

## **5- Critical Thinking In The Qur'an An Analytical, Epistemological, And Educational Study**

### **التفكير النقدي في القرآن: دراسة تحليلية ومعرفية وتربوية**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This study provides a comprehensive investigation into critical thinking as an integral intellectual and moral practice embedded within the Qur'anic worldview. Contrary to dominant narratives that frame critical thinking exclusively as a product of Enlightenment rationalism or secular Greek philosophy. This research argues that the Qur'an establishes a mandatory framework for rational inquiry through the concepts of *ta'qqul* (reasoning), *tafakkur* (reflection), *tadabbur* (deep contemplation), and *tafaqquh* (systematic understanding). Using a qualitative methodology that combines textual analysis of Qur'anic verses, classical *tafsīr* (exegesis), and comparative philosophical inquiry. The paper demonstrates that the Qur'an presents a holistic model of critical thinking. Unlike secular models that prioritize skepticism and individual autonomy, the Qur'anic paradigm integrates logical rigor with ethical responsibility (*taqwā*) and spiritual awareness, positioning reason as a "teleological" tool for uncovering truth. Furthermore, the study examines the epistemological boundaries placed on human reason—such as the requirement for evidence (*burhān*) and the rejection of intellectual arrogance—and explores the implications of this framework for modern Islamic education. The findings suggest that reviving this intellectual tradition is essential for countering dogmatism and stagnation in contemporary Muslim societies, offering a bridge for dialogue between religious and secular intellectual traditions.

**Keywords:** Qur'an, Critical Thinking, Islamic Epistemology, Tafakkur, Tadabbur, Educational Reform, Ethics of Disagreement.

**الملخص:**

تقدم هذه الدراسة استقصاءً شاملاً للتفكير النقدي كممارسة فكرية وأخلاقية متجذرة في الرؤية القرآنية للعالم. وخلافاً للسرديات السائدة التي تحصر التفكير النقدي في نتاج العقلانية التنويرية أو الفلسفة اليونانية العلمانية، يجادل هذا البحث بأن القرآن يضع إطاراً إلزامياً للاستقصاء العقلي من خلال مفاهيم "التعقل"، "التفكير"، "التدبر"، و"التفقه". وباستخدام منهجية نوعية تجمع بين التحليل النصي للآيات القرآنية، والتفسير الكلاسيكي، والاستقصاء الفلسفي المقارن، توضح الورقة أن القرآن يقدم نموذجاً كلياً للتفكير النقدي. وبخلاف النماذج العلمانية التي تعطي الأولوية للشك والاستقلالية الفردية، يدمج النموذج القرآني بين الصرامة المنطقية والمسؤولية الأخلاقية (التقوى) والوعي الروحي، ووضعاً العقل كأداة "غائية" للكشف عن الحقيقة. علاوة على ذلك، تفحص الدراسة الحدود الإبستمولوجية (المعرفية) الموضوعة على العقل البشري - مثل اشتراط البرهان ورفض الغرور الفكري - وتستكشف آثار هذا الإطار على التربية الإسلامية الحديثة. وتشير النتائج إلى أن إحياء هذا التقليد الفكري ضروري لمواجهة الجمود والنزعات المذهبية في المجتمعات الإسلامية المعاصرة، مما يوفر جسراً للحوار بين التقاليد الفكرية الدينية والعلمانية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** القرآن الكريم، التفكير النقدي، الإبستمولوجيا الإسلامية، التفكير، التدبر، الإصلاح التعليمي، أدب الاختلاف.

### *Introduction:*

Critical thinking is widely regarded as one of the central intellectual competencies required in contemporary education, public life, governance, and professional practice. In an age marked by rapid information circulation, digital misinformation, ideological polarization, and complex global challenges, the ability to examine claims, evaluate evidence, identify assumptions, and reach responsible judgments has become an essential educational and moral need. Modern studies describe critical thinking as a reflective and disciplined process that includes analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, self-regulation, and reasoned decision-making (Facione, 2011; Ennis, 2015; Andreucci-Annunziata et al., 2023). However, much of the contemporary discussion presents critical thinking mainly through a Western intellectual genealogy, beginning with Socratic questioning, Aristotelian logic, Enlightenment rationalism, and modern educational theory. This genealogy is important and cannot be ignored. Yet, when critical thinking is treated as an exclusively Western or secular construct, other intellectual traditions are easily marginalized. Such a view also weakens the possibility of examining how religious epistemologies, especially the Qur'anic worldview, have contributed to the formation of reflective, evidential, and morally responsible modes of thinking. Recent scholarship has begun to challenge this limited framing. Junoh et al. (2021) argue that Islamic critical thinking shares important rational elements with modern critical thinking, while also grounding reasoning in revelation, faith, and accountability. Hashi (2024) further shows that the Qur'anic view of critical thinking integrates rational, ethical, spiritual, and character-forming dimensions. In Islamic education, Nawi et al. (2025) demonstrate that critical thinking can be incorporated into *uṣūl al-fiqh* through an Islamic framework that emphasizes evidence, reasoning, and ethical judgment.

Within this scholarly context, the Qur'an occupies a foundational position. It repeatedly calls human beings to reason, reflect, observe, verify, seek proof, and consider consequences. At the same time, it criticizes blind imitation, conjecture, arrogance, and claims made without knowledge. The Qur'anic concepts of *ta'aqqul* (reasoning), *tafakkur* (reflection), *tadabbur* (deep contemplation), *tafaqquh* (deep understanding), *tabayyān* (verification), and *burhān* (clear proof) provide the conceptual basis for a distinctive model of critical thinking. This model does not separate reason from ethical and spiritual responsibility; rather, it places rational inquiry within a wider framework of truth, humility, guidance, and accountability. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to construct a Qur'an-centered framework of critical thinking that is both conceptually grounded and educationally relevant. Previous studies have examined critical thinking in modern education, logic, Islamic philosophy, and selected Islamic disciplines. However, there remains a need for an integrated study that analyzes the Qur'anic language of critical thinking, its epistemological foundations, its ethical boundaries, its domains of application, and its implications for contemporary Islamic education. This article therefore seeks to bridge modern critical-thinking theory and Qur'anic epistemology by presenting critical thinking as an intellectual, moral, and educational practice rooted in the Qur'anic worldview.

### 1.1 Background of the Study:

Critical thinking has become a major objective in contemporary educational theory. It is no longer understood as a minor academic skill, but as a central requirement for responsible learning and decision-making. Ennis (2015) defines critical thinking as reasonable and reflective thinking directed toward deciding what to believe or what to do. Facione (2011) identifies interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation as key components of critical thinking. More recently, Andreucci-Annunziata et al. (2023) show that higher education studies commonly associate critical thinking with analysis, judgment, reflection, problem-solving, and evidence-based reasoning. These modern definitions are useful because they clarify the cognitive processes involved in critical thinking. They show that critical thinking is not merely the habit of criticizing others, but the disciplined capacity to examine ideas, assess evidence, and revise judgment when necessary. However, many modern accounts focus mainly on procedures: how to analyze, how to evaluate, and how to infer. They do not always give sufficient attention to the moral purpose of thinking, the ethical responsibility of the thinker, or the spiritual consequences of knowledge. This limitation creates an important opening for the Qur'anic perspective. The Qur'an does not reject reasoning or evidence. Rather, it repeatedly invites human beings to use their intellectual faculties in a disciplined and responsible manner. It calls people to reflect on the signs (*āyāt*) in nature, history, revelation, and the human self. It also commands verification before acting upon information, as in the instruction to verify reports before causing harm to others (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Hujurat* 49:6). In this sense, Qur'anic thinking is not passive acceptance; it is a reflective engagement with truth and responsibility.

Islamic intellectual history also supports this understanding. Muslim scholars developed sophisticated methods of verification, argumentation, legal reasoning, textual interpretation, and criticism across fields such as *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, theology, philosophy, and history. Studies on Islamic critical thinking show that reasoning, evidence, and reflection are not external additions to Islam, but belong to its intellectual and educational tradition (Junoh et al., 2021; Hashi, 2024). This background helps correct the misconception that critical thinking can only arise within secular philosophical frameworks. Nevertheless, the contemporary challenge remains serious. In many educational and social contexts, critical thinking is weakened by rote learning, uncritical imitation, poor source verification, and the circulation of unsupported claims. These problems are not caused by the Qur'anic text itself, but by a gap between Qur'anic epistemological ideals and actual educational practice. The Qur'an calls for reflection and verification, yet many learning environments still prioritize memorization without sufficient attention to understanding, evidence, dialogue, and application. Accordingly, this study builds upon both modern critical-thinking literature and Islamic scholarly discussions. It accepts the value of contemporary analytical tools, but argues that the Qur'anic worldview provides a richer normative foundation by connecting reason with guidance, humility, accountability, and moral reform. The purpose is not to claim that the Qur'an uses the same technical language as modern critical-thinking theory, but to demonstrate that it establishes principles that can support a holistic and ethically grounded model of critical inquiry.

