

Faith-Based Inquiry as Bounded Openness: Negotiating Revelational Authority and Student Agency in Indonesian Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract

Confessional religious education faces a precise pedagogical problem: students are invited to question and construct meaning, while revelation retains normative authority. This exploratory qualitative case examined how an Islamic Religious Education teacher and students at an Indonesian junior high school negotiated that tension. The multi-method corpus comprised a teacher interview (11 question-answer units), interviews with 8 students across varying participation levels (S1–S8), 4 classroom observation logs (280 minutes across 4 lesson blocks), and document analysis of lesson plans (Modul Ajar) and student worksheets (LKPD). Analyzed through iterative condensation, comparison, and abductive reflexive thematic analysis, the findings show that inquiry operated as bounded openness. Contextual cases, peer discussion, and multiple viewpoints broadened students' understanding of religious teaching and its application; the teacher then re-entered as the agent of verification, distinguishing defensible interpretations from those inconsistent with recognized sources. Students experienced this not as a contradiction but as a division of epistemic labor, moving between peer exploration and teacher clarification. Inquiry therefore shifted the classroom status of religious knowledge from passively received information to an authoritative source encountered interpretively, without treating the truth-status of revelation as undecided. This arrangement proved fragile: a 70-minute lesson block, uneven readiness, classroom noise, and limited device access compressed verification into declaration, eroding the boundary between inquiry and transmission. The article offers a tri-tiered coding hierarchy and a methodologically triangulated specification of how authority and agency are arranged sequentially in confessional inquiry, establishing Faith-Based Inquiry as a testable proposition.

Keywords: bounded openness; faith-based inquiry; guided inquiry; Islamic religious education; revelational authority; qualitative triangulation

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is routinely described as facing a pedagogical tension between teacher authority and student agency, but the confessional classroom confronts a more precise epistemological difficulty. In a subject where revelation and recognized sources carry normative authority, inviting students to question, compare, and construct meaning does not merely redistribute classroom talk. It raises the prior question of what, within a tradition of divine guidance, remains legitimately open to human investigation. Contemporary religious education scholarship has increasingly acknowledged that

knowledge selection, interpretation, and pedagogical purpose cannot be detached from a tradition's account of truth and human formation (Lewin, 2023; Miedema, 2021; Wright & Wright, 2023). The problem, therefore, is not whether active learning can be imported into IRE. It is how learner inquiry can operate when the truth-status of revelation is not itself treated as provisional.

This tension has concrete pedagogical consequences. A transmissive IRE may reduce religious learning to recall and compliance, leaving students unable to interpret teachings in relation to lived problems. Conversely, an unrestricted discovery model risks implying that all religious conclusions are equally valid, detaching classroom discussion from the interpretive constraints that define the tradition. In Indonesian secondary schools, this dilemma is intensified by curriculum reforms that promote critical thinking, student-centered learning, and problem-based inquiry alongside character education and religious literacy. Teachers are expected to foster active engagement without compromising doctrinal integrity, yet they are rarely provided with analytic frameworks that specify how authority and inquiry can coexist in daily instruction.

Inquiry research offers a partial response. Guided inquiry organizes learning around questions, evidence, conclusion, and reflection, and meta-analytic evidence consistently indicates that guidance is most productive when learners possess limited prior knowledge (Alfieri et al., 2011; Furtak et al., 2012; Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016; Pedaste et al., 2015). Recent synthesis further demonstrates that inquiry cycles depend on structured support, clear phase definitions, and calibrated teacher intervention (Chen & Chen, 2025; Dobber et al., 2017; Jegstad, 2023; Urdanivia Alarcon et al., 2023). However, this literature has developed predominantly in science and social studies classrooms, where evidence is empirical, and claims are, in principle, falsifiable. It offers limited guidance for subjects in which authoritative texts serve as normative standards rather than empirical hypotheses.

Religious education scholarship adds the missing interpretive dimension. Jackson's interpretive approach emphasizes the relation among traditions, groups, individuals, and learners' reflexive responses (Jackson, 1997, 2004), while more recent work foregrounds vulnerability, relevant knowledge, and worldview interpretation as conditions for serious classroom engagement rather than as reasons to avoid difficult questions (Ayres, 2021; Miedema, 2021; Wright & Wright, 2023). Islamic education has also seen parallel discussion of the relationship between reason and revelation, and between traditional transmission and contemporary pedagogical renewal (Halstead, 2004; Mu'ti, 2023; Sahin, 2013, 2018; Syafaq et al., 2024). Yet much of this writing remains theoretical or philosophical. It specifies what confessional education ought to aim for, but rarely shows how teachers and students negotiate revelational authority during ordinary classroom talk.

