

Focus Group Discussion (FGD): How to Quickly Build Students' Critical Thinking Skills

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Abstract:

This study aims to focus on Group Discussion: How to Quickly Build Students' Critical Thinking Skills. It includes how this strategy can be implemented more optimally at various levels of education and learning contexts for students of the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program, Al-Mujaddid Sabak Islamic Institute. In discussing the theme of Focus Group Discussion as an Effective Strategy in Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Students, the appropriate research method is qualitative research with a descriptive approach and in-depth interviews. It can be concluded that the implementation of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as a learning strategy in the Educational Management course at the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program, Al-Mujaddid Sabak Islamic Institute, is very effective in developing students' critical thinking skills. Through a collaborative, interactive, and reflective discussion process, students are actively involved in expressing and evaluating various perspectives, as well as analyzing real cases in educational management. FGD not only helps students understand educational management theory more deeply but also trains them to think critically in dealing with complex situations in the real world. Although there are challenges in its implementation, the role of lecturers as facilitators and creators of an inclusive discussion atmosphere can overcome these obstacles, so that FGD can be carried out more optimally.

Keywords:

Focus Group Discussion, Quickly Build, Students' Critical Thinking Skills.



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INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking skills are one of the skills that are very much needed in the world of education and life in the 21st century. Alsaleh said, amidst the abundant flow of information and increasingly complex global challenges, students are expected to not only be able to memorize or understand information, but also be able to analyze, evaluate, and apply knowledge critically in various situations (Alsaleh, 2020). Critical thinking involves the ability to question, make logical inferences, and draw conclusions based on existing evidence (Al-Husban, 2020). Therefore, the development of critical thinking skills is essential in preparing students to face future challenges (Kubo, 2024).

However, various studies show that many students still do not have adequate critical thinking skills. This can be caused by a learning approach that is still conventional and tends to be passive, where lecturers act more as information centers while students only receive information in one direction (Rimarioczy et al., 2017). This learning model does not provide enough space for students

to practice critical thinking, discuss, or solve problems independently or collaboratively (Alsaleh, 2020; Learning, 2013). In this context, there is a need to implement more interactive learning strategies and encourage students to think critically and creatively (Widiastuti et al., 2022). One strategy that has great potential in developing critical thinking skills is Focus Group Discussion (O. Nyumba et al., 2018). FGD is a method that involves small group discussions facilitated by a moderator to explore various perspectives, opinions, and ideas related to a particular topic (Hennink, 2013). In this process, discussion participants are encouraged to think deeply, put forward arguments supported by evidence, and appreciate different views (Hennink, 2013).

The application of FGD in learning provides several significant benefits in developing students' critical thinking skills (O. Nyumba et al., 2018). First, FGD allows students to learn collaboratively, which is an important aspect of learning critical thinking. Through group discussions, students can share information, criticize emerging ideas, and construct arguments logically. Second, FGD encourages students to participate actively, both in expressing opinions and in listening to and responding to the opinions of others. This process helps students develop communication skills that are important in critical thinking, such as formulating relevant questions, providing fact-based arguments, and evaluating arguments from various points of view. Third, in FGD, students are exposed to a variety of perspectives that can enrich their perspective on an issue. This helps students hone their ability to consider multiple perspectives before concluding, which is the essence of critical thinking. In addition, an open and free discussion environment allows students to be more comfortable asking questions or criticizing ideas without fear of being wrong, so they are more motivated to continue honing their critical thinking skills (O. Nyumba et al., 2018).

However, although FGDs offer many benefits in developing critical thinking, their implementation in learning environments is not always easy. One challenge that is often faced is how to ensure that all students can be actively involved in the discussion (Brown, 2015). Some students may feel less confident in speaking in public or have difficulty formulating opinions clearly and logically (Hennink, 2013). Therefore, the role of the lecturer as a facilitator is very important in creating an inclusive and supportive discussion atmosphere, where every student has the opportunity to contribute (Yusuf & Adeoye, 2012).