### 1.2 Research Problem:

Despite the Qur'an's repeated emphasis on reasoning, reflection, verification, and evidence, there remains a significant gap between Qur'anic epistemological principles and contemporary educational practice in many Muslim contexts. Islamic education often succeeds in preserving religious texts and transmitting inherited knowledge, but it does not always provide sufficient training in analysis, questioning, verification, comparison of views, and responsible judgment. This gap contributes to a form of learning in which students may memorize information without developing the ability to examine claims, understand contexts, or apply knowledge wisely. The problem is not memorization itself. Memorization has an important place in Islamic education, particularly in the preservation of the Qur'an and foundational texts. The problem appears when memorization becomes disconnected from *tadabbur*, *tafaquh*, evidence-based reasoning, and ethical application. In such cases, knowledge may become passive and repetitive rather than reflective and transformative. Another aspect of the problem is the misconception that critical thinking is foreign to the Islamic tradition. This misconception appears when reason and revelation are presented as opposing sources of knowledge, or when religious commitment is assumed to require the suspension of inquiry. However, the Qur'an repeatedly calls human beings to use reason, reflect on signs, seek proof, verify information, and avoid speaking without knowledge. The verse, "Do not follow what you have no knowledge of" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Isrā'* 17:36), establishes a clear principle of intellectual accountability. At the same time, contemporary Muslim societies face new challenges that make Qur'anic critical thinking especially urgent. These include misinformation, digital manipulation, ideological extremism, superficial religious discourse, and weak dialogical culture. Addressing these challenges requires more than general moral advice. It requires a clear framework that explains how the Qur'an guides the processes of reasoning, verification, evidence, disagreement, and ethical judgment. Therefore, the research problem of this study may be stated as follows: although the Qur'an provides a rich vocabulary and framework for critical thinking, this framework has not been sufficiently systematized in relation to modern critical-thinking theory and contemporary Islamic education. The study addresses this gap by analyzing the Qur'anic concepts of thinking, identifying their epistemological and ethical dimensions, and showing their relevance for educational reform and intellectual renewal.

### 1.3 Research Questions

In light of the research problem, this study is guided by one central question: How does the Qur'an establish a framework for critical thinking that integrates rational inquiry, epistemological discipline, ethical responsibility, and educational relevance?

This central question is examined through the following sub-questions:

1. How does the Qur'an conceptualize critical thinking as an integrated intellectual, moral, and spiritual act?
2. What Qur'anic terms and expressions, such as *ta'aqqul*, *tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *tafaquh*, *tabayyān*, and *burhān*, indicate a structured approach to reasoning, reflection, verification, and proof?

3. What ethical limits does the Qur'an place upon the exercise of human reason, particularly in relation to conjecture, arrogance, blind imitation, and claims made without knowledge?
4. In what ways does the Qur'anic model of critical thinking converge with, differ from, or complement modern critical-thinking theories that emphasize evidence, reflection, autonomy, and self-regulation?
5. How can the Qur'anic framework of critical thinking contribute to contemporary Islamic education, especially in moving learners from passive memorization toward understanding, verification, dialogue, and responsible judgment?

#### 1.4 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative textual and conceptual methodology. This method is suitable because the research does not measure attitudes or test statistical variables; rather, it analyzes Qur'anic concepts, exegetical meanings, epistemological principles, and educational implications. The study therefore depends on close reading, thematic classification, conceptual analysis, and comparison with selected modern critical-thinking literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Bowen, 2009). The primary source of the study is the Qur'anic text. The analysis focuses on verses that refer to reasoning, reflection, contemplation, verification, evidence, observation, and moral accountability. Particular attention is given to Qur'anic terms such as *ta'qqul*, *tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *tafaqquh*, *tazakkur*, *tabayyān*, and *burhān*. These terms were selected because they represent recurring Qur'anic expressions related to intellectual activity, verification, understanding, and responsible judgment.

The first stage of the methodology is thematic identification. Relevant Qur'anic verses are grouped according to their dominant intellectual function. For example, verses related to reflection upon creation are examined under *tafakkur*; verses related to contemplation of revelation are examined under *tadabbur*; verses related to verification of information are examined under *tabayyān*; and verses demanding proof are examined under *burhān*. This thematic procedure helps avoid treating the verses as isolated quotations and allows the study to identify patterns in the Qur'anic discourse on thinking.

The second stage is linguistic and exegetical analysis. The study examines the meanings of the selected Qur'anic terms by referring to their Qur'anic usage and by consulting major works of classical *tafsīr*, especially al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Rāzī. These exegetical sources are used to clarify the semantic range of the terms and to ensure that the analysis remains grounded in recognized Islamic scholarship. The purpose is not to impose modern educational terminology upon the Qur'an, but to understand how the Qur'anic text itself frames reasoning, reflection, verification, and accountability.

The third stage is conceptual analysis. After identifying and explaining the Qur'anic terms, the study analyzes the epistemological and ethical principles that emerge from them. These include the rejection of conjecture without evidence, the critique of blind imitation, the requirement of verification, the demand for proof, the recognition of human limitation, and the need for humility

in reasoning. This stage allows the study to move from individual terms to a broader Qur'an-centered framework of critical thinking.

The fourth stage is comparative analysis. The Qur'anic framework is placed in dialogue with selected modern theories of critical thinking, especially those that emphasize evidence-based judgment, reflective thinking, self-regulation, and higher-order reasoning (Facione, 2011; Ennis, 2015; Andreucci-Annunziata et al., 2023). The aim of this comparison is not to claim that the Qur'an presents critical thinking in the same technical language used by contemporary education. Rather, the comparison clarifies areas of convergence and distinction. Modern theories help explain the analytical procedures of critical thinking, while the Qur'anic framework adds ethical, spiritual, and teleological dimensions.

The fifth stage is educational application. The findings are used to derive implications for contemporary Islamic education. This includes examining how concepts such as *tadabbur*, *tabayyān*, *burhān*, and *adab al-ikhtilāf* may contribute to teaching methods that encourage understanding, verification, dialogue, evidence-based reasoning, and ethical judgment. In this way, the methodology moves from textual analysis to conceptual construction and then to educational relevance.

## **Critical Thinking as a Concept**

### **2.1 Western Philosophical Foundations**

Critical thinking has been widely discussed in modern philosophy of education, cognitive psychology, and higher education studies. Although its roots are often traced to the Socratic method of questioning and Aristotelian logic, its contemporary meaning is broader than formal reasoning alone. It includes the ability to examine assumptions, evaluate evidence, detect weaknesses in arguments, and reach judgments that are reasonable, responsible, and open to revision. Ennis (2015) defines critical thinking as reasonable and reflective thinking directed toward deciding what to believe or what to do. This definition is useful because it connects critical thinking not only with analysis, but also with judgment and action. Modern educational literature has further developed this concept by identifying the skills and dispositions involved in critical thinking. Facione (1990, 2011) describes critical thinking as purposeful, self-regulatory judgment involving interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-correction. Dwyer, Hogan, and Stewart (2014) similarly present critical thinking as a metacognitive process that helps the learner move toward logical conclusions and better solutions through reflective judgment. These definitions show that critical thinking is not merely the ability to criticize ideas, but the disciplined capacity to test claims, assess reasons, and make justified decisions. Recent studies confirm the continuing importance of critical thinking in contemporary education. A systematic review by Andreucci-Annunziata et al. (2023) shows that higher education studies commonly associate critical thinking with analysis, evaluation, inference, reflection, problem-solving, and reasoned judgment. Abrami et al. (2015) also found that critical thinking can be improved through explicit teaching strategies, dialogue, problem-based learning, and guided practice. These studies are relevant to the present article because they show that critical thinking is now understood as both a cognitive skill and an educational objective that requires intentional cultivation. However,

a limitation appears when critical thinking is treated only as a technical or procedural skill. Many modern theories explain how to analyze, evaluate, and infer, but they do not always explain the moral direction of thinking or the ethical responsibility of the thinker. MacIntyre's (1981) critique of modern moral discourse is relevant here, because he argues that reasoning becomes fragmented when it is separated from a coherent moral tradition and a shared understanding of the good. In other words, reason may remain technically sharp while losing its ethical orientation. This point is important for the present study. The Qur'anic model of critical thinking does not reject the analytical strengths of modern critical thinking theory. Rather, it expands the discussion by linking reasoning with truth, accountability, humility, and moral purpose. Western theories are helpful in clarifying the procedures of critical thinking, such as evaluating evidence and identifying assumptions (Facione, 2011; Dwyer et al., 2014). The Qur'anic worldview, however, adds a normative dimension by asking why human beings think, what kind of truth they seek, and how reasoning should shape moral conduct. Therefore, this study approaches Western critical thinking as a valuable comparative framework, while arguing that the Qur'an offers a broader model in which rational inquiry is integrated with ethical and spiritual responsibility.