Existing empirical work on IRE in Indonesia has documented important innovations in religious literacy, student-centered *fiqh* learning, teacher creativity, and transformative pedagogy (Asfiati, 2023; Hidayah et al., 2024; Nurpratiwi et al., 2021; Parhan et al., 2024). Studies on dialogical teaching, religious moderation, and autonomy support similarly show that active student participation can strengthen engagement without undermining religious commitment (Daheri, 2022; Mulyana, 2023; Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Rojas-Drummond et al., 2024). What remains under-specified is the precise mechanism by which a teacher maintains

the authority of divine revelation while genuinely opening pedagogical space for student questioning, peer exploration, and interpretive reasoning.

This study addresses that gap through an exploratory, multi-method qualitative case focused on one IRE teacher, eight students across active and passive engagement profiles, four classroom observation sessions, and instructional documents (Modul Ajar and LKPD) at an Indonesian junior high school. The purpose is not to generalize about Indonesian IRE, nor to evaluate learning outcomes. It aims to specify, at the level of teacher prompts, student dialogue, classroom observations, and instructional tasks, how revelational authority and student agency are reconciled in practice.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed an exploratory, multi-method qualitative case design (Yin, 2018). The case is bounded by a single IRE classroom at SMP *Muhammadiyah* Program Khusus Temanggung, Central Java, Indonesia, and by the specific pedagogical problem of enacting guided inquiry when revelation retains normative authority. The multi-method approach triangulates semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to capture both reported perspectives and enacted classroom practices.

The study is exploratory in the precise sense that it seeks to specify a mechanism rather than to test a model. It does not claim population representativeness or causal impact. Its analytic contribution is articulating a provisional, empirically grounded mechanism—Faith-Based Inquiry as bounded openness—and a tri-tiered coding hierarchy that subsequent research across diverse Islamic educational settings can test, refine, or criticize.

Participants, Sampling, and Data Sources

The research site was selected purposively because available school documentation identified an IRE teacher who actively incorporated questioning, contextual cases, and group discussion in regular lessons. The special-program setting is treated as an information-rich case, providing an optimal environment to observe how guided inquiry is structured within an Islamic educational institution.

To ensure data adequacy and source triangulation, data were collected from four complementary sources:

1. **Teacher Interview:** One female IRE/Al-Islam teacher (T1) with extensive experience in secondary PAI instruction, yielding 11 substantive question-and-answer units recorded on 14 April 2026.
2. **Student Interviews:** Eight junior high school students (S1–S8) selected purposively across three participation profiles: highly active verbal contributors (S1–S3), moderate contributors (S4–S6), and quiet/passive students (S7–S8). Interviews comprised 12–15 question-and-answer units per student and were conducted between 17 and 20 April 2026.
3. **Classroom Observations:** We observed four double-period IRE lesson blocks (280 minutes total) during school-based fieldwork in October–December 2025 (Obs 1–Obs

4). Observations focused on real-time classroom discourse, teacher prompt sequences, student peer interaction, and moments of source verification, recorded in structured field notes.

4. **Instructional Document Corpus:** Key instructional materials including the teacher's lesson plans (Modul Ajar PAI), student activity sheets (LKPD), and textbook units covering fiqh and Islamic ethics topics.

Combining an expanded student cohort (n=8) with four classroom observation logs and document analysis meets methodological standards for data adequacy in qualitative research (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Malterud, 2001; Sims & Cilliers, 2025). This multi-source corpus permits systematic cross-verification between what the teacher intended, what students experienced across engagement levels, and what occurred during classroom instruction.

Instruments and Validation

Data collection utilized four primary instruments developed specifically for this study: (a) a semi-structured teacher interview protocol; (b) a semi-structured student interview protocol; (c) a classroom observation scheme tracking discourse phases; and (d) a document analysis checklist evaluating task openness and textual authority anchors. The interview protocols were developed deductively from the study's research questions and inductively from the theoretical intersection of guided inquiry and revelational authority.

