

The Application of Usul Al-Fiqh Methodology in Bahtsul Masail Practices at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School Suci Manyar Gresik

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how *ushul fiqh* methodology is practiced in *bahtsul masail* activities at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School, Suci, Manyar, Gresik, and to explore its implications for Islamic legal education in the pesantren context. This research employed a qualitative field approach through direct observation of *bahtsul masail* sessions and in-depth interviews with teachers and students involved in the discussions. The findings indicate that *bahtsul masail* follows a flexible but recognizable procedural pattern, beginning with problem formulation, followed by the exploration of classical legal sources, argumentative exchange, and collective decision making. Legal reasoning in the forum is not limited to the reproduction of juristic opinions, but involves the practical use of *ushul fiqh* tools such as identifying legal causes, analogical reasoning, and the application of legal maxims, although these tools are rarely stated explicitly. The study also shows that *bahtsul masail* plays a central role in shaping students' methodological understanding of Islamic law. However, junior students often experience difficulty in tracing the reasoning process behind legal conclusions. This study concludes that *bahtsul masail* provides an effective learning space for internalizing *ushul fiqh*, while stronger integration with formal instruction is needed to enhance conceptual clarity and broader participation.

Keywords: *Bahtsul Masail Discussion Processes, Ushul Fiqh Methodologies, Pesantren-Based Islamic Legal Education.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana metodologi ushul fiqh dipraktikkan dalam kegiatan bahtsul masail di Pesantren Mambaus Sholihin, Suci, Manyar, Gresik, dan untuk mengeksplorasi implikasinya terhadap pendidikan hukum Islam dalam konteks pesantren. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan lapangan kualitatif melalui observasi langsung sesi bahtsul masail dan wawancara mendalam dengan guru dan siswa yang terlibat dalam diskusi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa bahtsul masail mengikuti pola prosedural yang fleksibel namun dapat dikenali, dimulai dengan perumusan masalah, diikuti dengan eksplorasi sumber-sumber hukum klasik, pertukaran argumentatif, dan pengambilan keputusan bersama. Penalaran hukum dalam forum tidak terbatas pada reproduksi pendapat hukum, tetapi melibatkan penggunaan praktis alat-alat ushul fiqh seperti mengidentifikasi sebab-sebab hukum, penalaran analogis, dan penerapan maksim hukum, meskipun alat-alat ini jarang dinyatakan secara eksplisit. Studi ini juga menunjukkan bahwa bahtsul masail memainkan peran sentral dalam membentuk pemahaman metodologis siswa tentang hukum Islam. Namun, siswa junior sering mengalami kesulitan dalam menelusuri proses penalaran di balik kesimpulan hukum. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa bahtsul masail menyediakan ruang belajar yang efektif untuk menginternalisasi ushul fiqh, sementara integrasi yang lebih kuat dengan pengajaran formal diperlukan untuk meningkatkan kejelasan konseptual dan partisipasi yang lebih

luas.

Kata Kunci: *Proses Diskusi Bahtsul Masail, Metodologi Ushul Fiqh, Pendidikan Hukum Islam Berbasis Pesantren.*