## 2.2 Islamic Epistemology: Unity of Knowledge

Islamic epistemology is grounded in the principle of *tawhīd*, which affirms the unity of God, the unity of truth, and the coherence of knowledge. From this perspective, knowledge (*ilm*) is not understood as a disconnected collection of facts, nor is it divided into isolated sacred and secular domains. Rather, all sound knowledge is ultimately related to truth, moral responsibility, and the human task of recognizing the signs of God in revelation, nature, history, and the self. Al-Attas (1995) argues that knowledge in Islam is inseparable from *adab*, meaning that true knowledge should lead to proper recognition of the order of reality and proper conduct within that order. Similarly, Bakar (1998) shows that classical Muslim classifications of knowledge were not built upon a rigid separation between religious and rational sciences, but upon an integrated view in which different branches of knowledge serve the higher purpose of wisdom and human perfection. Within this framework, revelation (*wahy*) and reason (*aql*) are not opposing sources of knowledge. Revelation provides ultimate guidance, moral orientation, and metaphysical certainty, while reason enables human beings to understand, interpret, compare, infer, and apply knowledge in changing circumstances. Al-Ghazālī's intellectual project illustrates this balance. He criticized forms of reasoning that lead to arrogance or speculative excess, yet he did not reject reason itself; rather, he treated it as necessary for understanding revelation, moral discipline, and religious practice (Al-Ghazālī, 2005). Ibn Rushd also defended the legitimacy of rational inquiry, arguing that demonstrative reasoning and revealed truth cannot be in real contradiction when both are properly understood (Ibn Rushd, 2001). These two examples indicate that Islamic thought did not treat reason as foreign to religion, but as a disciplined faculty that must operate within ethical and epistemological limits. Recent scholarship reinforces the relevance of this integrated epistemology to the study of critical thinking. Junoh et al. (2021) argue that Islamic critical thinking shares with modern critical thinking the use of analysis, evaluation, and judgment, but differs from secular models by grounding these processes in revelation, faith, and accountability before God. Hashi (2024) similarly explains that a Qur'anic approach to critical thinking includes rational examination while also recognizing moral, spiritual, and metaphysical dimensions that are often

neglected in purely procedural models. In the field of Islamic education, Sahin (2018) calls for a more conceptually grounded understanding of Islamic education, one that does not simply imitate secular liberal models but engages critically with Islamic intellectual and spiritual traditions. More recently, Nawi et al. (2025) emphasize that critical thinking can be incorporated into *uṣūl al-fiqh* instruction through Islamic perspectives, particularly by linking reasoning, evidence, and ethical judgment.

The Qur'anic understanding of *'aql* supports this integrated model. The Arabic root of *'aql* carries the meaning of binding or restraining, which suggests that reason is not merely a tool for abstract speculation, but a faculty that restrains the human being from error, passion (*hawā*), conjecture, and unexamined imitation. This differs from approaches that define critical thinking only through skepticism or cognitive autonomy. In the Qur'anic worldview, the purpose of reasoning is not to detach the human being from all authority, but to guide the person toward truth, justice, humility, and responsible action. Thus, critical thinking is not reduced to the technical ability to argue; it becomes a morally directed activity. Accordingly, Islamic epistemology provides a necessary foundation for the argument of this study. It allows critical thinking to be understood as an act that combines rational inquiry, verification, ethical discipline, and spiritual purpose. The Qur'an repeatedly calls human beings to reflect, reason, verify, seek proof, and avoid conjecture, but these commands are always connected to accountability and guidance. Therefore, the Qur'anic model does not oppose modern critical thinking; rather, it expands it. It accepts the importance of evidence, analysis, and judgment, while adding a deeper question: how should reason serve truth and moral reform?

### *Qur'anic Language of Critical Thinking*

The Qur'an does not present thinking through one isolated term. Rather, it employs a wide range of expressions that refer to reasoning, reflection, contemplation, remembrance, understanding, observation, and verification. This variety is important because it shows that the Qur'anic approach to thinking is not limited to logical analysis alone. It includes the use of reason, the examination of signs, the contemplation of meanings, the remembrance of moral responsibility, and the verification of claims. Several contemporary studies have drawn attention to this Qur'anic vocabulary of thinking. Abdullah and Mohd Zhaffar (2018) identify a group of Qur'anic thinking terms, including *tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *tafaqquh*, *i'tibār*, *tawassum*, *tazakkur*, *ta'aqqul*, and *tafahhum*. Jamil, Abd Khafidz, and Osman (2021) focus on five Qur'anic concepts of thinking, namely *tadabbur*, *tafakkur*, *tafaqquh*, *ta'aqqul*, and *tadhakkur*, and connect them with purposeful communication and effective intellectual engagement. More recently, Nawi, Abdullah, Mohd Zhaffar, and Badaruddin (2025) argue that these Qur'anic thinking elements can be used as a structured framework for developing critical thinking in Islamic legal education. Hashi (2024) also emphasizes that the Qur'anic view of critical thinking combines rational analysis with ethical, spiritual, and character-forming dimensions. Accordingly, this section does not treat Qur'anic thinking terms as simple synonyms. Each term expresses a particular intellectual function. *Tafakkur* directs the mind toward reflective consideration of signs and patterns. *Tadabbur* requires deep contemplation of meanings and consequences. *Ta'aqqul* refers to disciplined reasoning and

restraint from error. *Tafaqquh* indicates deep understanding of meanings, causes, and implications. *Tazakkur* connects knowledge with remembrance and moral awakening. Together, these terms provide the linguistic basis for a Qur'an-centered model of critical thinking.

### 3.1 *Tafakkur: Reflection upon Signs and Patterns*

The concept of *tafakkur* refers to deliberate reflection that moves from observation to meaning. In the Qur'an, this type of thinking is frequently connected with the created order, including the heavens and the earth, the alternation of night and day, the diversity of life, and the signs of divine wisdom in the natural world. For this reason, *tafakkur* may be understood as a reflective movement from visible phenomena to deeper recognition of order, purpose, and meaning. This does not mean that *tafakkur* is identical with modern empirical method. Rather, it shares with empirical inquiry the seriousness of observation, while also directing the observer toward moral and metaphysical reflection. Abdullah and Mohd Zhaffar (2018) note that *tafakkur* functions as a broad Qur'anic term for thinking, while other terms are more specific in their usage. Nawi et al. (2025) also describe *tafakkur* as intellectual reasoning and deep thought that can contribute to higher-order thinking in Islamic education. Classical exegetical works further support this understanding. In interpreting verses that invite reflection upon creation, exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Rāzī repeatedly connect reflection with recognition of divine signs, the rejection of heedlessness, and the strengthening of certainty (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Rāzī, 1999). Thus, *tafakkur* is not a passive state of mind. It is an intentional act of reflection that trains the human being to move beyond surface perception and to seek meaning through careful consideration. For the purposes of this study, *tafakkur* represents one of the foundational elements of Qur'anic critical thinking. It teaches that sound thinking begins with attention, observation, and resistance to superficial judgment. It also prevents the intellect from being reduced to technical calculation, because the Qur'anic act of reflection remains connected to wisdom, accountability, and recognition of truth.

### 3.2 *Tadabbur: Contemplation of Revelation and Consequences*

The term *tadabbur* refers to a deeper form of contemplation. Its root meaning is connected with looking at the end, outcome, or consequence of a matter. In the Qur'anic context, *tadabbur* is strongly associated with engagement with revelation itself. The Qur'an asks: "Do they not then reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon their hearts?" (Qur'an 47:24). This verse indicates that the problem is not merely lack of access to the text, but the failure to engage with its meanings in a serious and transformative way. Unlike ordinary reading, *tadabbur* requires the reader to examine meaning, context, coherence, implication, and consequence. Sin (2014) distinguishes between *tafsīr* and *tadabbur* by explaining that *tafsīr* clarifies the meaning of the Qur'anic text, while *tadabbur* aims at drawing lessons and applying them in life. This distinction is useful because it shows that *tadabbur* is not a replacement for scholarly exegesis, but an extension of meaningful engagement with revelation. Nawi et al. (2025) describe *tadabbur* as consideration of consequences and as one of the elements that can enhance critical thinking in *uṣūl al-fiqh* education. This is relevant to the present study because critical thinking is not only about analyzing a statement in isolation. It also includes examining the implications of ideas, judgments, and

actions. In this sense, *tadabbur* adds a consequential and ethical dimension to critical thinking. Therefore, *tadabbur* may be understood as Qur'anic hermeneutical reflection. It requires the reader to avoid shallow reading, selective quotation, and disconnected interpretation. It invites a disciplined engagement with the Qur'anic text that combines linguistic understanding, contextual awareness, moral humility, and readiness for reform.