Trustworthiness and qualitative rigor were pursued through four explicit methodological measures:

1. **Methodological and Source Triangulation:** Cross-verifying teacher accounts (T1), student accounts (S1–S8), observation field notes (Obs 1–4), and instructional documents (Modul Ajar/LKPD) to identify empirical convergence, nuances, and points of tension.
2. **Member-Checking:** Reviewing interview transcripts and preliminary interpretive summaries with teacher T1 and student representatives (S1, S3) to ensure factual accuracy and authentic representation of classroom experiences.
3. **Peer-Debriefing:** Subjecting the preliminary coding framework and thematic categories to peer debriefing with two senior qualitative scholars specializing in Islamic religious education.
4. **Audit Trail and Coding Hierarchy:** Maintaining a transparent, tri-tiered audit trail linking raw empirical evidence (quotes, field logs, document excerpts) directly to second-order categories and aggregate theoretical dimensions.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection proceeded in two coordinated phases. Fieldwork began with classroom observations and document collection during October–December 2025. Four double-period IRE lessons (70 minutes each) were observed, generating 280 minutes of observational field notes alongside collected Modul Ajar and LKPD artifacts. In April 2026, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews at the school site in a quiet room, in Indonesian, audio-

recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim. The interview protocol explored how inquiry was initiated, how multiple student viewpoints were handled, how off-topic responses were redirected, and what material constraints affected learning.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the iterative logic of data condensation, display, comparison, and conclusion verification (Miles et al., 2020), operationalized through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022). Coding was abductive rather than purely inductive, moving between empirical classroom data and theoretical concepts regarding inquiry pedagogy and revelational authority. To ensure analytic transparency, coding was organized into a three-tiered hierarchy: (1) First-Order Empirical Evidence (raw interview quotes, observation log entries, and document excerpts); (2) Second-Order Categories (patterned pedagogical actions and student perceptions); and (3) Aggregate Theoretical Dimensions (core mechanisms of bounded openness, guided verification, and structural compression).

Ethical Considerations

Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw without consequence. Institutional approval was granted by the school principal, and written informed consent was obtained from the teacher and student guardians. The text preserves anonymity throughout using alphanumeric identifiers (T1, S1–S8, Obs 1–4).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The multi-method analysis produced a patterned, methodologically triangulated account of bounded inquiry in the observed IRE classroom. Students were systematically encouraged to explore meanings and applications through contextual problems and peer dialogue, while the teacher retained responsibility for guiding verification and aligning conclusions with recognized Islamic sources.

Table 1 summarizes cross-source evidence from all four data streams, showing strong convergence among teacher intent, student experience across engagement profiles, classroom observation logs, and instructional documents.

Table 1
Cross-Source Evidence and Methodological Triangulation for the Enacted Inquiry Sequence

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Teacher Account (T1)</i>	<i>Student Accounts (S1–S8)</i>	<i>Classroom Observations (Obs 1–4)</i>	<i>Document Analysis (Modul Ajar/LKPD)</i>	<i>Analytic Interpretation</i>
Contextual Opening	Uses real-life cases and stories to spark curiosity and problem formulation.	Students (S1–S8) confirm lessons start with relatable everyday dilemmas before textbook reading.	Teacher opens with a case of youth honesty in Obs 1 & 2; students actively raise questions.	Modul Ajar specifies 'Pemantik Masalah' based on contemporary youth ethics.	Inquiry begins by making religious concepts problematic and lived rather than abstract.

Dialogic Exploration	Invites multiple student viewpoints before providing definitive explanations.	Active students (S1–S3) enjoy debating; quiet students (S7–S8) feel safer speaking in small groups.	Obs 2 shows 4 student groups presenting differing interpretations of ethical duty.	LKPD features open-ended discussion prompts requiring group consensus.	Perspective plurality is permitted as a provisional stage of active learning.
Guided Verification	Redirects off-topic answers and checks student reasoning against Qur'an/Hadith.	Students explicitly value teacher correction so they learn the 'correct and expected' answer.	Obs 3 records teacher prompting students to read specific verses to verify group claims.	LKPD includes 'Refleksi & Dalil' section requiring textual citation.	Authority operates interpretively and sequentially rather than as upfront transmission.
Participation Scaffolding	Uses heterogeneous grouping to support quieter or less prepared students.	Quiet students (S7–S8) report reduced fear of error when discussing with peers first.	Obs 1 & 3 show group leaders encouraging passive peers to read LKPD answers aloud.	Modul Ajar outlines collaborative group roles (Chairman, Speaker, Writer).	Student agency is relational and scaffolded rather than purely individualistic.
Structural Constraints	Reports that 70-min blocks force teacher to supply answers when time runs short.	S1–S6 report feeling rushed during discussions; search tasks curtailed by device limits.	Obs 4 shows teacher truncating discussion due to bell and declaring conclusion directly.	Modul Ajar allocates only 15 mins for verification and reflection phase.	Incomplete inquiry is caused by structural time compression rather than pedagogical failure.

Note. Evidence triangulated from teacher interview (T1), student interviews (S1–S8, n=8), 4 classroom observation logs (Obs 1–Obs 4, 280 mins), and instructional documents (Modul Ajar and LKPD).