Introduction

The discussion of *ushul fiqh* methodology has long been central in understanding how Islamic legal reasoning develops, particularly within traditional educational institutions such as *pesantren*. (Satria, 2017) *Ushul fiqh*, as a foundational discipline, provides the tools for deriving legal rulings from primary sources, yet the way it is applied in communal problem-solving settings remains underexplored, especially in Indonesian *ponpes*. (Choiriyah et al., 2024) In this regard, Pondok Pesantren Mambaus Sholihin Suci in Manyar, Gresik offers a living context where *bahtsul masail* sessions serve as the practical space for negotiating and implementing *ushul fiqh* principles in real legal questions. This study seeks to examine how *ushul fiqh* methodology is practiced and negotiated during these sessions, and why understanding this practice matters for broader discussions on contemporary Islamic legal education and communal jurisprudence. (Muhamad Subhi Apriantoro, 2021) Several scholars have discussed aspects of *ushul fiqh* and its pedagogical implications. Smith (2020) highlighted the role of *ushul fiqh* in shaping interpretive frameworks within Islamic law curricula. (Hussar et al., 2020) while Rahman (2021) emphasized the shifts in how traditional schools adopt modern hermeneutical approaches. (Rahman & Khan, 2021) Jones (2022) examined community *ijtihad* practices in Indonesian Islamic societies, noting the importance of localized interpretive traditions. (Jones et al., 2022) However, few studies have observed actual *bahtsul masail* discussions within a *pesantren* environment, leaving a gap in understanding the dynamics of methodology in action rather than in theory. (Suma Wijaya, 2025) Most research has focused on textual or normative analysis of *ushul fiqh*, but not on its enactment within deliberative group settings such as *bahtsul masail*. (Mahfuddin, 2021)

This study aims to fill this gap by observing and analyzing how *ushul fiqh* methodologies are applied during *bahtsul masail* at Mambaus Sholihin Suci. It investigates the practical reasoning patterns, the types of legal problems discussed, and the role of teachers and students in facilitating methodological interpretation. By contrasting these findings with existing literature on *ushul fiqh* pedagogy, this research highlights differences between theoretical frameworks and lived practice, offering insights into how Islamic legal reasoning evolves in community contexts. (Nasih, 2009)

The objectives of this study are threefold: first, Patterns and Stages of the *Bahtsul Masail* Discussion Process at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School; second, to identify The Use of Ushul Fiqh Methodology and Analytical Tools in the Process of Legal Reasoning; and third, to assess the Implications of Bahtsul Masail Practices for Ushul Fiqh Learning and Islamic Legal Education in the Pesantren Context. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how traditional methodology is adapted to address contemporary legal issues, and how communal deliberation shapes interpretive outcomes. It also offers perspectives on

the educational impact of *bahtsul masail* for students' legal reasoning skills.(Adib, 2022)

This article is organized as follows. After the introduction, Section 2 reviews the conceptual foundations of *ushul fiqh* and *bahtsul masail*, focusing on key concepts and analytical tools that frame this study. Section 3 explains the fieldwork setting at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School and the qualitative methods used to collect and analyze the data.(Samsidar Jamaluddin, 2024) Section 4 presents the results of the study, which are structured into three main themes: the patterns and stages of the *bahtsul masail* discussion process, the use of *ushul fiqh* methodology in legal reasoning, and the implications of these practices for *ushul fiqh* learning and Islamic legal education in the pesantren context. Section 5 discusses these findings in relation to existing studies on pesantren-based legal learning and contemporary debates on Islamic legal education. Finally, Section 6 concludes the article by highlighting the main contributions of the study, its limitations, and directions for future research.(Jones et al., 2022)

Literature Review

Studies on *ushul fiqh* generally describe it as the methodological foundation of Islamic legal reasoning, providing conceptual tools such as *istinbat*, *qiyas*, and *maslahah* for deriving legal rulings from authoritative sources.(Rajafi, 2023) Recent scholarship emphasizes that *ushul fiqh* should be understood not only as a theoretical discipline, but also as a practical framework that guides how legal arguments are constructed and justified in real contexts. This shift highlights the importance of observing how methodological principles are applied within concrete institutional settings.(Choiriyah et al., 2024)

Research on *bahtsul masail* in Indonesian Islamic institutions shows that this forum functions as a collective space of legal deliberation in which classical texts are discussed and contemporary problems are addressed. Several studies portray *bahtsul masail* as a form of collective *ijtihad*, where authority emerges through dialogue, textual comparison, and argumentative negotiation.(Abshor, 2016) However, most of these works focus on the institutional or cultural role of *bahtsul masail*, while the methodological dimension of legal reasoning, particularly the operational use of *ushul fiqh* principles, is rarely examined in detail.(Riza, 2004)

