal methodology, the empirical findings indicate that considerations of public benefit (*maṣlaḥah*), social justice, institutional stability, and communal welfare consistently influenced legal deliberation.

However, unlike some contemporary reformist approaches that prioritize *maqāṣid* over classical jurisprudence, the Ma'al-Ikhwan Forum places *maqāṣid* within the established framework of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *qawā'id fiqhiyyah*. This balanced approach preserves methodological continuity while allowing legal interpretation to respond effectively to social transformation. Consequently, the study refines Auda's theoretical perspective by illustrating how *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* may function as an integrative rather than substitutive component of traditional legal reasoning.

The *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum demonstrates that institutional procedures alone cannot explain the authority of collective legal decisions. Instead, legitimacy depends upon rigorous methodological verification, scholarly dialogue, and continuous evaluation of legal arguments. This perspective enriches previous scholarship by shifting analytical attention from institutional structure to epistemological construction. The *Ma'al-Ikhwan* Forum illustrates that the transmission of *turāth* involves not only memorizing legal texts but also internalizing methodological reasoning, developing critical argumentation, and cultivating collaborative scholarly ethics. Thus, *pesantren* education contributes to the reproduction of Islamic legal methodology as much as to the preservation of classical legal literature.

Comparison with previous empirical studies on *Bahtsul Masā'il* indicates that many researchers have concentrated on legal products, organizational procedures, or classifications of legal methods. Few studies have systematically examined the interaction between epistemology, methodology, and institutional culture. The present research addresses this gap by demonstrating that collective legal reasoning is produced through the continuous negotiation of textual authority, empirical reality, legal methodology, and scholarly interaction. This integrated perspective provides a broader understanding of how Islamic legal institutions maintain both continuity and adaptability in the face of contemporary social change.

An important theoretical implication emerging from this study is the formulation of the Integrative Traditional Collective *Ijtihād* Model. This model consists of five interconnected components. First, classical legal authority (*kutub al-turāth*) functions as the primary normative foundation. Second, methodological pluralism allows the complementary use of *qaulī*, *manhajī*, *qiyās*, and *ilhaq* according to the characteristics of legal problems (Intania et al., 2024). Third, epistemological verification ensures that every legal argument is evaluated through *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *qawā'id fiqhiyyah*, and collective scholarly criticism. Fourth, deliberative institutional culture facilitates equal academic participation among scholars, teachers, and advanced students while maintaining scientific discipline. Fifth, social contextualization enables legal conclusions to address contemporary realities without compromising the normative principles of Islamic law. The interaction of these five dimensions constitutes a comprehensive framework for understanding how traditional Islamic jurisprudence remains intellectually productive in modern society.

The originality of this research therefore lies not merely in examining the *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum as a unique *pesantren* institution, but in proposing a conceptual framework that reconceptualizes *Bahtsul Masā'il* as an epistemological system of collective *ijtihād*. This study demonstrates that methodological contestation functions as a constructive scholarly process through which legal authority is continuously negotiated, validated, and reproduced. This finding contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic legal studies by showing that the sustainability of traditional jurisprudence depends not on rigid textualism but on the capacity of scholarly communities to preserve methodological integrity while responding creatively to contemporary challenges.

From the perspective of Islamic education, these findings also highlight the strategic role of *pesantren* in cultivating critical legal reasoning and collaborative academic culture. The *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum illustrates that Islamic educational institutions are capable of

integrating classical scholarship with contemporary analytical approaches through structured deliberative learning. Consequently, *Bahtsul Masā'il* should be understood not only as a mechanism of legal decision-making but also as a pedagogical model for developing future Muslim scholars who possess methodological competence, intellectual openness, and commitment to preserving the authenticity of the Islamic legal tradition while engaging constructively with the changing realities of modern society.

CONCLUSION

The legitimacy of legal decisions is not determined solely by reliance on authoritative classical texts but is constructed through a systematic process of collective deliberation, methodological verification, and critical scholarly interaction. The integration of *kutub al-turāth*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *qawā'id fihiyyah*, and contextual understanding enables the forum to formulate legal opinions that remain faithful to the Sunni legal tradition while addressing emerging issues in social, economic, educational, and technological contexts. Accordingly, *Bahtsul Masā'il* should be understood not merely as a mechanism for issuing legal rulings but as an institutional process of knowledge production that continuously reproduces Islamic legal reasoning through collaborative academic engagement. The discussion further indicates that the epistemological strength of the *Ma'al-Ikhwan Mudzakarah* Forum lies in its ability to harmonize textual authority with methodological flexibility. Rather than creating a dichotomy between traditional and contemporary approaches, the forum demonstrates that classical jurisprudence possesses sufficient methodological capacity to accommodate social transformation when supported by rigorous collective reasoning. Based on these findings, this study proposes the Integrative Traditional Collective *Ijtihād* Model, which emphasizes the interaction between classical legal authority, methodological pluralism, deliberative verification, institutional scholarly culture, and contextual legal analysis. This conceptual contribution enriches the discourse on Islamic legal studies by providing an alternative framework for understanding how traditional *pesantren*-based legal institutions sustain both doctrinal authenticity and social relevance.

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