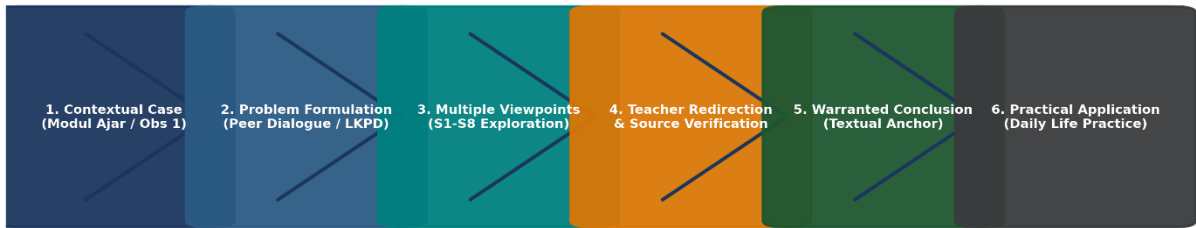


Figure 1
Enacted Sequence of Bounded Inquiry in the Observed Classroom

Note. The sequence represents the empirically verified order observed across 4 double-period lessons (Obs 1–4) and corroborated by teacher T1, students S1–S8, and LKPD activity structures.

To provide full analytical transparency and meet qualitative audit trail standards, Table 2 details the three-tiered coding hierarchy that links first-order empirical evidence directly to second-order categories and aggregate theoretical dimensions.

Table 2
Three-Tiered Coding Hierarchy Matrix for Faith-Based Inquiry

<i>Aggregate Theoretical Dimension</i>	<i>Second-Order Category</i>	<i>First-Order Empirical Evidence (Quotes, Field Notes, Documents)</i>
Bounded Exploration	Contextual Problem Formulation	T1: 'I provide a stimulus in the form of a story or real-life case...' S2: 'We start with everyday problems before opening the textbook.' Obs 1: Teacher presents a case on youth digital ethics; students ask 5 spontaneous questions. Modul Ajar: 'Orientasi peserta didik pada masalah kontekstual.'
Bounded Exploration	Dialogic Multi-Perspective Exploration	T1: 'I do not accept only one answer. I look for other points of view...' S1: 'I like when friends have different opinions so we can compare them.' S7 (quiet student): 'In small groups, I dare to give my opinion.' Obs 2: Groups 1–4 present distinct applications of Islamic ethical rules.
Guided Verification	Decentred Authority Scaffolding	T1: 'Inquiry lets students discover meaning rather than just memorise.' S3: 'Teacher asks us to explain why an answer is right or wrong.' Obs 3: Teacher refrains from answering immediately, prompting: 'Which verse supports that?' LKPD: Prompts require students to write arguments before teacher confirmation.
Guided Verification	Textual Verification & Correction	T1: 'We discuss and find the correct answer that is expected.' S1: 'I want the teacher to explain deeper afterwards so we don't misunderstand.' Obs 3: Teacher redirects an off-topic interpretation by pointing to Surah Al-Hujurat. LKPD: Includes mandatory 'Konfirmasi Dalil & Versi Sahih' section.
Structural Compression	Temporal Compression	T1: 'When time is short, I must supply the answer directly.' S4: 'Sometimes discussion stops suddenly because the bell rings.' Obs 4: Teacher cuts short group debate at 65-min mark to deliver final summary. Modul Ajar: Allocated 15-minute verification window proves insufficient in practice.
Structural Compression	Resource & Readiness Constraints	T1: 'Uneven readiness and limited devices restrict independent search.' S8: 'We shared one phone for four students, so searching took long.' Obs 2: Two groups stall due to slow internet; teacher provides oral source summary.

Note. The coding matrix illustrates the abductive transition from first-order evidence (interviews, field notes, documents) to aggregate dimensions.

Enacting Inquiry under Revelational Authority

The teacher framed inquiry as a means for students to understand and “discover the meaning” of IRE so that Islamic values could be applied in daily life. The object of discovery was therefore meaning and application, not whether revelation was true:

“One of the goals of guided inquiry is that students do not merely listen and memorize the lesson, but truly understand it and discover its meaning so that Islamic values can be applied in their daily lives.” (T1-Q1)

This framing aligns with Islamic educational accounts that link knowledge to ethical formation and disciplined engagement with tradition (Halstead, 2004; Sahin, 2013). It also qualifies generic constructivist language: students were not invited to invent religious truth, but to enter into an interpretive relationship with an authoritative tradition. Analysis of the teacher's lesson plans (Modul Ajar) confirmed this orientation, specifying learning objectives focused on contextual application rather than doctrinal revision.