In addition, lecturers need to have special skills in managing group discussions to stay focused on learning objectives, and can direct students to think critically and deeply (Nurakhir et al., 2020). This includes the ability to design challenging questions, provide constructive feedback, and manage group dynamics well so that discussions run effectively (Sholihah et al., 2021). Given these benefits and challenges, it is important to continue to develop and research the implementation of FGDs in various educational contexts (Garside, 1996). In this case, FGD not only functions as a learning tool, but also as a pedagogical model that places students at the center of the learning process (M. C. Chiu, 2023; Uhlig, 2018). By maximizing the potential of FGD, it is hoped that students' critical thinking skills can develop optimally, so that they are better prepared to face a world full of complex challenges in the future (Mahdi et al., 2020).

Therefore, it is important to further examine the role of Focus Group Discussion: How to Quickly Build Students' Critical Thinking Skills, it's including how this strategy can be implemented

more optimally at various levels of education and learning contexts for students of the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program, Al-Mujaddid Sabak Islamic Institute?

METHOD

In discussing the theme of Focus Group Discussion as an Effective Strategy in Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Students, the appropriate research method is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. This approach is suitable because it aims to explore in depth the processes, experiences, and interactions that occur during the implementation of FGD in learning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative research allows researchers to understand how students participate in discussions, how they express their opinions, and how their critical thinking skills are honed in real contexts (Moider & Valtonen, 2016).

The number of research samples was 23 people. Data collection techniques can include participant observation during FGD sessions, in-depth interviews with students and lecturer to find out their perceptions of the FGD process, and analysis of documents or student discussion results to evaluate the development of their critical thinking (Beuving & Vries, 2015). In addition, data can be analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to the development of critical thinking skills. Thus, this method allows researchers to gain a holistic and in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of FGD in improving critical thinking skills in students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of essential concepts, functions, benefits, and applications of Focus Group Discussion (FGD), particularly relevant in developing students' critical thinking skills in Educational Management courses.

Table 1. Result of the essential concepts, functions, benefits, and applications of Focus Group Discussion.

Theme	Key Points / Findings	Implications / Benefits
Understanding Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	- FGD is a data collection method involving small, selected groups (6–12 participants). - Guided by a moderator to explore a topic deeply. - Encourages interaction, sharing perspectives, and generating in-depth understanding.	- Collects rich, contextual data.- Stimulates new ideas and insights.- Enhances collaborative learning in educational settings.
Applications of FGD	- Education: Enhances student engagement, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. - Social Research: Explores social and cultural dynamics, perceptions, and norms. - Marketing: Understands consumer preferences, feedback, and brand perception. - Public Policy: Involves stakeholders in policy input and feedback.	- Provides practical insights applicable in multiple fields. - Strengthens participatory and democratic processes.
Functions of FGD	- Gathering Diverse Perspectives: Participants share unique ideas, experiences, and opinions. - Encourage Collaboration: Group problem-solving and collective understanding. - Develop Communication Skills: Structured expression, argumentation, and active listening. - Generate Deep Understanding: Explore complex issues thoroughly. - Stimulate Critical Thinking: Evaluate, question, and construct arguments analytically.	- Fosters open-mindedness and critical evaluation. - Develops interpersonal and cognitive skills. - Supports holistic learning and research analysis.
Advantages of FGD	- Active Participation: Everyone contributes to the discussion. - In-depth Data Collection: Rich qualitative insights. - Flexibility & Adaptability: Customizable to context, topic, or group. - Open Learning Environment: Encourages comfortable, informal discussions. - Social & Group Dynamics Understanding: Builds collaboration and interpersonal skills.	- Increases engagement, learning ownership, and contextual understanding. - Facilitates effective research and education outcomes.
FGD in Developing Critical Thinking in Educational Management Courses	- Collaborative: Students analyze case studies together, discuss curriculum, HR, and facilities management. - Interactive: Students actively ask questions, propose solutions, and evaluate ideas. - Reflective: Students critically reflect on learning, arguments, and outcomes. - Theory-Practice Connection: Students relate educational management theory to real madrasah contexts. - Challenges: Unequal participation; some students dominate. Requires facilitator intervention.	- Enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical application skills. - Produces prospective teachers capable of analytical, reflective, and contextually relevant decision-making.

