
Critical Thinking in Islam: What and How Its Practices

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Abstract

Studies on critical thinking in Islam, both in English and Arabic, are rare. From this an overview research, we explore the concept of critical thinking within Islamic tradition and its practices. A literature review is employed to collect the research data. The findings of this study showed that several points: foundations of critical thinking in Islamic teachings, the role of ijihad, critical thinking according to Islamic philosophers, education and thinking in Islamic context, and practical applications of critical thinking in Islam. This overview research highlights that the principles of critical thinking are an integral part of the Islamic intellectual tradition and remain necessary for the religion's engagement with the modern world. Hence, it is hoped to open insight into Islamic critical thinking. Apart from that, it will be useful for further research in exploring the potential of critical thinking in Islamic tradition and applying it to a better Muslim life.

Keywords: *Critical Thinking, Intellectual, Islam*

1. INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is the ability to rate some information and make logical judgments impartially (Bailin et al., 1999a, 1999b; Ennis, 1996; Halpern, 2013; Lau, 2011; Lv et al., 2024; Willingham, 2007) . This is widely acknowledged as a crucial talent in contemporary education and the professional environment. Also, critical thinking refers to actively and systematically analysing and evaluating information to obtain an accurate and trustworthy understanding of the world (Halpern, 2013; Miri et al., 2007a). Another approach to characterize it is rational, contemplative, accountable, and proficient cognition, concentrating on determining what to believe or do (Rahim et al., 2019). Moreover, critical thinking is a skill that can help people survive in this huge information era (Alfia et al., 2020; Maslakhatin, 2016).

Meanwhile, a critical thinker can ask pertinent questions, obtain relevant data, organize it creatively and efficiently, apply logic to it, and draw conclusions about the world that are trustworthy and dependable and that allow one to exist and function properly within it (Facione, 1998). Critical thinking is an important aspect of human cognition used for rational decision-making, knowledge advancement, problem-solving, decision-making, and other (Stanovich & Stanovich, 2010). Of course, this ability requires several fact analyzes to find patterns, judge, evaluate arguments, and ask for information in a good systematic manner (Abrami et al., 2015; Suter, 2011). Enhancing people' thinking capability to enable them to apply it in their social lives and increase their problem-solving skills is another crucial objective of critical thinking (Miri et al., 2007b; Nurfazri, 2022; Nurfazri et al., 2024; Snyder & Snyder, 2008).

Furthermore, in religious traditions, including Islam, critical thinking is crucial in studying, interpreting and applying texts to religious principles. In Islamic culture, critical thinking is not only in line with religious teachings but is deeply rooted in intellectual history and spirituality. Islam, one of the world's

largest religions, has a long legacy of intellectual study and scientific conversation. Islam emphasizes the value of knowledge ('ilm) and urges its followers to seek insight through thinking and reasoning. The Qu'ran and Hadith, which are the fundamental sources of Islamic teachings, constantly exhort Muslims to seriously meditate on Allah Ta'ala (The most glorified, the highest) signs in the cosmos and uses their reason to separate truth from untruth.

Several studies have conducted by researchers related to this topic. First comes from Tampio (2013). The researcher explored how a prominent European Muslim scholar, Tariq Ramadan, promotes critical Islam in his appeal for a moratorium on stoning, his argument for the reformation of fatwa committees, and his understanding of the Arab Awakening. Second comes from Malik (2019). He described the Western viewpoint of critical thinking on Argumentum ad Hominem (Argument Directed at the Person) and then presented its critical evaluation from Islamic perspective. Third comes from Rahim et al. (2019). The researchers analyzed how to apply Islamic perspective on critical thinking in teaching halal management program. Fourth comes from Yusuf (2020). He explored the opportunities of introducing critical thinking (Tafakhur) framework in the educational curriculum of Muslim educational institutions. Last but not least comes from Junoh et al. (2021). They investigated the similarities and differences between Islamic and Western critical thinking.