Student accounts across active (S1–S3) and passive (S7–S8) profiles corroborated this framing. Active student S1 described the purpose of inquiry as understanding rather than memorization, distinguishing between questions that invited her opinion and those that required textual verification. Passive student S7 noted that working through contextual problems made the material less intimidating, allowing her to understand the practical reason behind religious commands before reading the formal textual proofs.

Negotiating Discovery and Truth

Classroom observations (Obs 1–Obs 4) and interview data confirmed that the teacher's pedagogical sequence combined openness and closure. She began with a story or real-life case, asked students to formulate a problem, invited possible answers, and used discussion to conclude. Multiple viewpoints were welcomed, but the lesson moved systematically toward a recognized normative anchor:

“I provide a stimulus in the form of a story or a real-life case. Students formulate the problem, discuss possible answers, and draw a conclusion. They become more active because they are not only sitting and listening to a lecture.” (T1-Q3)

When one response was offered, the teacher deliberately sought other points of view. She then brought the class toward what she described as the correct or expected answer. This is the critical moment in which discovering meaning encounters revelational authority:

“I do not accept only one answer. I look for other points of view, then we discuss them and find the correct answer that is expected.” (T1-Q6)

Rather than interpreting this closure as a failure of inquiry, the triangulated evidence suggests a change in the timing and function of authority. The teacher did not provide the conclusion at the outset. Authority was temporarily decentred so that students could formulate ideas, encounter alternative views, and recognize the need for verification. When the teacher re-entered, she did not suppress inquiry; instead, she anchored student reasoning in the tradition's textual sources. Observation 3 vividly illustrated this dynamic: when two student groups presented conflicting views on social media ethics, the teacher did not

immediately declare a winner, but asked both groups to inspect Surah Al-Hujurat verse 6 on LKPD worksheets to evaluate their own claims.

Student accounts strongly supported this bounded pattern. Students across participation profiles explicitly welcomed teacher verification:

"I like this method because students become active in asking and answering questions, but I also like the teacher to explain the material more deeply afterward." (S1-Q11)

This finding complicates binary accounts of either teacher-centered authority or student-centered freedom. For students, exploration and explanation complemented each other. They first asked questions and discussed with peers; then they sought teacher confirmation to ensure their conclusions were defensible. Students exercised agency during the open phase, while authority provided epistemic security during closure.

The Social and Structural Conditions of Inquiry

The third research question examined what constraints and adaptive practices shaped inquiry in practice. Multi-method analysis revealed a distinct tension between the pedagogical ideal of bounded openness and the material conditions under which it was enacted. The most consequential constraint was temporal. The lesson comprised two periods totaling 70 minutes, and observational field notes (Obs 4) showed that when time ran short, the teacher directly supplied the conclusion rather than guiding students through textual verification. This is the precise point at which bounded openness becomes fragile: time pressure compresses verification into direct declaration, threatening to turn inquiry back into traditional transmission.

The second constraint was unequal student readiness. While active students (S1–S3) thrived during open debate, quieter students (S7–S8) initially hesitated. The teacher's adaptive use of heterogeneous peer groups successfully scaffolded participation, as passive student S8 explained: 'In the big class I was afraid of saying the wrong thing, but in my group my friends encouraged me to read our LKPD answer.' However, observation logs also revealed that peer groups could create subtle conformity pressures when stronger students dominated group report writing. The third constraint was device and resource availability. Limited smartphone access during class forced students to share devices (Obs 2), slowing independent digital source verification and prompting the teacher to provide oral source summaries. While this adaptive response maintained lesson momentum, it limited students' independent exploration of sources.