1. How to know about Focus Group Discussion (FGD):

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a method of collecting data or information used in various fields, such as social research, marketing, education, and public policy development (Hennink, 2013). This method involves a small group of people selected based on certain criteria to discuss a previously determined topic or issue. This discussion is guided by a moderator who is tasked with directing the conversation to remain focused and productive, and ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to contribute (Bintarania et al., 2024). Through this group interaction, FGD seeks to explore various perspectives, opinions, and in-depth understandings related to the topic being discussed.

FGDs usually involve 6 to 12 participants selected based on certain characteristics that are relevant to the research objectives. In the context of social research, for example, groups can be selected based on demographics, educational background, profession, or interest in a particular topic (Ekahitanond, 2013). One of the main advantages of FGDs is their ability to stimulate dynamic discussions that allow participants to interact with each other, respond to each other's opinions, and explore new ideas that may not have emerged in individual interviews (Bintarania et al., 2024). This creates an environment rich in ideas and allows for more in-depth and contextual data collection. The FGD process begins with determining the topic or issue to be discussed. The topic is usually divided into several key questions or issues that will be explored during the discussion (Asyari et al., 2016). The moderator will then open the session by introducing the purpose of the discussion, ground rules (such as speaking one at a time or respecting the opinions of others), and providing an initial stimulus to start the discussion. Throughout the discussion, the moderator plays a key role in ensuring that the discussion remains focused on the main topic, although participants are free to express their views and ideas openly (Darby, 2007).

One of the unique characteristics of FGDs is the interaction between participants, which is often a very valuable source of information. In a group discussion, participants may be more open to expressing their opinions than in an individual interview situation (Ekahitanond, 2013). This social interaction can trigger new thinking, clarification of ideas, and confirmation from other participants that strengthen the discussion results. In addition, group interaction allows participants to explore issues from multiple perspectives, which often produces richer and more in-depth data than other data collection methods (Zare & Othman, 2015). In educational contexts, FGDs are often used as a strategy to increase student engagement in the learning process (Nelson & Crow, 2014). As a pedagogical method, FGDs create an atmosphere conducive to collaborative and interactive learning (Asyari et al., 2016). In group discussions, students can share knowledge, critique arguments, and develop critical thinking skills through intensive discussion (Zhang et al., 2023). FGDs also encourage active participation from students, help them build confidence in expressing their opinions, and strengthen their ability to communicate effectively.

In addition, FGDs can also be a very effective tool in exploring social and cultural dynamics within a group (Walker & Finney, 1999). Because FGDs are interactive, they allow participants not only to express their opinions but also to explain the reasons behind those views. These discussions often yield insights into how social norms, cultural values, or personal experiences influence a

person's views on an issue (Bell et al., 2002). For example, in social research, FGDs can be used to understand how people's perceptions of a particular policy are influenced by life experiences, cultural values, or religious beliefs (Darby, 2007). In marketing and consumer research, FGDs are often used to gather direct feedback from consumers about a particular product, service, or brand. Through FGDs, companies can gain a deeper understanding of consumer needs, preferences, and behaviors (Ekahitanond, 2013). By listening to group discussions about a product or service, companies can identify strengths and weaknesses and gain ideas for product innovation or improvement. In addition, FGDs also allow companies to understand how consumers view their brand in a competitive context, as well as how those perceptions are influenced by social interactions and user experiences (Y. J. Chiu, 2009). In the field of public policy, FGDs are often used by governments or non-profit organizations to obtain input from the public or interest groups on issues related to social, economic, or environmental policy (Franklin et al., 2022). These discussions provide an opportunity for stakeholders to voice their concerns, propose solutions, or provide input on how a particular policy will directly affect them. In this way, FGDs serve as a democratic tool for gathering opinions from a variety of community groups, so that the resulting policies are more representative and responsive to public needs (Foo & Quek, 2019).