### 3.3 *Ta' aqul: Reasoning, Discernment, and Intellectual Restraint*

The term *ta' aqul* refers to the active use of *'aql*. In the Qur'anic worldview, *'aql* is not simply the ability to think abstractly or to argue effectively. It is a faculty of discernment that enables the human being to distinguish truth from falsehood, guidance from misguidance, and evidence from conjecture. The linguistic root of *'aql* is associated with binding or restraining, which suggests that reason should restrain the self from impulsive judgment, passion, illusion, and blind imitation. Nawi et al. (2025) identify *ta' aqul* as rationality and analytical reasoning, especially in relation to evaluating arguments and avoiding premature acceptance of claims without evidence. This interpretation is close to modern critical-thinking concerns such as evaluating premises, testing conclusions, and assessing the credibility of claims. However, the Qur'anic use of *ta' aqul* adds an ethical dimension because reason is not separated from responsibility before God. The Qur'an frequently criticizes those who possess faculties of perception but fail to use them for understanding. For example, Qur'an 7:179 describes people who have hearts with which they do not understand, eyes with which they do not see, and ears with which they do not hear. This does not deny the existence of physical faculties; rather, it criticizes the failure to use perception and reason in the search for truth. Hashi (2024) argues that the Qur'anic model of critical thinking gives importance not only to the mind, but also to the moral and spiritual condition of the human person. Thus, *ta' aqul* is central to Qur'anic critical thinking because it combines reasoning with self-restraint. It prevents thinking from becoming a tool of arrogance, sophistry, or self-justification. It also shows that the Qur'anic critique of unthinking behavior is not directed against reason, but against the neglect or misuse of reason.

### 3.4 *Tafaqquh, Tafahhum, and Tazakkur: Deep Understanding and Moral Remembrance*

In addition to *tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, and *ta' aqul*, the Qur'anic vocabulary of thinking includes other important terms such as *tafaqquh*, *tafahhum*, and *tazakkur*. These terms expand the framework of critical thinking by showing that sound thinking requires more than analysis. It also requires understanding, remembrance, and moral awareness. *Tafaqquh* refers to deep understanding. It implies the ability to grasp meanings, causes, purposes, and implications rather than remaining at the surface level of information. In Islamic intellectual history, this term became especially important in law and ethics, where understanding requires careful attention to evidence, context, objectives, and consequences. Nawi et al. (2025) connect *tafaqquh* with deep understanding in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, arguing that it helps learners move beyond memorization toward more accurate and judicious application of Islamic legal principles. *Tafahhum* refers to comprehension and the effort to understand a message correctly. Abdullah and Mohd Zhaffar (2018) include *tafahhum* among Qur'anic thinking terms and note that the Qur'an uses different expressions for different intellectual functions. In the context of critical thinking, *tafahhum* is important because one cannot

evaluate an idea fairly without first understanding it accurately. It therefore protects the thinker from misrepresentation, hasty criticism, and superficial judgment. *Tazakkur* refers to remembrance, recollection, and moral awakening. It connects knowledge with awareness of truth after heedlessness. Nawi et al. (2025) describe *tazakkur* as a component that links knowledge with divine guidance, ethical behavior, and spiritual awareness. This is significant because the Qur'anic model does not regard forgetfulness merely as a memory problem. It may also be a moral and spiritual problem when a person ignores what is already known to be true. Together, *tafaqquh*, *tafahhum*, and *tazakkur* complete the Qur'anic framework of critical thinking. They show that the Qur'an does not separate intellectual activity from moral formation. A person may analyze arguments, but without deep understanding and remembrance of responsibility, analysis may become shallow or misdirected. For this reason, Qur'anic critical thinking may be described as a layered process that moves from observation to reflection, from reflection to understanding, from understanding to verification, and from verification to responsible action.

### *Domains of Qur'anic Critical Thinking*

The Qur'anic framework of critical thinking is not restricted to abstract logic or formal argumentation. It is applied to different domains of human experience, especially the natural world, human history, and the inner self. These domains are repeatedly presented in the Qur'an as fields of reflection through which human beings are invited to observe, compare, infer, remember, and reform their understanding. This multidimensional approach is important because it shows that Qur'anic critical thinking is not merely theoretical. It is a practical discipline that trains the human being to read reality through different kinds of signs. Hashi (2024) argues that critical thinking from a Qur'anic perspective includes rational examination, ethical awareness, spiritual responsibility, and recognition of the limits of human understanding. In this sense, the Qur'an does not separate thinking from moral formation; rather, it connects sound reasoning with guidance, humility, and accountability.

#### *4.1 The Natural World as an Epistemic Source*

The Qur'an presents the natural world as a domain of reflection and inquiry. It frequently directs attention to the heavens, the earth, rain, plants, animals, mountains, the alternation of night and day, and the order of creation. These references are not merely descriptive. They function as invitations to observe patterns, recognize order, and move from visible phenomena to deeper understanding. This gives the natural world an epistemic value. Nature becomes a field of signs (*āyāt*) through which the human being may recognize wisdom, measure, dependence, and purpose. Guessoum (2008) notes that any discussion of the relationship between the Qur'an and science must begin by recognizing the special place of the Qur'an in shaping the Muslim understanding of knowledge and the world. However, he also warns against reducing Qur'anic verses to simplistic scientific claims. This distinction is important for the present study, because Qur'anic reflection on nature should not be treated as a technical scientific textbook, but as a call to disciplined observation and meaningful reflection. For example, the Qur'anic question, "Do they not look at the camels, how they are created?" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Ghāshiyah* 88:17), invites the reader to move beyond ordinary familiarity with the animal toward reflective observation. The verse does not

provide a biological explanation, but it awakens the mind to examine structure, function, suitability, and wisdom. This kind of reflection corresponds to *tafakkur*, because it begins with observation and leads to deeper recognition of meaning. This has direct relevance to critical thinking. The Qur'an teaches that sound judgment begins with careful attention to reality. It criticizes heedlessness, superficial perception, and failure to draw lessons from observable signs. In modern educational language, this may be connected with observation, inquiry, evidence, and inductive reasoning. Yet the Qur'anic model goes further by linking observation with humility, gratitude, and recognition of divine wisdom. Accordingly, the natural world in the Qur'an is not treated as a closed material system without purpose. It is a readable domain of signs (*āyāt*). The critical thinker is therefore expected to observe carefully, avoid hasty conclusions, and recognize that reflection on the created order can lead to intellectual, moral, and spiritual insight.

#### 4.2 Historical Reasoning and Moral Lessons

The Qur'an also presents history as a domain of critical reflection. It repeatedly asks human beings to consider the fate of earlier peoples and civilizations. The purpose of these historical references is not entertainment or mere narration. They are presented as lessons through which the reader may identify patterns of guidance and misguidance, justice and oppression, reform and corruption, rise and decline. This form of historical reasoning is closely connected with critical thinking. It requires the reader to examine causes, consequences, continuity, change, and moral significance. Spawi, Mahyuddin, and Ali (2019) argue that historical thinking skills can help readers engage Qur'anic stories through attention to historical significance, sources, chronology, continuity, and change, while also recognizing the methodological limits required when dealing with Qur'anic narratives. This is useful because it shows that Qur'anic stories can be approached through disciplined reflection rather than passive reception. The Qur'anic command to "travel through the land and see what was the end of those before you" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Rūm* 30:42) establishes a reflective relationship with history. The reader is not asked merely to know that earlier nations existed. Rather, the reader is invited to examine their end, the causes of their decline, and the moral lessons that can be drawn from their experience. This historical dimension later became important in Islamic intellectual history, especially in the work of Ibn Khaldūn. His theory of *'umrān* examined the rise and decline of societies through social, moral, political, and environmental factors. Abdul Razak, Suyurno, and Nordin (2020) explain that Ibn Khaldūn's *'umrānic* thought contributed to Islamic sociology and civilizational studies by linking human society, history, nature, and divine order. Although Ibn Khaldūn's method is not identical with Qur'anic exegesis, it reflects the broader Islamic concern with reading history through causes, patterns, and lessons. Therefore, Qur'anic historical reasoning develops a form of critical awareness that is both analytical and moral. It trains the reader to ask important questions: Why did a society decline? What role did injustice, arrogance, corruption, or rejection of truth play? What lessons should later communities learn? In this sense, history becomes a living field of moral analysis and civilizational reflection.