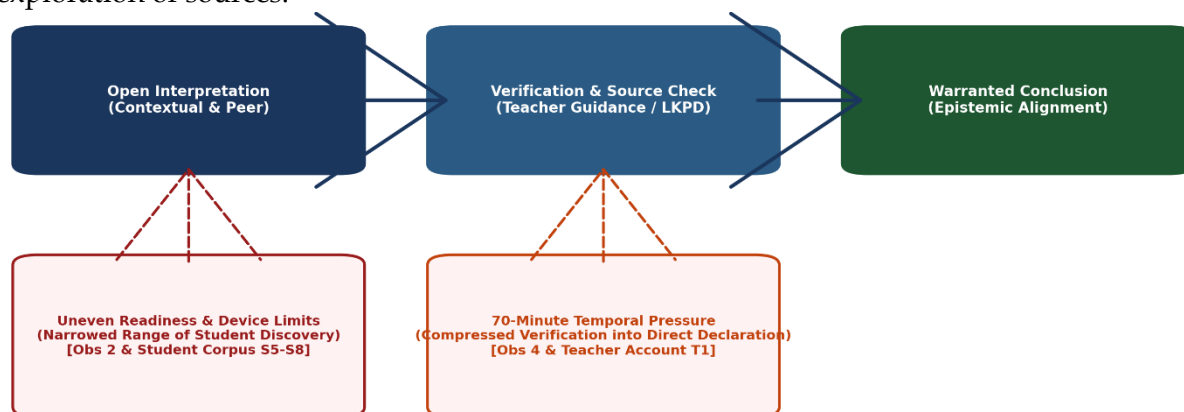


Figure 2

Points of Fragility in the Enacted Inquiry Sequence

Note. Analytic points of structural fragility identified across teacher interviews, student cohorts (S1–S8), and 4 classroom observation sessions.

Table 3

Constraints and Adaptations in the Enacted Inquiry Sequence

<i>Constraint</i>	<i>Reported & Observed Adaptation</i>	<i>Consequence Reported by Students (S1–S8)</i>
70-minute double period	Teacher supplies conclusion directly when time runs short (Obs 4).	Discussion sometimes felt rushed; verification phase compressed.
Uneven student readiness	Heterogeneous grouping and collaborative LKPD roles (Obs 1 & 3).	Quieter students spoke more in groups but stronger peers wrote reports.
Limited device access	Teacher provides oral source summaries and printed LKPD verses.	Search-dependent verification tasks were curtailed or simplified.
Unfinished inquiry cycles	Continuation in next meeting or via class messaging group.	Learning extended beyond class time, maintaining inquiry continuity.

Note. Summary of structural constraints, teacher adaptations, and student experiences across all data sources.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this multi-method case contributes a conceptual specification that the general inquiry literature has neglected. Guided inquiry research consistently demonstrates that scaffolding improves learning outcomes (Alfieri et al., 2011; Furtak et al., 2012; Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016). However, it rarely addresses subjects where authoritative texts serve as normative standards. Faith-Based Inquiry specifies how inquiry operates when the truth-status of revelation is not treated as provisional: authority is decentred during exploration and re-engaged during verification, establishing a division of epistemic labor between peer discovery and authoritative textual alignment.

Practically, the findings demonstrate that bounded openness cannot rely solely on teacher improvisation. It requires structural support at three levels: (1) designing multi-meeting inquiry units so that verification is not rushed; (2) structuring LKPD worksheets with explicit textual verification prompts; and (3) preparing teachers to manage dialogic transition moments where student opinions meet normative textual anchors.

Discussion

This study's findings specify a sequential mechanism – Faith-Based Inquiry as bounded openness – through which revelational authority and student agency are practically reconciled in confessional Islamic Religious Education. This section interprets the mechanism's underlying logic, situates it within and against existing scholarship, and draws out its theoretical and practical implications for Islamic pedagogy.

Interpretation and Mechanism: The Division of Epistemic Labor

The study's central empirical insight is that inquiry in the observed IRE classroom did not operate as an unrestricted constructivist free-for-all, nor did it collapse into traditional transmission. Instead, it functioned as a structured division of epistemic labor. During the exploratory phase, authority was deliberately decentred: the teacher opened with contextual dilemmas, invited peer discussion, and permitted multiple interpretations to surface. During the verification phase, authority was re-engaged: the teacher redirected claims toward Qur'anic and Hadith anchors, asking students to inspect specific verses before accepting or rejecting peer conclusions.

This sequencing explains why students across participation profiles experienced the arrangement as coherent rather than contradictory. Active students valued the chance to compare viewpoints; quiet students valued the safety of small-group exploration before public verification; and both groups explicitly welcomed teacher correction as a way to ensure they understood the “correct and expected” answer. The mechanism therefore operates through a temporal separation of functions: exploration is the phase in which student agency is exercised, and verification is the phase in which revelational authority performs its normative role.

This finding resonates with recent scholarship on dialogic pedagogy in Islamic education, which suggests that teachers who adopt dialogical approaches maintain intellectual leadership while encouraging active student engagement, and that such authority can be reinterpreted as relational rather than diminished (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2024). The observed teacher's practice exemplifies this: she did not abandon authority during exploration, but she temporarily suspended its declarative function so that students could encounter the interpretive problem for themselves.