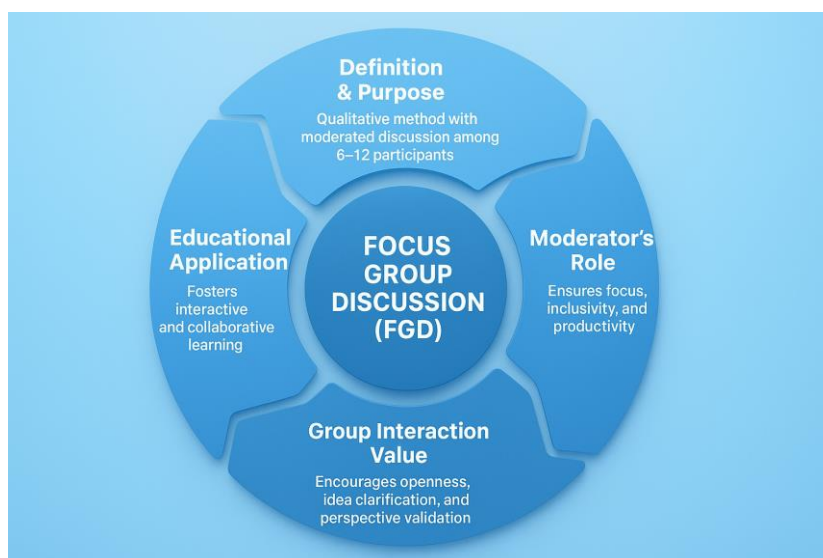


Figure 1. The essential concepts, functions, benefits, and applications of Focus Group Discussion (FGD),

Although FGDs offer a number of advantages, this method also has limitations. One of the main disadvantages is the potential for a few participants to dominate the discussion, while others may be reluctant to contribute (Franklin et al., 2022). Moderators must be skilled at managing group dynamics, ensuring that all participants are actively involved, and preventing the discussion from being dominated by one or a few individuals. In addition, because of their interactive nature, FGDs tend to produce subjective data, which is dependent on the personal views, experiences, and perceptions of participants. Therefore, FGD results often need to be balanced with other data collection methods to obtain a more objective and comprehensive picture (O. Nyumba et al., 2018). Overall, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a very useful method in collecting rich and in-depth data, especially when the topic under discussion requires exploration of multiple perspectives and social interaction. FGD provides an opportunity for participants to share ideas, critique, and expand their

understanding of an issue through open and structured group discussions. As a research method and learning strategy, FGD continues to be widely used because of its ability to produce high-value data that is relevant to the needs of various fields, ranging from education, consumer research to public policy.

2. How to Functions and Benefits of Focus Group Discussion (FGD):

The function of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is one of the methods widely used in various fields, such as education, research, marketing, and social studies (Y. J. Chiu, 2009). FGD involves a structured discussion among small groups of individuals guided by a moderator to discuss a particular topic in depth. In education, FGD is often used as a method to encourage student interaction, increase active involvement, and deepen understanding through collaborative discussion. In the context of research, FGD functions as a tool to collect qualitative data from participants who have diverse perspectives or experiences related to the issues discussed. FGD has various functions and advantages, especially in the context of learning and developing critical thinking skills, which will be discussed further below (Abidin et al., 2021, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2023; Bell et al., 2002; Y. J. Chiu, 2009; Foo & Quek, 2019; Hennink, 2013; Zhang et al., 2023).

1. Function of Focus Group Discussion

- a) **Gathering Various Perspectives**, one of the main functions of FGD is to gather various perspectives and opinions from discussion participants. Through FGD, each individual has the opportunity to convey their ideas, experiences, and thoughts that are different from those of others. In the context of education, this is very useful because students are invited to see an issue from various sides, avoid narrow thinking, and be open to the views of others. With different opinions and perspectives, discussions can become richer and deeper, helping participants to be more critical in considering various points of view before drawing conclusions.
- b) **Encourage Collaboration and Interaction**, FGDs serve as a platform for participants to work together in analyzing, evaluating, and formulating solutions to the problems discussed. In group discussions, students or participants not only interact with the material or topic raised, but also with fellow participants, which facilitates collaboration in the learning process. Through this collaboration, participants can learn from each other, share insights, and build a better collective understanding. This collaboration also allows for the emergence of new ideas that might not have emerged if individuals worked separately.
- c) **Develop Communication Skills**, another function of FGDs is to train participants in expressing opinions in a structured and clear manner. In this context, participants are invited to learn to speak effectively, convey ideas clearly, and support their arguments with logical evidence. In addition, FGDs also teach good listening skills, where participants must understand and respond to other people's arguments critically but constructively. This is very important in the development of critical thinking skills, where students are not only expected to voice their opinions, but also to be able to evaluate and criticize the views of others rationally.
- d) **Generating Deep Understanding**. In an FGD, participants are given space to dig deeper into a topic or issue being discussed. The discussion that takes place allows participants to explore aspects that might be missed if only discussed individually or in a more formal context. This makes FGDs an effective tool in building a deeper understanding of an issue, especially if the topic of discussion is a complex or controversial topic.
- e) **Stimulating Critical Thinking**, FGDs are a very effective medium for stimulating critical thinking. Because participants are exposed to various perspectives and arguments, they are