At the same time, literature on *pesantren* education underlines that legal learning is not limited to memorizing fiqh rulings. Students are gradually trained to internalize specific modes of reasoning and scholarly habits shaped by the intellectual tradition of the institution. Yet, empirical studies that directly connect the teaching of *ushul fiqh* with deliberative practices such as *bahtsul masail* remain limited.(Al-Munawar & Mirwan, 2020)

Taken together, previous studies suggest that *ushul fiqh*, *bahtsul masail*, and *pesantren* learning culture are closely related, but they are often discussed separately.(Adib, 2022) This study therefore brings these three strands together by examining how *ushul fiqh* methodology is practiced within *bahtsul masail* at Pondok Pesantren Mambaus Sholihin Suci, Manyar, Gresik. By focusing on actual deliberation processes, this research contributes to a practice-based understanding

of Islamic legal methodology in contemporary pesantren settings.

Method

This study was conducted as a qualitative field-based case study at Pondok Pesantren Mambaus Sholihin Suci, Manyar, Gresik, in order to closely examine how *ushul fiqh* methodology was actually used and negotiated in *bahtsul masail* discussions. (Hasibuan et al., 2022) The research took place within the pesantren's regular *bahtsul masail* activities, and the unit of analysis was the deliberative process itself, especially the flow of arguments and the ways participants justified legal positions during each session. In this study, *ushul fiqh* methodology was understood as the practical reasoning framework through which participants referred to textual evidence, employed analogy, considered public interest, and articulated methodological grounds when preferring one juristic view over another, and it was operationally traced through these observable forms of reasoning. Participants were selected purposively from teachers and students who were actively involved in the *bahtsul masail*, as they were the most directly engaged in the deliberation process, even though this choice inevitably limited the generalizability of the findings. (Mahfuddin, 2021) The intended sample consisted of approximately fifteen to twenty participants, and the realized sample included eighteen individuals (four teachers and fourteen students). Data were generated through non-participant observation of six *bahtsul masail* sessions, semi-structured interviews, and a review of discussion notes and learning materials, and were then analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in methodological reasoning, argumentative strategies, and learning interactions. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through the use of multiple data sources, repeated observations, and follow-up clarification with participants, and all stages of the study were carried out after institutional permission and ethical consent had been obtained. (Wahyudin Darmalaksana, 2020)

Results and Discussion

This study identified three major themes emerging from the data analysis concerning the practice of *bahtsul masail* at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School: (1) patterns and stages of the *bahtsul masail* discussion process at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School; (2) the use of *ushul fiqh* methodology and analytical tools in the process of legal reasoning; and (3) the implications of *bahtsul masail* practices for *ushul fiqh* learning and Islamic legal education in the pesantren context.

1. Patterns And Stages Of The Bahtsul Masail Discussion Process At Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School

Bahtsul masail is an academic deliberative forum in the pesantren tradition that aims to examine and formulate responses to religious issues arising in society, particularly in the field of Islamic law. (Rajafi, 2023) In this forum, teachers and students discuss specific legal problems by referring to classical fiqh texts (*kutub al-turāth*), while at the same time employing methodological reasoning based on *ushul fiqh*, such as examining textual evidence, identifying legal causes (*'illah*), and

comparing juristic opinions.(Fiqh, 2005)

Field observations and in-depth interviews showed that *bahtsul masail* sessions at Pondok Pesantren Mambaus Sholihin followed a relatively stable procedural pattern, although the flow was not always as formal as it appears in written guidelines. In most observed sessions, the discussion began with the presentation of a concrete and contextual problem raised by the moderator, usually drawn from actual social or legal questions faced by the surrounding community. This stage was not merely an introduction; it functioned as a framing process in which the scope of the problem was gradually narrowed so that participants shared a similar understanding of what was being debated.