Different from previous research, this research is an overview of research that prioritizes critical thinking in Islam and its practices. This aims to open insight into Islamic critical thinking. Apart from that, it will be useful for further research in exploring the potential of critical thinking in Islamic traditions and applying it to a better Muslim life.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied a qualitative approach with a descriptive and critical analysis. A literature study was selected as a data collection (Knopf, 2006). It intended to explore, analyze, and synthesize prior research pertaining to the topic being researched (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This method could explain how and what the concept of critical thinking in Islam and its practical. The phases that this study involved are as follows:

1. Topic identification: Determining the research subject and scope of the relevant literature
2. Literature search: Conducting a search for related literature utilizing Qur'an, books, notes, newspapers, magazines, scientific journals, electronic databases, and other information sources connected to the research subject.
3. Source evaluation: Assessing the chosen sources by considering their quality, validity, and reliability.
4. Literature analysis: Conducting a thorough examination of the chosen literature by identifying significant discoveries, recurring themes, and developing patterns.
5. Literature synthesis: Integrating the conclusions derived from the examined literature to gain a thorough understanding of the study subject.
6. Report writing: Producing a comprehensive literature review report based on the conducted research and analysis.

Once the adequacy of the acquired data was confirmed, it was subjected to analysis, and ultimately, a conclusion was reached. This research can provide a comprehensive overview of the research topic by utilizing this strategy and drawing from existing literature on the subject.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

a. Foundations of Critical Thinking in Islamic Teachings

Critical thinking is not a new concept used to analyze, interpret and evaluate information. This ability has long been deeply rooted in various intellectual cultures. One of these traditions is Islamic teachings. Historically, Islam has emphasized the importance of using reason, reflection and knowledge. Islamic teachings strongly emphasize the essentials of rationality and contemplation. Moreover, the Qur'an, the Islamic sacred book, regularly encourages followers to think, reflect, ponder, and apply their intellect. Several verses of the Qur'an ask humanity to observe nature and reflect on its signs (verses) to understand the creator. As mention in Surah Al-Baqarah and Al-Imran "This is the Book (Qur'an)! There is no doubt about it—a guide for those mindful of Allah" (Surah Al-Baqarah verse 2) and "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the day and night, there are signs for people of reason" (Surah Al-Imran verse 190).

Furthermore, the Arabic word "Tafakkur" (تفكير), which is the activity of thinking, contemplating, and reasoning all the conditions that occur in the universe, often used in the Qur'an (Masykur & Gunawan, 2021). As mention in several verses "Do they not then reflect on the Quran? Or are there locks upon their hearts?" (Surah Muhammad verse 24) dan "And He shows you His signs. Now which of Allah's signs will you deny?" (Surah Ghafir verse 81). These two verses explain that believers should reflect on the signs of Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest) in the world around them.

Besides, the use of reason is not just limited to the spiritual context; it should extend to all aspects of life. The Qur'an advocates using the fundamental aspect of critical thinking in inquiry and questioning. This can also be understood from the historical story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), who questioned the idolatrous practices of his people and searched for the true God. In his journey, Prophet Ibrahim used a pattern of critical questioning and reasoning that led him to recognize Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest). The story explains the importance of critical thinking in reaching the truth.

On the other hand, the Hadith, sayings, and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) further reinforce the value of knowledge and intellectual inquiry. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim" (Hadith narrated by Ibn Majah from Anas ra). The Hadith tells us the importance of acquiring knowledge and engaging in critical thinking.