encouraged to think analytically, consider different arguments, and evaluate the validity and relevance of the information presented. In FGDs, participants are challenged to ask questions, question existing assumptions, and construct arguments based on evidence. These are core elements of critical thinking that are essential in the world of education and research.

2. Advantages of Focus Group Discussion

- a) **Active Participation and Participant Involvement**, one of the main advantages of FGD is its ability to actively involve participants. FGD provides an opportunity for each participant to contribute to the discussion, express their opinions, and respond to ideas put forward by other participants. Unlike lecture or presentation methods, where participants tend to be passive, FGD places participants as the main actors in the learning or discussion process, which in turn increases involvement and ownership of the discussion results.
- b) **In-depth Data Collection**. In the context of research, FGDs provide the advantage of being able to explore in-depth qualitative data. Through facilitated interactions, researchers can gain richer insights into participants' thoughts, motivations, and attitudes toward an issue. Furthermore, FGDs allow researchers to observe how group dynamics influence participants' views, as well as how arguments develop as the discussion progresses. These advantages make FGDs a very useful method for exploratory studies or research that aims to understand a phenomenon comprehensively.
- c) **Flexibility and Adaptability** FGDs are flexible in terms of implementation and topics discussed. Discussions can be tailored to the needs of the group, research objectives, or even participant characteristics. In education, discussion topics can be tailored to the curriculum or subject matter, while in research, discussions can be focused on specific issues according to the objectives of the study. This flexibility allows FGDs to be used in a variety of contexts and situations, whether in the classroom, research institutions, or the industrial world.
- d) **Creating an Open Learning Environment** FGDs can create an environment conducive to open and pressure-free discussions, where participants feel comfortable speaking up and expressing their opinions. With an informal and interactive atmosphere, participants are more encouraged to actively engage, especially those who may be less comfortable in a more formal discussion context. This environment helps facilitate more personal and contextual learning, where participants can learn from and support each other.
- e) **Improving Social Understanding and Group Dynamics** FGDs also have the advantage of helping participants understand group dynamics and social interactions. Participants are encouraged to work together, listen, and respond positively to the opinions of others, which ultimately hones their social skills. In an educational context, these skills are very important because they help students learn to collaborate, resolve conflicts constructively, and respect different opinions.

Overall, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) have a strong function in fostering diverse perspectives, encouraging collaboration, improving communication skills, producing deep understanding, and stimulating critical thinking. The advantages include active participant participation, in-depth data collection, flexibility in implementation, creating an open discussion environment, and increasing understanding of social dynamics. With these functions and advantages, FGDs are a very effective tool in education and research, especially in developing critical thinking skills and deep understanding of a topic or issue.

3. How to Quickly Build Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Educational Management Courses at the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program

Critical thinking skills are one of the most important skills in modern education. In the context of teacher education, especially in the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program at the Al-Mujaddid Sabak Islamic Institute, developing critical thinking skills is an essential element that prospective teachers need to have. One of the courses that has great potential to hone this skill is Educational Management, where students are required to be able to analyze, evaluate, and develop effective management strategies in educational management, especially at the elementary madrasah level. To achieve this goal, the application of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as a learning strategy is very relevant and effective. FGD allows students not only to understand educational management theory, but also trains them to think critically in real situations, work together in groups, and express and evaluate various perspectives that emerge in the discussion. The effectiveness of FGD as a strategy in developing critical thinking skills in the educational management course in the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program can be analyzed from several key aspects, such as collaborative, interactive, and reflective aspects (Abidin, 2020; Abidin & Sulaiman, 2024; Asrita & Nurhilza, 2018; Bernstein & Isaac, 2018; Klimovienė et al., 2006; Lintangari et al., 2022).