Critical Comparison: Extending Inquiry and Religious Education Scholarship

The general inquiry literature has long established that guidance is most productive when learners possess limited prior knowledge, and that structured support—clear phase definitions, calibrated intervention, and scaffolded tasks—is essential for productive inquiry (Alfieri et al., 2011; Furtak et al., 2012; Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016; Pedaste et al., 2015). The present study extends this consensus into a domain that inquiry research has largely neglected: a subject in which authoritative texts function as normative standards rather than empirical hypotheses.

Where the science education literature treats inquiry as culminating in evidence-based conclusions that are in principle revisable, Faith-Based Inquiry culminates in textual alignment. The teacher's question in Observation 3—“Which verse supports that?”—does not invite falsifying revelation; it invites evaluating whether a peer's interpretation is defensible within the tradition. This distinction matters. It suggests that the scaffolding literature's emphasis on “reducing degrees of freedom” and “direction maintenance” (Dobber et al., 2017) requires a confessional adaptation: the goal is not to constrain inquiry toward empirical discovery, but to channel it toward interpretive accountability.

The study also qualifies a persistent binary in religious education scholarship between teacher-centered transmission and student-centered exploration. Students in this study did

not experience teacher verification as a suppression of their agency; they experienced it as epistemic security. This aligns with arguments that vulnerability and relevant knowledge condition serious classroom engagement rather than reasons to avoid difficult questions (Ayres, 2021; Miedema, 2021). The teacher’s re-entry during verification did not foreclose inquiry; it completed it.

However, the findings also reveal a point of fragility that the existing literature has under-theorized. Under temporal compression—the 70-minute lesson block—verification collapsed into declaration. When time ran short, the teacher supplied conclusions directly, and students reported feeling rushed. At this point, the distinction between bounded openness and traditional transmission became blurred. This is not merely a practical inconvenience; it is a structural vulnerability of the mechanism itself. Recent research on inquiry in religious education has similarly noted that scaffolding often limits students’ freedom to explore, resulting in limited epistemic agency (Kim, 2021). The present study specifies the precise condition under which this limitation becomes acute: when the verification phase is compressed, authority ceases to function interpretively and reverts to transmission.

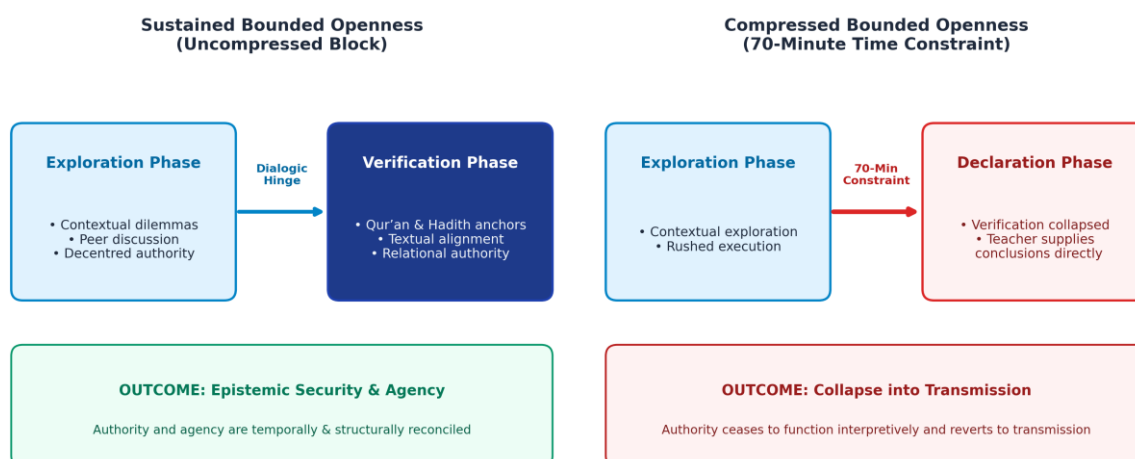


Figure 3

The Dialogic Hinge: Temporal Compression and the Collapse of Bounded Openness

Note. The figure illustrates the empirically identified fragility of Faith-Based Inquiry under temporal pressure, as documented in Observation 4 and corroborated by teacher and student accounts.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes a specification that neither the general inquiry literature nor the religious education literature has provided: a sequential account of how authority and agency are temporally arranged in confessional inquiry. The mechanism is not “student-centered learning with occasional teacher correction.” Instead, it is a structured alternation between decentred exploration and authoritative verification, with each phase serving a distinct epistemic function.