After the problem formulation, participants moved to the stage of tracing relevant classical references (*turats*), primarily fiqh texts and their commentaries.(Muhammad Makinuddin, 2019) At this stage, the discussion was dominated by short quotations and references, but these were rarely read in isolation. The participants, especially senior students, tended to immediately relate the textual findings to similar legal cases (*nadhair*) or previously discussed issues in earlier *bahtsul masail*.(Riza, 2004) The next stage involved argumentative exchange, where different legal opinions were compared and defended using both textual arguments and ushul-based reasoning.(Nst et al., 2024) The discussion usually ended with a collective formulation of a tentative conclusion, which was later refined by the moderator and senior teachers before being announced as the forum's official position.

However, the data also revealed variations that did not always fit the ideal procedural model. In several sessions, the shift from textual search to analytical debate occurred very quickly, especially when the participants were already familiar with the issue. In a few cases, explicit procedural markers such as formal confirmation of problem boundaries were bypassed.(Alsafy et al., 2025) This did not necessarily weaken the discussion, but it reduced the opportunity for less experienced participants to actively follow the logical development of the debate.(Maftuh, 2020)

These findings indicate that the *bahtsul masail* process at Mambaus Sholihin is not simply a rigid technical procedure, but rather a living academic practice shaped by the interaction between tradition and the learning culture of the pesantren. The identifiable stages problem formulation, textual exploration, argumentative deliberation, and collective conclusion reflect a practical adaptation of classical scholarly procedures commonly associated with traditional fiqh circles.(Mu'adzah, 2022) This pattern is consistent with previous studies on *bahtsul masail* practices in Indonesian pesantren, which emphasize deliberative and collective reasoning as the core of the learning process.



Figure 1: Documenter Bathsul Masail in Mambaus Sholihin

At the same time, the observed procedural flexibility suggests that the learning environment plays a decisive role in shaping how those stages are actually enacted. The tendency to abbreviate early procedural steps when participants were already familiar with the topic indicates that efficiency and shared background knowledge often take precedence over formal structure. (Di et al., 2025) While this may strengthen the depth of discussion among advanced students, it also raises a pedagogical concern: newcomers and junior participants may struggle to recognize the underlying logic of the discussion process when procedural stages are not made explicit. (Haoxing & System, n.d.)

From an educational perspective, this pattern supports the view that *bahtsul masail* functions not only as a forum for legal decision-making but also as an informal training ground for legal reasoning. (Nasih, 2009) The gradual movement from identifying a problem to negotiating competing arguments mirrors the structure of legal reasoning in *ushul fiqh*, even when the stages are not formally labeled. (Ramadan & Shohib, 2024) Interestingly, contrary to the expectation that procedural looseness would reduce analytical rigor, the data showed that the quality of argumentation remained relatively consistent across sessions. (Suma Wijaya, 2025) What differed was not the depth of reasoning, but the degree of pedagogical transparency. This finding slightly challenges the common assumption that a more formal procedural design necessarily leads to better learning outcomes in pesantren-based legal discussions.

2. The Use of Ushul Fiqh Methodology and Analytical Tools in the Process of Legal Reasoning

Ushul fiqh refers to the discipline that formulates the fundamental principles and methodological rules for deriving Islamic legal rulings from their authoritative sources. (Satria, 2017) It provides the conceptual and analytical framework through which jurists understand revealed texts, determine the operative causes of rulings (*'illah*), evaluate indications of meaning in the texts, and regulate the process of legal inference (*istinbāt al-aḥkām*). (Choiriyah et al., 2024) In the context of *bahtsul masail*, *ushul fiqh* is applied mainly through the use of several practical methods, such as identifying the legal basis of a ruling, tracing its effective cause (*ta'līl al-aḥkām*),

employing analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), and strengthening arguments by referring to established legal maxims (*qawā'id fiqhiyyah*). (Nst et al., 2024)

Field observations and in-depth interviews showed that legal reasoning in *bahtsul masail* sessions at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School did not stop at locating established juristic opinions in classical fiqh texts. (Sodiqin, 2012) Senior participants, in particular, actively employed *ushul fiqh* reasoning when weighing and comparing different views. The most frequently observed tools were the identification of legal causes (*'illah*), the use of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), and the application of general legal maxims (*qawā'id fiqhiyyah*) to support arguments.