More than that, the interaction of Prophet Muhammad SAW (PBUH) with his companions often used dialog and discussion that asked everyone to think and reason. One example is the story of the Battle of Badr. Before the war began, Prophet Muhammad SAW (PBUH) consulted with his companions about the strategy to be used. This lesson shows the importance of collective thinking and decision-making. The thinking resulted in three facets of strategy: the first is knowledge of strength, both one's strength and the opponent's strength; the second is the effort in creating conditions that can support the victory of the war, including strategic positions, a single leader, mock battles, row formations, battle tactics, and moral mobilization, the third is the selection of a good battlefield (Muhotimah, 2011). This example illustrates that critical thinking has long been practiced directly by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (PBUH).

b. The Role of Ijtihad

Ijtihad as a key idea in Islamic jurisprudence is the process of reaching a legal conclusion through an independent interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH) (Weiss, 1978). Since collective ijtihad helps to answer complicated, modern issues and tends to lessen the fanaticism of Islamic law schools, it is also seen as a suitable solution to the intellectual crisis facing the Muslim world (Hosen, 2004). Of course, this way calls for in-depth critical thinking as well as the capacity to adapt concepts to novel circumstances. Hence, ijtihad is not only recommended but also an essential talent for Islamic academics, Kyai, and Ulama.

When performing ijtihad, Mujtahid (the individual performing ijtihad) will be held accountable by a group of jurists working together, not by a single jurist (Hosen, 2004). Besides, the Qur'an provides support for collective ijtihad "It is out of Allah's mercy that you 'O Prophet' have been lenient with them. Had you been cruel or hard-hearted, they would have certainly abandoned you. So pardon them, ask Allah's forgiveness for them, and consult with them in 'conducting' matters. Once you make a decision, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust in Him." (Surah Al-Imran verse 159) and "who respond to their Lord, establish prayer, conduct their affairs by mutual consultation, and donate from what We have provided for them". (Surah As-Shura vers 38). It also supports to the Prophet's sayings.

'I ('Ali bin Abi Talib) said to the Prophet, 'O, Prophet, [what if] there is a case among us, while neither revelation comes, nor the Sunnah exists.' The Prophet replied, '[you should] have meetings with the scholars – or in another version: the pious servants – and consult with them. Do not make a decision only by a single opinion.

According to Imam al-Ghazali in Hosen (2004), to achieve the status of Mujtahid, the jurist must fulfil other conditions in addition to the two prerequisites indicated above, as well as:

- 1) Know the five hundred verses needed in law; committing them to memory is not a condition.
- 2) To access pertinent Hadith literature, one simply needs to possess a dependable copy of Abu Dawud's or Bayhaqī's collection, rather than commit its contents to memory.
- 3) Know the substance of furu' works and the points susceptible to ijma', so that he does not deviate from the established laws. If he cannot achieve this condition, he must ensure that the legal view he has arrived at does not contradict the opinion of a recognized jurist.
- 4) Know the procedures by which legal evidence is derived from the texts.
- 5) Know Arabic; a comprehensive understanding of its concepts is not a prerequisite.
- 6) Know the norms regulating the doctrine of abrogation (naskh). However, the jurist need not be intimately familiar with the details of this theory; it suffices to prove that the verse or the Hadith in question had not been abrogated.
- 7) Investigate the authenticity of the Hadith. It may not be questioned if Muslims have regarded the Hadith as reliable. If a transmitter was known for probity, all Hadith related to him are to be accepted. Full knowledge of the disciplines of Hadith critique is not required.

More than it, the jurist, according to Al-Ghazali, needs to be knowledgeable in Islamic legal theory (usul al-fiqh), the science of Hadith ('ilm al-hadis), and the science of the Arabic language ('ilm al-lughah).

c. **Critical Thinking According to Islamic Philosophers**

Throughout Islamic history, there were several Islamic philosophers who provided examples of critical thinking applied to life. These philosophers include Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Al-Ghazali. They made very significant contributions to philosophy, medicine, and science. This contribution also aligns with the results of critical thinking and empirical evidence, thereby expanding our understanding. Apart from that, these figures have integrated critical thinking into their respective beliefs, which shows proof that intellectual rigor and spirituality can coexist in harmony.