This specification has practical implications at three levels. First, at the unit-design level, the findings show that bounded openness cannot be sustained within a single 70-minute lesson block. Verification requires time for students to inspect sources, compare interpretations, and receive reasoned correction. Multi-meeting inquiry units, in which exploration and verification are distributed across sessions, would protect the mechanism from temporal compression. Second, at the task-design level, the LKPD worksheets observed in this study already included a “Refleksi & Dalil” section requiring textual citation. This structural feature should be strengthened and made non-negotiable, so that student exploration is always oriented toward eventual textual accountability. Third, at the teacher-preparation level, teachers need explicit training in managing the transition between exploration and verification—what might be called the “dialogic hinge” of confessional inquiry. Without such preparation, the transition is vulnerable to improvisation and collapse under pressure.

Implications for Islamic Studies: Bounded Openness and Wasatiyyah

For the broader discourse of Islamic pedagogy, this mechanism offers an empirically grounded instantiation of a middle path (*wasatiyyah*) between two pedagogically inadequate extremes. A purely transmissive IRE reduces religious knowledge to recall and compliance, leaving students unequipped to interpret teachings in relation to lived problems. An unrestricted discovery model, conversely, risks implying that all religious conclusions are equally valid, detaching classroom discussion from the interpretive constraints that define the tradition. Bounded openness charts a course between these positions: it treats revelation as authoritative while treating its meaning and application as legitimately open to student investigation.

This arrangement is consistent with classical Islamic scholarly practice, in which *ijtihad*—independent reasoning—operated within the constraints of revealed sources and recognized interpretive methods. The teacher’s practice in this study can be understood as a classroom-level analog of that tradition: students were invited to reason, but their reasoning was ultimately accountable to the textual sources. This connection suggests that Faith-Based Inquiry is not an import into Islamic education but a pedagogical articulation of an epistemic disposition already present within the tradition. Future research might explore this connection more directly, examining how teachers invoke or implicitly enact classical scholarly norms when managing the transition from exploration to verification.

Table 4
Mechanism, Fragility, and Pedagogical Response in Faith-Based Inquiry

Mechanism Component	Empirical Manifestation	Point of Fragility	Pedagogical Response
Contextual opening	Teacher presents real-life case; students formulate problems	None observed	Maintain as entry point; link cases to textual sources early

Mechanism Component	Empirical Manifestation	Point of Fragility	Pedagogical Response
Dialogic exploration	Peer discussion; multiple viewpoints permitted	Uneven readiness; conformity pressure in groups	Heterogeneous grouping with structured roles
Guided verification	Teacher redirects to Qur'an/Hadith; students inspect verses	Temporal compression collapses verification into declaration	Multi-meeting units; protected verification time
Textual anchoring	LKPD requires citation of dalil	Limited device access impedes independent search	Printed source packets; teacher-supplied oral summaries as fallback

Note. Mechanism components derived from triangulated evidence across teacher interviews, student interviews, classroom observations, and instructional documents.

Limitations

The findings must be interpreted in light of the study's methodological scope. While data adequacy was substantially strengthened through method triangulation (combining teacher interviews, eight student interviews across participation profiles, four classroom observation logs, and instructional document analysis), the study remains bounded by a single special-program school site. Future research should test Faith-Based Inquiry's applicability across diverse school types (*madrassahs*, public secondary schools) and different Islamic topics.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how revelational authority and student agency are practically negotiated in confessional Islamic Religious Education. By triangulating teacher accounts, student perspectives across engagement profiles (S1–S8), classroom observation logs (Obs 1–4), and instructional documents (Modul Ajar and LKPD), the research specifies a sequential mechanism termed Faith-Based Inquiry.

Inquiry operated as bounded openness. Contextual problems and peer dialogue opened religious concepts to active student exploration, while the teacher re-entered during closure to verify conclusions against recognized Islamic sources. Students experienced this arrangement as a coherent division of epistemic labor rather than a pedagogical contradiction. However, this mechanism proved structurally fragile and, under temporal and resource constraints, compressed into traditional transmission. These empirical insights provide a grounded foundation for future multi-site, quantitative research on inquiry pedagogy in Islamic education.

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DECLARATIONS

<i>Declaration Category</i>	<i>Statement Details</i>
Use of AI Statement	The author(s) declare(s) that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used in the writing, analysis, or generation of empirical data for this manuscript.
Authors' Contributions	All authors contributed substantially to this manuscript. Maulani Sayyidati Abrori contributed to conceptualization, fieldwork, data analysis, and initial drafting. Indah Nurhidayati contributed to methodology design, theoretical framing, and qualitative synthesis. Izzun Khoiru Nissa contributed to data triangulation, document analysis, and manuscript revision. Alwan Arhan contributed to literature contextualization, critical review, and final manuscript editing.
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