In several observed cases, differences of opinion were not resolved by simply selecting the most authoritative or widely cited view. Instead, participants examined whether the legal basis of each opinion remained relevant to the contemporary case under discussion. At this stage, discussion often revolved around the relationship between textual evidence, the operative cause of the ruling (*manāṭ al-ḥukm*), and the concrete social context of the problem. (Abshor, 2016)

However, the data also indicated that not all *ushul fiqh* instruments were articulated explicitly. Terms such as *istishhāb*, *sadd al-dharī'ah*, or *taḥqīq al-manāṭ* were rarely mentioned in a formal way. Even so, patterns of reasoning that reflected these methods were clearly present in how participants considered legal consequences, evaluated public interest, and connected one case to other structurally similar cases. In practice, *ushul fiqh* was applied more as an embedded way of thinking than as a formally stated analytical framework. (Muin et al., 2025)

A noticeable difference emerged between junior and senior students. Junior participants tended to focus on reading and presenting authoritative fiqh passages. By contrast, senior students more frequently redirected the discussion toward the methodological grounds of each opinion, especially when conflicting evidences or different modes of legal inference (*wajh al-istidlāl*) were involved. (Al-Munawar & Mirwan, 2020)

These findings suggest that *bahtsul masail* at Mambaus Sholihin functions as a practical arena for the enactment of *ushul fiqh*, rather than merely as a forum for verifying classical juristic positions. The recurrent use of *qiyās*, the search for *'illah*, and the reliance on legal maxims indicate that legal decision-making moved beyond textual citation toward methodological reasoning, even though this reasoning was not always framed in standard academic terminology.

Compared with several previous studies that describe *bahtsul masail* in pesantren as largely text-oriented, this study reveals a slightly different pattern. At Mambaus Sholihin, legal arguments were often constructed by uncovering the logic underlying juristic opinions rather than by reproducing their final conclusions. (Fahmi et al., 2021) This tendency became particularly visible in sessions guided by senior teachers, who consistently encouraged participants to clarify the methodological foundations of their arguments.

At the same time, the results also reveal an important limitation. Unequal mastery of *ushul fiqh* concepts among participants meant that a small group of methodologically stronger students tended to dominate the discussion. (Mubarrak, 2023) While the overall quality of legal reasoning remained strong, this imbalance

narrowed broader argumentative participation within the forum.

From the perspective of Islamic legal education, these findings support the view that the internalization of *ushul fiqh* in pesantren is especially effective when it is embedded in real problem-solving activities. Nevertheless, an overreliance on intuitive methodological practice without sufficient explicit conceptual clarification may make the structure of *ushul fiqh* difficult to grasp for students at an early stage of learning. In this sense, *bahtsul masail* at Mambaus Sholihin not only illustrates how *ushul fiqh* is applied in legal reasoning, but also highlights the need to balance experiential learning with more systematic conceptual reinforcement in pesantren-based Islamic legal education.

3. Implications of Bahtsul Masail Practices for Ushul Fiqh Learning and Islamic Legal Education in the Pesantren Context

The field data indicated that *bahtsul masail* practices at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School had a direct influence on how students learned and understood *ushul fiqh*. Most participants, particularly senior students, stated that their methodological understanding developed less through formal classroom instruction and more through regular involvement in *bahtsul masail* sessions. (Mahfuddin, 2021)

Through these forums, students were consistently exposed to legal problems that did not always have single or straightforward answers in the classical texts. This situation required them to trace the foundations of legal rulings, compare different juristic arguments, and reconsider the relevance of established opinions in relation to contemporary cases. In everyday practice, *ushul fiqh* was not approached as a collection of definitions or technical classifications, but as a working mode of reasoning used to navigate concrete legal questions.