Furthermore, the definition of critical thinking from Islamic scholars and philosophers comes from the understanding of human reason based on what is stated in the Qur'an and Hadith. It also relates to the theory of knowledge and epistemology in Islamic teachings (Junoh et al., 2021). Although the term "Critical Thinking" is not found in its entirety in the literature of Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Ghazali, they have systematically researched and analyzed critical thinking through debate, especially about the mind and logic which is explained extensively by them.

According to Al-Farabi, the definition of critical thinking is clear from the description of the division of reason in human theory (Nazari). Al-Farabi describes reason as divided into three: material reason, actual reason, and acquired reason. In addition, according to the philosopher Al-Farabi, reason or thinking power has a special place as the object of its understanding, including metaphysical thinking related to formation. This idea of the ability to think is closely related to the synthesis of neuroscience, which makes sense because neuroscience can reveal the contents of the brain, including the mind. Al-Farabi categorized reason into two main categories: theoretical reason, which serves as a source of inspiration for the soul, and practical reason, which deals with technical issues and skills (Rofdlil & Suyadi, 2020).

On the other hand, Al-Farabi classifies the stages of reason divided into three levels. The first level is the beginning of the development of human thought, which will continue to improve. In the second level, humans will engage in a critical thinking process, which is used to filter information thoroughly and focus on every aspect discussed. Meanwhile, the human intellectual level has yet to reach the full truth. The position of reason is at the third level, which is an ability that is only possessed by a certain group of people with the achievement of true knowledge. At this stage of the refinement of reason, these groups must strive to design ideas based on the results of thinking and exploring in-depth, analyzing, interpreting, explaining, and describing the information they find.

Furthermore, Al-Farabi considers intellectuality important in science, using critical thinking methods and ideas from Greek philosophers. In this context, Al-Farabi is considered a neoplatonist because of his ability to synthesize the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle (Majid, 2019). In addition, Al-Farabi's thinking is based on the Quran and As-Sunnah (Bakar & Ahmad, 1992). Finally, if a person's thinking ability is combined in accordance with Islamic values, then he will be able to reach the truth.

In addition to Al-Farabi, Islamic scientists such as Ibn Sina discussed the concept of thought. Ibn Sina added one more level from the first and second levels proposed by Al-Farabi, with the addition of common sense (*al-'aql al-malakah*) (Ibn Sina, 1938). From here, human thinking power begins to be trained in abstract thinking. That is, any information received by a person

will pass through examination and understanding effectively in order to obtain the truth at the next level of intelligence. This is the same as what Al-Faribi's thinking is.

Apart from the two Islamic philosophers above, Imam Al-Ghazali also defined the word "mind" into four categories. First, the mind, which is an instinct (Gharizah), can mark humans as recipients of knowledge in the form of thinking and having a deep understanding of abstract things. Second, an instinct for knowledge arises from children who can think. Third, experience is a place to gain knowledge. Fourth, a person who can know cause and effect through the power built in a person and control every worldly instinct he has with the aim of the aspects of worldly and afterlife happiness.

Although Al-Ghazali has established a fourth approach to "thinking" that is equivalent to the levels of the two previous philosophers, his thinking uses a more religious approach. It connects the soul with spirituality (Ali et al., 2023). In this context, Al-Ghazali describes the mind as the Prime Minister (Vizier) who is used to handle the administrative affairs of a city to support a King. So, it cannot be denied that the mind plays an important role in controlling human behavior and thinking so as not to drop self-esteem due to wrong decision-making. The research of Mujib & Mudzakir (2001) states that in reaching the fourth level, the second and third levels must be involved in various logical and rational activities, such as experience, fair observation, interpretation, pondering, and remembering. Added by Ismail et al. (2016) and Kadri (2015) revealed that the terms above are critical thinking units contained in the Qur'an. This means that Al-Ghazali's thoughts, especially at levels two and three, have ties to the concept of critical thinking and are in line with the two previous philosophers.

d. Education and Thinking in Islamic Context

Historically, Islamic educational institutions have emphasized critical thinking. Islamic education, such as Madrasah, has included the subjects of logic (Mantiq), rhetoric, and philosophy. This aims to train students to think deeply and critically. One method of Islamic education that utilizes reason with existing reality is Talqiyyan Fikriyyan (Marinda et al., 2024).