1. Collaborative Aspects in FGD: One of the main advantages of FGD, its collaborative nature. In the group discussion process, students are encouraged to work together, share ideas, and provide input to each other. In the Educational Management course, the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education students are faced with various case studies related to educational management in madrasahs. By using FGD, students can analyze management problems, such as curriculum management, human resources, and educational facility management collectively. This collaborative process is very effective in honing critical thinking skills because each student must be able to express their opinions, listen to ideas from other group members, and evaluate the various arguments that arise. This collaboration also helps create a dynamic learning environment, where students can learn from each other, support each other, and broaden their horizons on the topic of educational management.
2. Interactive Aspects in FGD: Interactive learning is the main key to developing critical thinking skills. FGD encourages active participation from each student, where they not only listen to lecturers or study the material passively, but also play an active role in the learning process. In group discussions, Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education students are encouraged to ask questions, explore various solutions, and provide arguments based on critical analysis. This process creates a rich dynamic of interaction, where each student must try to think deeply about the material being discussed, evaluate the available information, and provide meaningful contributions to the discussion. For example, in discussing topics related to teaching management strategies in madrasahs, students will not only discuss management theories, but must also evaluate the effectiveness of applying these theories in real contexts in the field.
3. Reflective Aspects in FGD: The effectiveness of FGD also lies in its ability to encourage students to critically reflect on their learning. Through discussions, students are invited to review the arguments they have presented, consider different points of view, and review their understanding of the topics discussed. In the Educational Management course, this reflection is very important because educational management involves complex and broad-impact decisions. For example, in discussions related to human resource management in schools, PGMI students will be invited to reflect on how management decisions can affect the performance of teachers, students, and the educational environment as a whole. This reflection process helps students not only understand the theory but also develop deeper critical thinking skills, which will be very useful when they have to face real challenges in the field as prospective teachers and educational managers.

4. Improving Understanding of Educational Management through FGD: The implementation of FGD in the Educational Management course in the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program also allows students to connect theory with practice. Through group discussions, students can explore real cases that occur in the world of education, analyze the challenges faced in school management, and discuss possible solutions. FGD provides space for students to think critically about how the management theories they have learned can be applied in the context of Islamic education, especially in madrasahs. In group discussions, students can consider various factors that influence educational management in madrasahs, such as local culture, government policies, and community needs. This helps students to develop critical thinking skills that are contextual and relevant to their future professions.
5. Challenges in Implementing FGD and How to Overcome Them: Although FGD has proven effective in developing critical thinking skills, several challenges may be faced in its implementation. One of the main challenges is the involvement of students, which may be uneven, where some students are more dominant in the discussion, while others may be more passive. To overcome this, the role of lecturers as facilitators is very important in creating an inclusive discussion atmosphere and ensuring that every student has the opportunity to participate. In addition, it is important for lecturers to provide clear guidance on discussion topics and provide constructive feedback to students to help them develop their critical thinking skills optimally.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as a learning strategy in the Educational Management course at the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program, Al-Mujaddid Sabak Islamic Institute, has proven effective in developing students' critical thinking skills. Through the collaborative, interactive, and reflective aspects offered by FGD, students can engage in in-depth and meaningful discussions, which not only enrich their understanding of educational management but also hone their ability to think critically in real contexts. Thus, the application of FGD as a learning model is expected to produce prospective teachers who not only understand the theory of educational management but also have strong critical thinking skills in facing challenges in the world of future education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the series of discussions above, it can be concluded that the implementation of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as a learning strategy in the Educational Management course at the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program, Al-Mujaddid Sabak Islamic Institute, is very effective in developing students' critical thinking skills. Through a collaborative, interactive, and reflective discussion process, students are actively involved in expressing and evaluating various perspectives, as well as analyzing real cases in educational management. FGD not only helps students understand educational management theory more deeply but also trains them to think critically in dealing with complex situations in the real world. Although there are challenges in its implementation, the role of lecturers as facilitators and creators of an inclusive discussion atmosphere can overcome these obstacles, so that FGD can be carried out more optimally. Overall, this strategy is effective in preparing students to become prospective teachers who are not only academically competent but also critical and reflective in solving educational problems.

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