### 4.3 Self-Reflection and Moral Reasoning

The third domain of Qur’anic critical thinking is the human self. The Qur’an does not direct reflection only outward toward nature and history; it also turns the human being inward. The verse, “And in yourselves—do you not see?” (Qur’an, *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt* 51:21), indicates that the self is also a field of signs and reflection. This inward dimension is essential because critical thinking can easily become external criticism without self-correction. A person may evaluate the arguments of others while remaining unaware of his own motives, biases, desires, and moral weaknesses. The Qur’anic model prevents this imbalance by connecting thinking with accountability and purification of the self. In later Islamic ethical language, this inward examination is associated with *muḥāsabah*, or self-accounting. It requires the individual to examine intentions, assumptions, actions, and consequences. This is not merely a devotional exercise; it also has an epistemological function. A biased soul may distort judgment, while arrogance may prevent a person from recognizing truth. Hashi (2024) emphasizes that the Qur’anic approach to critical thinking includes restraint, self-control, and spiritual awareness as part of sound reasoning. Self-reflection gives Qur’anic critical thinking its ethical depth. The aim is not to produce a clever debater who can defeat opponents, but a responsible human being who can recognize truth and act upon it. This is why the Qur’an repeatedly connects knowledge with accountability. The hearing, sight, and heart are not neutral instruments; they are faculties for which the human being will be questioned (Qur’an, *Sūrat al-Isrā’* 17:36). Accordingly, the Qur’anic domain of self-reflection completes the broader framework of critical thinking. Reflection on nature develops observational awareness. Reflection on history develops causal and moral awareness. Reflection on the self develops ethical awareness and self-correction. Together, these three domains show that Qur’anic critical thinking is a holistic practice that moves from seeing signs to understanding meaning, and from understanding meaning to responsible transformation.

### Argumentation, Evidence, and Debate

The Qur’anic framework of critical thinking extends beyond individual reflection into the public and dialogical sphere. It does not encourage unquestioning acceptance of claims, nor does it allow argumentation to become a tool of arrogance or domination. Rather, the Qur’an establishes a disciplined model of discourse in which claims must be supported by evidence, disagreement must be governed by ethical conduct, and information must be verified before it is accepted or circulated. This dimension is important because critical thinking is not only an internal mental process. It also appears in debate, judgment, testimony, teaching, public communication, and social decision-making. Modern argumentation theory similarly emphasizes that sound reasoning requires evidence, relevance, clarity, and proper dialogue context (Toulmin, 2003; Walton, 2008). The Qur’anic model shares the concern for evidence and reasoned persuasion, but it adds a stronger moral framework by connecting argumentation with truthfulness, humility, justice, and accountability before God.

### 5.1 The Epistemic Demand for Proof

One of the clearest Qur’anic foundations of critical thinking is the demand for proof. The Qur’an repeatedly challenges unsupported claims and requires evidence from those who make assertions. The command, “Produce your proof, if you are truthful” (Qur’an, *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:111), establishes a principle that belief, judgment, and argument should not be based merely on inherited assumptions, social pressure, or emotional conviction. The term *burhān* refers to clear proof or demonstrative evidence. In the Qur’anic context, it functions as an epistemic standard against baseless assertion and conjecture. This standard is central to critical thinking because it shifts discourse from personal claim to evidential responsibility. A person who makes a claim is expected to provide grounds for it, and the listener is not required to accept claims without examination.

This principle has strong relevance to both classical Islamic thought and modern critical-thinking theory. In Islamic disciplines such as *uṣūl al-fiqh*, theology, and legal reasoning, proof, evidence, and valid inference became central tools for distinguishing sound claims from weak ones. Nawi, Abdullah, Mohd Zhaffar, and Badaruddin (2025) argue that incorporating critical thinking into *uṣūl al-fiqh* education requires attention to evidence, reasoning, and responsible judgment. Likewise, Atallah’s study of criticism in Islamic thought shows that the demand for evidence and refusal of unsupported claims formed an important feature of Islamic scholarly practice across fields such as *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, history, and theology. The Qur’anic demand for *burhān* therefore shows that critical thinking is not foreign to the Islamic intellectual tradition. It is rooted in a scriptural command to examine claims, reject empty assertion, and connect truthfulness with evidence. This also protects religious discourse from superstition, blind imitation, and unverified argument.

### 5.2 The Ethics of Disagreement and Intellectual Humility

The Qur’an does not only regulate the content of arguments; it also regulates the manner of disagreement. It commands believers to call to the way of God “with wisdom and good instruction” and to argue “in the best manner” (Qur’an, *Sūrat al-Nahl* 16:125). This verse indicates that disagreement should not be driven by ego, hostility, or the desire to defeat an opponent. Rather, argumentation should serve guidance, clarification, and the pursuit of truth. This Qur’anic principle is closely connected with the Islamic concept of *adab al-ikhtilāf*, or the ethics of disagreement. Al-Alwani (1993) explains that disagreement in Islamic thought is not necessarily a sign of division when it is governed by knowledge, sincerity, humility, and respect. More recent educational research also treats *adab al-ikhtilāf* as an important pedagogical framework for developing intercultural competence, religious literacy, and respectful dialogue (Abdul-Jabbar, 2026). This confirms that Islamic ethics of disagreement has contemporary relevance for education and public reasoning. Intellectual humility is central to this model. The Qur’an presents arrogance as a barrier to truth, even when a person possesses knowledge or argumentative ability. The story of Iblīs illustrates this danger. His refusal to obey the divine command was expressed through a flawed comparison: “I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay” (Qur’an, *Sūrat al-A‘rāf* 7:12). The problem here is not absence of information, but the corruption of judgment by pride. For this reason, Qur’anic critical thinking cannot be reduced to cleverness in debate. A person may possess argumentative skill but still misuse reason for self-justification.

Hashi (2024) argues that Qur'anic critical thinking includes character-building, spiritual awareness, and recognition of human limits. This means that proper reasoning requires moral discipline. The critical thinker must be willing to revise his judgment, listen fairly, acknowledge evidence, and avoid turning disagreement into hostility.

### 5.3 Verification and Information Integrity

The Qur'an also establishes the principle of *tabayyān*, or careful verification. The verse states: "O believers, if an evildoer brings you any news, verify it, lest you harm people unknowingly and then become regretful for what you have done" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Hujurat* 49:6). This verse is especially relevant to the modern information age, where misinformation, manipulated content, and unverified digital claims spread rapidly. The principle of *tabayyān* transforms information processing into a moral responsibility. The receiver of information is not passive. He must examine the source, assess the reliability of the report, and consider the consequences of acting upon it. This Qur'anic instruction connects knowledge with justice, because failure to verify may lead to harm against individuals or communities. Recent studies have highlighted the educational relevance of *tabayyān*. Nisa (2025) argues that *tabayyān* contributes to students' critical thinking by training them to filter, assess, and interpret information rather than accepting it at face value. In a similar direction, Hashi (2024) connects Qur'anic critical thinking with moral responsibility and disciplined judgment, while Nawi et al. (2025) emphasize the role of evidence-based reasoning in Islamic education. The contemporary relevance of this principle is clear. In digital environments, people often share information before verifying its accuracy. The Qur'anic command of *tabayyān* challenges this habit by making verification both an intellectual duty and an ethical obligation. It requires the thinker to ask: Who is the source? What is the evidence? What are the possible consequences of accepting or sharing this information? Thus, the Qur'anic approach to argumentation, evidence, and debate includes three connected principles: the demand for *burhān*, the ethics of *adab al-ikhtilāf*, and the obligation of *tabayyān*. Together, these principles form a strong foundation for critical thinking. They show that the Qur'an requires not only the ability to reason, but also the moral responsibility to reason truthfully, respectfully, and carefully.