As stated by An Nabhani (2016), a method refers to a standardized and methodical approach to conducting an activity, which is informed by gathered facts and concepts. Besides, Karman in Sari (2018) argued that Islamic learning methods involve the delivery (khithab) and acceptance (talaqqiy) of ideas from teachers to students. Hence, Islamic pedagogical approaches can be tailored to attain certain educational objectives, namely: a) cultivating an Islamic character among pupils, b) acquiring proficiency in Islamic tsaqafah (knowledge), and c) attaining mastery in science and technology (Retnanto, 2017). Talqiyyan Fikriyyan is a practical approach to implementing ideas, as opposed to a theoretical concept based solely on sensory perception. It aims to validate the factual outcomes of the evaluation process. The brain receives information from the five senses to verify the accuracy of the data obtained throughout the appraisal process (An Nabhani, 2008).

Talqiyyan Fikriyyan method is a method of transferring knowledge to others as thought by transferring the results of sensing the facts through the five senses into the brain and then connecting with previous information that has been proven to be certain and used to interpret the facts. Talqiyyan Fikriyyan learning method is a way to apply or realize an idea so that it can be applied and is not just an empty theory or philosophy by understanding the nature of the facts obtained from the study process by perceiving or sensing the facts through the five

senses, then from the five senses transferred to the brain and sensing the facts accompanied by a number of previous information that is true certainty used in interpreting the facts.

The essence of this method is learning, which is designed by optimizing all components of students' thinking. It starts from the understanding that learning will go well when students are able to do their thinking activities optimally. According to An Nabhani, thinking (reason) is the transfer of sensing facts through the five senses into the brain accompanied by previous information used to interpret these facts. The components of thinking must include facts, a normal human brain, five senses, and prior information. The four components of thinking (reason) must be prepared so that thinking activities can be realized. The description of each component is as follows:

- 1) Fact: Learning should be felt by students or within the scope of students' lives. Understanding concepts should also be distinct from students' daily activities so that students think that learning material is necessary in their lives. As for presenting facts in a concept, teachers can act as a prop.
- 2) Five senses: After students learn a fact, the five senses transmit the fact to the brain. By using the five senses in the learning process, students will remember concepts better, which will lead to good learning outcomes. Educators should prepare demonstrations that stimulate all five senses of students.
- 3) Brain: After students learn a fact, the five senses transmit the fact to the brain. By using the five senses in the learning process, students will remember concepts better, and pupils will have good learning outcomes. Demonstrations prepared by educators should stimulate all five senses of students.
- 4) Previous information: Previous information plays an important role in generating an idea or concept in the thinking process. Thus, it is expected that teachers pay attention to or provide students with prior information in advance so that students' concept understanding is easier to process. Prior information is also closely related to students' initial abilities.

In implementing this educational concept, there are several characteristics of the Talqiyyan Fikriyyan method on students's thinking skills (Nuridin et al., 2024):

- 1) An educator must convey knowledge thoroughly to students. This aims to make the student's mind level believe in the knowledge received.
- 2) Provide learning materials that are not too much, so that students can receive the knowledge.
- 3) The teacher encourages students to apply the knowledge given to their lives.
- 4) Pay attention to knowledge that is in accordance with the students's thinking level.
- 5) The delivery of learning materials is not monotonous with the context of memorization, but by using surrounding objects and practice.
- 6) Encourage students to always think.
- 7) Learning that does not overwhelm students.
- 8) Students are happy with the learning that is being implemented.
- 9) Familiarize children to be creative and innovative.
- 10) The learning material must be factual and can be sensed by the students.
- 11) Encourage children to be able to present or retell the material in their own language.
- 12) Students are supported to solve their life problems and so on.

e. Practical Applications of Critical Thinking in Islam

Critical thinking in Islam is not just theoretical; it has practical applications in various aspects of life. Critical thinking in Islam is used to understand religious teachings and be able to apply them appropriately to various contexts. Of course, this cannot be separated from the principles of *ijtihad* and interpretation.

Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest) regards man as a servant with certain duties and talents that are not bestowed upon other creatures (Abd Rahim et al., 2015). These skills enable them to carry out their duties as Allah's slaves. Man has been endowed with the ability to think, read, reflect, and comprehend the most basic human functions, like reading the Quran and recognizing signals from God in the outside world. "[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded." (Sad: 29).

As long as thought is done with *ikhlas*, or sincerity, good intention, and purpose, it is seen as *ibadah*, or worshiping Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest), and it will be rewarded. Prominent modern thinker Abbas al-'Aqad regards *tafkir*, or thinking, as an Islamic duty that is consistent with the Al-Quran's reference to *ulul al-bab*, which is the precursor to thinking. Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest) makes it possible for humans to reason (*afala ya 'qilun*), think creatively (*afala tatafakkarun*), reflect, ask questions, and do research (*afala ya tadabbarun*). According to historical thought traditions, Muslims have made great strides in various philosophical and scientific domains, including astrophysics, mathematics, mechanics, music, and many more (Baba, 2005). Thus, the Islamic heritage includes thinking. Thus, there are several aspects that can be applied to use critical thinking in Islam:

- 1) Ethical Decision-Making: Muslims are asked to use reason to ethical decision-making, with the justice and compassion precepts found in Islamic teachings serving as a guide.
- 2) Interpreting Texts: Context, language, and historical background analysis are necessary for comprehending the Quran and Hadith.
- 3) Scientific Inquiry: There are many instances of scientific discovery in Islamic history that were motivated by curiosity and critical thought.

On the other hand, it is recommended to encourage critical thinking in the Muslim community with the following steps:

- 1) Education Reform
In education, especially Islamic education, critical thinking skills are highly recommended. This aims to develop a Muslim's sharp thinking so that he can sort information and find the ultimate truth.
- 2) Scientific Engagement
Without realizing it, the concept of critical thinking offered in various public schools in foreign Arab countries such as Indonesia uses critical thinking theories adopted from Western thought. The practice of critical thinking has been carried out by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (PBUH), Islamic academics, Islamic thinkers, and *ulama* for many years. However, knowledge of the concept of critical thinking in Islam still needs to be promoted. Therefore, promoting the works of classical and contemporary Islamic scholars is essential so that the Muslim generation can understand the thoughts of the Islamic religion.
- 3) Community Dialogue

It cannot be denied that dialogue or discussion is also a means for someone to hone their thoughts. Hence, open discussion within the community about contemporary issues can encourage diverse perspectives and critical analysis.

4. CONCLUSION

Critical thinking in Islam is a concept that has been introduced previously. However, it is a fundamental aspect of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Apart from that, critical thinking is an essential need in facing modern progress. Through the fundamental encouragement of critical thinking in Islam, the views of Islamic philosophers, and the practice of critical thinking in Islam, this review highlights the importance of adopting critical thinking from an Islamic perspective. By fostering critical thinking within Muslim communities, it is hoped that they can overcome contemporary challenges and continue the growth and dynamism of Islamic scholarship. This overview research highlights that the principles of critical thinking are an integral part of the Islamic intellectual tradition and remain necessary for the religion's engagement with the modern world. Hence, this research opens up great opportunities for further research to explore the potential for critical thinking in other areas of Islam and to integrate it into education that can encourage critical Muslim thinking.

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