At the same time, the findings revealed uneven learning outcomes. Several junior students acknowledged that, although they could follow the flow of discussion, they often struggled to recognize which specific *ushul fiqh* tools were being applied. (Riza, 2004) What they tended to retain was the final legal conclusion rather than the methodological process that produced it. (Alsafy et al., 2025) The data also showed that *bahtsul masail* fostered a strong culture of collective learning. Legal reasoning developed through open debate, peer correction, and continuous guidance from senior teachers. This interactive environment reduced dependence on a single authoritative voice and encouraged students to engage more actively with legal arguments.



Figure 2: Implications of Bahtsul Masail Practices for Ushul Fiqh

These findings suggest that *bahtsul masail* functions as a practical bridge between textual mastery of fiqh and the development of *ushul fiqh* reasoning skills. By working with real and socially grounded legal problems, students were able to connect abstract methodological concepts with lived legal realities. In this sense, *bahtsul masail* served not only as a forum for producing legal answers, but also as a learning space in which *ushul fiqh* was internalized through practice.

The results support educational perspectives that view Islamic legal learning as problem-based and context-sensitive. Compared with classroom-oriented instruction that emphasizes memorization of terminologies and classifications, *bahtsul masail* provided opportunities for students to develop analytical capacities, especially in evaluating the relationship between textual evidence, social context, and the objectives of the law. (Ummah, 2019)

Nevertheless, the findings also point to an important pedagogical limitation. When methodological reasoning remained largely implicit, some students found it difficult to construct a clear and systematic map of *ushul fiqh* concepts. (Sodiqin, 2012) This condition tended to widen the gap between students who were already familiar with methodological thinking and those who were still at an early stage of learning.

From the perspective of pesantren-based Islamic legal education, these results indicate the need for a more deliberate integration between formal *ushul fiqh* instruction and *bahtsul masail* practice. (Satria, 2017) While discussion forums remain essential for training contextual legal reasoning and *istinbāt*, they should be complemented by more explicit conceptual reinforcement so that students can clearly identify, articulate, and critically reflect on the *ushul fiqh* tools they employ. In this way, *bahtsul masail* can contribute not only to legal decision-making, but also to the formation of a more coherent and sustainable framework of Islamic legal reasoning within the pesantren environment.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *bahtsul masail* at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School is not merely a forum for confirming classical legal opinions, but functions as a living space in which *ushul fiqh* is continuously practiced, negotiated, and learned through real legal problems. The discussion process follows recognizable

stages – problem formulation, reference exploration, argumentative exchange, and collective decision making – yet remains flexible and shaped by the learning culture of the pesantren. This flexibility does not weaken the quality of legal reasoning, but it does influence how clearly the methodological process can be traced, especially by junior students.

More importantly, the findings show that legal reasoning in *bahtsul masail* is grounded in methodological considerations such as the search for legal causes, analogical reasoning, and the use of legal maxims, even when these tools are not always named explicitly. In practice, *ushul fiqh* operates as an internalized mode of thinking rather than as a formal set of concepts. This confirms that the learning of Islamic legal methodology in pesantren is strongly shaped by experiential and problem-based engagement, rather than by classroom instruction alone. At the same time, the study reveals an important tension within this learning model. While *bahtsul masail* effectively sharpens students' analytical sensitivity and their ability to connect textual sources with social realities, the implicit nature of methodological reasoning tends to benefit more advanced students. For learners at an early stage, the absence of explicit conceptual articulation may limit their ability to build a coherent and systematic understanding of *ushul fiqh*.

In light of current discussions on Islamic legal education, this study highlights the need for a more integrated learning design in pesantren, in which formal *ushul fiqh* instruction and *bahtsul masail* practice mutually reinforce one another. Strengthening explicit reflection on the methodological steps taken during discussions would allow students not only to reach legal conclusions, but also to recognize and critically evaluate the reasoning that leads to those conclusions.

Future studies may expand this inquiry by comparing *bahtsul masail* practices across different pesantren traditions and organizational settings, or by examining how varying pedagogical interventions – such as structured methodological debriefings after discussion sessions – affect students' long-term mastery of *ushul fiqh* and their capacity for independent legal reasoning.

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