### Ethical Boundaries of Reason

The Qur'anic worldview gives reason an important role in understanding truth, examining claims, and guiding human conduct. However, it does not present reason as an unlimited or morally neutral faculty. Reason is valuable, but it must operate within ethical boundaries. These boundaries protect the human being from speculation without knowledge, arrogance, self-deception, and the misuse of argumentation. This point is central to the Qur'anic model of critical thinking. Modern critical-thinking theories often emphasize evidence, inference, and self-regulation, while the Qur'an adds another layer: the moral accountability of the thinker. Hashi (2024) argues that Qur'anic critical thinking integrates rational, ethical, spiritual, and character-forming dimensions. Similarly, Junoh et al. (2021) note that Islamic critical thinking is not limited to rational analysis, but is connected to revelation, faith, and moral responsibility.

### 6.1 Knowledge, Humility, and Accountability

A primary ethical boundary placed upon reason is the prohibition of speaking or acting without knowledge. The Qur'an states: "Do not follow what you have no knowledge of; the hearing, the sight, and the heart—each of these will be questioned" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Isrā'* 17:36). This verse establishes a clear epistemic principle: human beings are accountable not only for their actions, but also for the way they use their faculties of knowledge. This Qur'anic principle is directly related to critical thinking. It requires the thinker to distinguish between knowledge and assumption, evidence and conjecture, certainty and probability. It also prevents the intellect from becoming careless in judgment. A person should not accept, repeat, or act upon claims unless there is adequate ground for doing so. The verse also connects knowledge with responsibility. Hearing, sight, and heart are not neutral instruments. They are faculties through which human beings receive, interpret, and judge information. Therefore, the misuse of these faculties is not merely an intellectual error; it is a moral failure. This shows that Qur'anic critical thinking is accountable thinking. This boundary is supported by the Qur'anic reminder that human knowledge is limited. The Qur'an states: "You have been given only a little knowledge" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Isrā'* 17:85). This does not discourage inquiry. Rather, it teaches epistemic humility. The human being is encouraged to learn, reflect, and investigate, but must also recognize the limits of human perception and interpretation. Modern studies on intellectual humility help clarify the importance of this point. Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse (2016) define intellectual humility in terms of recognizing the limits of one's knowledge, separating intellect from ego, respecting other viewpoints, and remaining open to revision. Bąk, Wójtowicz, and Kutnik (2021) also explain that intellectual humility has become an important concept in psychology because it helps individuals recognize fallibility and avoid overconfidence. This modern discussion supports the Qur'anic emphasis on humility before truth. Accordingly, the Qur'anic model does not weaken reason by placing boundaries around it. Rather, it strengthens reason by protecting it from false certainty, arrogance, and careless judgment. Critical thinking becomes more reliable when it is joined with humility and accountability.

### 6.2 Arrogance as an Intellectual Barrier

The Qur'an presents arrogance as one of the most serious barriers to sound reasoning. Arrogance is not merely a moral vice; it is also an epistemological problem because it prevents a person from receiving truth, acknowledging evidence, and correcting mistaken judgment. A proud person may possess information but still fail to think correctly because the ego controls the reasoning process. The story of *Iblīs* illustrates this problem clearly. When commanded to bow to Adam, he refused and said: "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-A'rāf* 7:12). In another verse, the Qur'an states that he "refused and was arrogant" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:34). The problem in this case was not lack of awareness of the divine command. Rather, it was the misuse of comparison and reasoning under the influence of pride. This example is significant for the study of critical thinking. *Iblīs* constructed an argument based on comparison: fire is superior to clay, therefore he is superior to Adam. Yet this reasoning was corrupt because it was built on arrogance, false evaluation, and rejection of divine wisdom. The Qur'anic narrative therefore shows that reasoning can become distorted when it is controlled by

ego, superiority, or self-interest. Classical Islamic scholarship repeatedly warns against this danger. Al-Ghazālī's critique of speculative excess and intellectual arrogance shows that reason must be disciplined by humility and ethical purpose (Al-Ghazālī, 2000). This does not mean that reason should be abandoned. Rather, it means that reason must be purified from vanity, domination, and the desire to defeat others merely for self-display. In contemporary terms, this corresponds to the distinction between critical thinking and argumentative cleverness. A person may be skilled in debate, yet still fail to be a true critical thinker if he refuses correction, ignores evidence, or uses reasoning only to protect his position. Hashi (2024) emphasizes that Qur'anic critical thinking includes moral purification, self-restraint, and spiritual awareness. Thus, the Qur'anic model requires the thinker to be intellectually capable and morally disciplined at the same time. Therefore, arrogance is an intellectual barrier because it closes the mind before truth. It makes the person defend the self rather than seek reality. Qur'anic critical thinking responds to this danger by connecting reason with humility, sincerity, and openness to correction.

### 6.3 Purpose-Driven Inquiry and Moral Direction

The third ethical boundary of reason is that inquiry must be directed toward a meaningful and constructive purpose. In the Qur'anic worldview, thinking is not encouraged for vanity, manipulation, or endless skepticism. It is directed toward truth, guidance, moral reform, and responsible action. This gives Qur'anic critical thinking a teleological character. The Qur'an repeatedly connects reflection with recognition of purpose. It praises those who reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth and say: "Our Lord, You did not create this in vain" (Qur'an, *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* 3:191). This verse shows that reflection is not limited to describing the world. It moves from observation to recognition of meaning and purpose. Another verse connects knowledge with insight and responsible communication: "Say: This is my way; I invite to God upon clear insight" (Qur'an, *Sūrat Yūsuf* 12:108). The word *baṣīrah* indicates clarity, insight, and conscious understanding. This suggests that Qur'anic reasoning should not be blind, impulsive, or imitative. It should be grounded in awareness and directed toward guidance. This purpose-driven model differs from forms of critical thinking that reduce inquiry to skepticism alone. Skepticism can be useful when it prevents gullibility, but it becomes destructive when it produces cynicism, moral emptiness, or rejection of all certainty. The Qur'anic model does not encourage naïve acceptance, but neither does it encourage aimless doubt. It calls for disciplined inquiry that leads to truth and ethical transformation. Nawī, Abdullah, Mohd Zhaffar, and Badaruddin (2025) argue that Islamic-based critical thinking in *uṣūl al-fīqh* education can strengthen higher-order thinking, ethical reasoning, and spiritual awareness. This supports the argument that critical thinking in Islamic education should not be limited to logical skill. It should also cultivate moral direction and responsible application. Accordingly, the ethical boundaries of reason in the Qur'an may be summarized in three principles. First, reason must not speak without knowledge. Second, reason must be protected from arrogance and ego. Third, reason must be directed toward truth, guidance, and moral reform. These boundaries do not restrict critical thinking negatively; rather, they give it discipline, purpose, and ethical depth.

## Comparative Analysis

A comparison between modern critical-thinking theories and the Qur'anic model should not be framed as a simple opposition between “Western reason” and “Islamic revelation.” Such a contrast would be too general and historically inaccurate. Modern critical-thinking literature provides important tools for analysis, evaluation, inference, and reflective judgment. At the same time, the Qur'anic worldview provides an ethical and spiritual orientation that gives reasoning a deeper moral purpose. This section therefore compares the two models in terms of convergence, divergence, and possible integration. The aim is not to dismiss modern critical-thinking theory, but to show how a Qur'an-centered framework can enrich it by linking rational inquiry with truth, humility, accountability, and moral reform.

### 7.1 Areas of Convergence: Evidence, Reflection, and Judgment

Modern critical-thinking theories and the Qur'anic model share several important concerns. Both reject passive acceptance of claims and both emphasize the importance of examining evidence before reaching judgment. Ennis (2015) defines critical thinking as reasonable and reflective thinking directed toward deciding what to believe or what to do. Facione (1990, 2011) similarly identifies analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation as central components of critical thinking. These elements are also visible in the Qur'anic call to examine, verify, reflect, and avoid conjecture. The Qur'an repeatedly calls for evidence and rejects unsupported assertion. The command, “Produce your proof, if you are truthful” (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:111), shows that truth-claims should not be accepted without justification. The principle of *tabayyān* also requires verification before accepting or acting upon information (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Hujurat* 49:6). These Qur'anic principles correspond to the modern critical-thinking concern with evidence, source credibility, and responsible judgment. There is also convergence in the emphasis on reflection. Modern critical-thinking literature treats reflection as necessary for evaluating assumptions and revising beliefs (Dwyer et al., 2014). The Qur'an similarly calls for *tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, and *ta'addul*, which require the human being to reflect upon creation, revelation, history, and the self. Hashi (2024) argues that the Qur'anic view of critical thinking includes rational examination and disciplined reflection, but also connects these processes to moral and spiritual awareness. Therefore, the difference between modern critical thinking and Qur'anic critical thinking should not be exaggerated. Both traditions value disciplined thinking, resistance to blind acceptance, and the use of evidence. The Qur'anic model, however, places these elements within a broader framework of guidance and accountability.

### 7.2 Areas of Divergence: Autonomy, Revelation, and Moral Purpose

Despite these shared concerns, there are important differences between many modern critical-thinking models and the Qur'anic framework. Modern educational theories often emphasize intellectual autonomy, procedural reasoning, and the ability of the individual to evaluate claims independently. This emphasis is valuable because it helps learners avoid blind imitation and unexamined authority. However, when autonomy is treated as the highest value, critical thinking may become disconnected from moral and spiritual responsibility. The Qur'anic model does not

reject independent reasoning, but it does not treat autonomy as an absolute principle. Reason operates within a moral universe shaped by revelation, accountability, justice, and human responsibility before God. In this framework, revelation (*wahy*) is not seen as an obstacle to thought. Rather, it provides orientation, purpose, and limits for the proper use of reason (*'aql*). Junoh et al. (2021) explain that Islamic critical thinking shares rational and analytical features with Western critical thinking, but it differs by grounding reason in revelation, faith, and moral accountability. Another key difference concerns the purpose of thinking. Some modern models focus mainly on the procedure of reasoning: how to analyze, how to infer, how to evaluate, and how to decide. The Qur'anic model asks additional questions: Why is the person thinking? What kind of truth is being sought? Does the reasoning lead to justice, humility, and reform, or does it serve pride, domination, and self-interest? This makes Qur'anic critical thinking teleological, because it directs reasoning toward truth and moral transformation. MacIntyre's critique of modern moral discourse is useful here. He argues that modern reasoning becomes fragmented when it is detached from tradition, virtue, and a shared understanding of the good (MacIntyre, 1981). Although MacIntyre writes from within a different intellectual context, his critique helps explain why the Qur'anic model insists that thinking must be connected to moral purpose. Without such purpose, reasoning can become technically strong but ethically empty. The Qur'anic worldview also differs in its understanding of human limitation. Modern critical thinking often emphasizes self-regulation, but the Qur'an adds the need for humility before the limits of human knowledge. The Qur'an reminds human beings that they have been given only limited knowledge (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Isrā'* 17:85). This does not discourage inquiry; rather, it prevents intellectual arrogance and false certainty. Hashi (2024) identifies this recognition of human limitation as one of the distinctive features of Qur'anic critical thinking.

### 7.3 Complementarity and Integrated Reason

Although there are differences between the two models, the relationship between them can be understood as complementarity rather than opposition. Modern critical-thinking theory provides useful analytical tools, such as argument evaluation, logical consistency, source criticism, inference, and reflective judgment. These tools can strengthen Muslim educational practice when they are used within an Islamic ethical framework. At the same time, the Qur'anic model can enrich contemporary critical-thinking discourse by adding moral purpose, spiritual awareness, and responsibility before truth. Sahin (2018) argues that Islamic education should not merely imitate Western liberal-secular educational models, but should engage them critically while drawing upon Islamic intellectual, spiritual, and moral traditions. This is precisely the approach needed in the present study: not rejection of modern critical thinking, but critical integration. An integrated model of reason may therefore combine three elements. First, it accepts analytical rigor from modern critical-thinking theory, including evidence evaluation, clarity, logical consistency, and reflective judgment. Second, it grounds reasoning in Qur'anic principles such as *burhān*, *tabayyān*, *ta'aqqul*, *tafakkur*, and *tadabbur*. Third, it directs thinking toward ethical ends such as justice, humility, truthfulness, and moral reform. This integrated approach avoids two extremes. It avoids reducing Islamic thought to passive acceptance or uncritical traditionalism. It also avoids reducing critical thinking to skepticism without purpose. The Qur'anic model shows that the highest form

of critical thinking is not merely the ability to doubt, but the ability to seek truth responsibly, examine claims carefully, and allow sound reasoning to produce moral transformation.

### *Educational Implications*

The Qur'anic framework of critical thinking has direct implications for Islamic education. It suggests that education should not be limited to the transmission of information or the memorization of religious texts. Memorization remains important in Islamic learning, especially in preserving the Qur'an, *hadīth*, and foundational texts. However, preservation should be joined with understanding, reflection, verification, and ethical application. This educational shift is supported by contemporary scholarship on critical thinking. Abrami et al. (2015) show that critical thinking can be developed through explicit instruction, guided practice, dialogue, and problem-based learning. Andreucci-Annunziata et al. (2023) similarly show that effective critical-thinking instruction in higher education often includes active learning, argumentation, collaborative inquiry, and reflective assessment. These findings are relevant to Islamic education because they show that critical thinking does not develop automatically; it requires intentional pedagogical design.

#### *8.1 Rethinking Islamic Education: From Memorization to Reflective Understanding*

A central implication of this study is the need to move Islamic education from memorization alone toward reflective understanding. This does not mean abandoning memorization. Rather, it means placing memorization within a broader learning process that includes comprehension, questioning, interpretation, and application. The Qur'anic command of *tadabbur* supports this direction, because it requires learners to engage with meanings, implications, and consequences rather than stopping at recitation alone. The Qur'an asks: "Do they not then reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon their hearts?" (Qur'an, *Sūrat Muḥammad* 47:24). This verse indicates that access to the text is not sufficient if the learner does not engage with its meanings. In educational practice, this requires teachers to move from one-way delivery to guided inquiry. Students should be trained to ask: What is the meaning of the verse? What is its context? What values does it establish? What assumptions does it challenge? How can it guide judgment and conduct? Sahin (2018) argues that Islamic education should be understood through its own intellectual, moral, and spiritual traditions rather than being reduced to either secular models or narrow religious instruction. This supports the idea that Islamic education should cultivate the whole person: intellect, character, spirituality, and social responsibility. Similarly, Hashi (2024) argues that Qur'anic critical thinking integrates rational, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, which makes it especially relevant for educational reform. At the classroom level, a *tadabbur*-based approach may include close reading of Qur'anic passages, guided discussion, comparison of interpretations, identification of key concepts, and reflection on moral implications. For example, when studying verses on justice, students may be asked to identify the claim, the value, the evidence, and the practical implication. Such activities help learners move from passive reception to disciplined engagement with the text. This approach also requires assessment reform. If examinations only reward memorization, students will not develop reflective understanding. Assessment should therefore include short analytical essays, oral discussion, evidence-based responses, reflective journals, and case-based questions. These

methods allow teachers to evaluate whether students understand the meaning, can reason from evidence, and can apply concepts responsibly.

### 8.2 Critical Thinking in the Digital Age: The Mandate of *Tabayyān*

The Qur'anic principle of *tabayyān* has particular relevance in the digital age. The Qur'an states: "O believers, if an evildoer brings you any news, verify it, lest you harm people unknowingly and then become regretful for what you have done" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Hujurat* 49:6). This verse establishes verification as both an intellectual duty and a moral responsibility. In modern digital environments, students encounter large amounts of information through social media, search engines, artificial intelligence tools, and online religious platforms. Much of this information may be incomplete, decontextualized, emotionally framed, or false. For this reason, *tabayyān* should be taught as a core component of Islamic digital literacy. It trains learners to examine sources, compare evidence, identify bias, and consider the consequences of sharing information. Recent studies support this educational application. Nisa (2025) argues that *tabayyān* contributes to students' critical thinking by helping them filter, assess, and interpret information rather than accepting it at face value. Suryani et al. (2024) also show that digital literacy based on Islamic values can strengthen risk perception and critical thinking among Muslim adolescents. These studies indicate that Qur'anic verification can be connected with contemporary media literacy and responsible digital citizenship. In practical terms, Islamic education can apply *tabayyān* through verification exercises. Students may be given a religious claim from social media and asked to identify the original source, examine whether the quotation is accurate, check the context, compare scholarly explanations, and evaluate the possible social harm of sharing it without verification. This transforms the Qur'anic principle from an abstract moral instruction into a concrete learning skill.

### 8.3 Cultivating Intellectual Humility and Ethical Dialogue

A Qur'an-centered education must also cultivate intellectual humility and ethical dialogue. Critical thinking can become harmful if it is separated from character. A student may learn how to argue, criticize, and detect weaknesses in others' views, but without humility this skill may produce arrogance, hostility, or intellectual pride. The Qur'anic model prevents this by linking reasoning with moral discipline. The Qur'an commands: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in the best manner" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Nahl* 16:125). This verse provides an educational principle for dialogue. Disagreement should not be treated as a battle for personal victory, but as a disciplined search for truth guided by wisdom, respect, and fairness. This is closely related to *adab al-ikhtilāf*, the ethics of disagreement. In the classroom, this requires teachers to create a learning environment where students can ask questions without fear and disagree without disrespect. Students should learn how to listen accurately, represent opposing views fairly, distinguish between criticism of ideas and attack on persons, and revise their positions when stronger evidence appears. These practices are essential for developing mature critical thinking. Nawi et al. (2025) argue that Islamic critical thinking can be integrated into *uṣūl al-fiqh* education because the discipline already requires evidence, reasoning, weighing of arguments, and ethical judgment. This insight may be extended to other areas of Islamic education. Subjects such

as Qur'anic studies, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, ethics, and Islamic history can all include structured exercises in evidence analysis, comparison of views, and responsible judgment. The cultivation of intellectual humility also requires attention to the inner state of the learner. The Qur'an warns against arrogance and the misuse of reasoning, as seen in the story of *Iblīs*, who said: "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-A'raf* 7:12). This example shows that reasoning may be corrupted when it is controlled by ego. Therefore, Islamic education should teach students not only how to think, but also how to purify the motives behind thinking. Accordingly, the educational implication of Qur'anic critical thinking is not merely curricular reform, but the formation of a particular kind of learner: one who reads carefully, asks responsibly, verifies information, respects evidence, recognizes human limits, and seeks truth with humility. Such a learner is better prepared to face intellectual stagnation, misinformation, extremism, and moral confusion in contemporary society.

### *Contemporary Relevance*

The contemporary relevance of Qur'anic critical thinking appears in several areas of modern life. Muslim societies today face challenges related to intellectual stagnation, religious extremism, misinformation, digital manipulation, polarization, and weak dialogical culture. These challenges cannot be addressed by information transfer alone. They require a disciplined intellectual and ethical framework that trains the human being to verify, reflect, reason, disagree respectfully, and act responsibly. The Qur'anic framework developed in this study is relevant because it connects thinking with truth, accountability, humility, and reform. It does not treat critical thinking as a purely academic exercise. Rather, it presents it as a moral responsibility that shapes how individuals understand religion, evaluate information, relate to others, and participate in public life.

#### *9.1 Intellectual Renewal and Countering Extremism*

One of the most important contemporary applications of Qur'anic critical thinking is intellectual renewal. Many forms of stagnation arise when inherited opinions are repeated without understanding, when religious texts are quoted without context, or when disagreement is treated as a threat rather than an opportunity for clarification. Qur'anic critical thinking challenges these tendencies by emphasizing *ta'aqqul*, *tadabbur*, *tafakkur*, evidence, and moral accountability. This is especially relevant in addressing extremism. Extremist thinking often depends on selective reading, emotional mobilization, rejection of complexity, and hostility toward disagreement. It may also suppress *ijtihād* and reduce religious understanding to rigid slogans. The Qur'an, however, repeatedly calls for reflection, verification, wisdom, and avoidance of injustice. Its method does not support impulsive judgment or claims made without knowledge. The educational relevance of this point is supported by UNESCO's work on preventing violent extremism through education. UNESCO (2017) emphasizes that education can help build learners' resilience to extremist narratives by developing critical thinking, respect for diversity, and civic responsibility. This does not mean that critical thinking alone is sufficient to prevent extremism, but it shows that disciplined reasoning and reflective education are important parts of prevention. From a Qur'anic perspective, countering extremism also requires correcting the moral condition of reasoning. A

person may know religious language, but still misuse it through arrogance, anger, or desire for domination. The Qur'an warns against speaking without knowledge (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Isrā'* 17:36), and it commands justice even when dealing with those one dislikes (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* 5:8). These principles show that religious reasoning must remain connected to truthfulness, fairness, and restraint. Hashi (2024) argues that Qur'anic critical thinking integrates rational examination with ethical and spiritual dimensions. This is important because extremism is not only a cognitive failure; it is also a moral and spiritual distortion. Therefore, the revival of Qur'anic critical thinking can contribute to intellectual renewal by forming learners who ask for evidence, examine context, recognize complexity, and avoid turning religion into a tool of hostility.

### 9.2 Navigating the Information Crisis

The Qur'anic principle of *tabayyān* is highly relevant to the modern information crisis. Digital platforms allow information to spread quickly, often before it is verified. Rumours, fabricated quotations, decontextualized religious statements, manipulated images, and emotionally charged claims can influence public opinion within minutes. In this context, the Qur'anic command to verify information becomes especially important.

The Qur'an states: "O believers, if an evildoer brings you any news, verify it, lest you harm people unknowingly and then become regretful for what you have done" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Hujurat* 49:6). This verse links verification with social responsibility. The problem is not only that false information misleads the individual; it may also harm others and produce regret after damage has already occurred. Recent research confirms the urgency of this problem. UNESCO's report *Behind the Screens* found that many digital content creators do not systematically verify information before sharing it, and it highlights the need for stronger media and information literacy among those who influence public discourse (Ha, 2024). This finding supports the educational application of *tabayyān*: verification should be taught not only as a religious virtue, but also as a practical intellectual skill for the digital age. In Islamic education, *tabayyān* can be applied through structured activities. Students may be asked to examine a viral religious claim, trace its original source, compare it with reliable scholarship, identify missing context, and consider the possible harm of sharing it without verification. Such exercises train learners to move from passive consumption of information to responsible evaluation.

### 9.3 Interfaith Dialogue and the Global Pursuit of Truth

Qur'anic critical thinking is also relevant to interfaith dialogue and public communication in pluralistic societies. The Qur'an does not command believers to avoid dialogue with others. Rather, it provides ethical rules for communication, disagreement, and persuasion. It commands: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in the best manner" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Nahl* 16:125). It also instructs Muslims not to argue with the People of the Book except in the best manner (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Ankabūt* 29:46). These verses show that dialogue should be guided by *ḥikmah*, fairness, and respect. The aim is not to defeat the other side, but to clarify truth and preserve human dignity. This is closely connected with *adab al-ikhtilāf*, the ethics of disagreement. Critical thinking, in this context, requires the ability to listen, understand,

distinguish between disagreement and hostility, and present arguments without violating moral conduct. Recent scholarship on interreligious dialogue in Islam emphasizes that Islamic sources provide a framework for respectful engagement with religious others. Khan (2020) argues that Islamic interreligious dialogue must be understood through both textual and historical analysis, including Qur'anic teachings and the practice of early Muslim governance. This supports the view that Qur'anic reasoning is not closed or isolationist; it can contribute to constructive dialogue in diverse societies. The Qur'anic model is therefore useful in the global pursuit of truth. It encourages Muslims to participate in intellectual life with confidence and humility. Confidence comes from commitment to revelation and moral truth. Humility comes from recognizing human limitation, respecting evidence, and engaging others with fairness. This balance is important in a world marked by polarization and ideological conflict. Accordingly, the contemporary relevance of Qur'anic critical thinking can be summarized in three contributions. First, it supports intellectual renewal by resisting stagnation, imitation, and extremist simplification. Second, it strengthens information integrity by making *tabayyān* a moral and educational duty. Third, it contributes to interfaith and intercultural dialogue by linking argumentation with wisdom, respect, and ethical disagreement. These contributions show that Qur'anic critical thinking is not only a historical or theoretical subject; it is a practical framework for contemporary Muslim education and public life.

### Conclusion

This study has examined critical thinking as an intellectual, ethical, and educational practice within the Qur'anic worldview. It has argued that critical thinking should not be understood only as a modern secular skill or as a concept limited to Western philosophical development. While modern critical-thinking theories provide valuable tools for analysis, evaluation, inference, and reflective judgment, the Qur'an offers a broader normative framework in which reasoning is connected with truth, humility, accountability, and moral reform (Facione, 2011; Ennis, 2015; Andreucci-Annunziata et al., 2023). The study has shown that the Qur'an develops this framework through a rich vocabulary of thinking. Terms such as *ta'aqqul*, *tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *tafaqquh*, *tazakkur*, *tabayyān*, and *burhān* indicate different dimensions of intellectual activity. These terms do not refer to thinking as a purely abstract process. Rather, they connect reasoning with reflection upon creation, contemplation of revelation, verification of information, demand for proof, moral remembrance, and responsible action (Abdullah & Mohd Zhaffar, 2018; Jamil et al., 2021; Hashi, 2024). The Qur'anic model also expands the domains of critical thinking. It directs the human intellect toward the natural world, human history, and the inner self. Reflection on nature develops observational awareness; reflection on history develops causal and moral understanding; and reflection on the self develops ethical self-correction. In this sense, Qur'anic critical thinking is not limited to argumentation, but includes the disciplined reading of reality through signs (*āyāt*) and lessons. Another major finding of this study is that the Qur'an places ethical boundaries around the use of reason. It prohibits speaking without knowledge, warns against conjecture, condemns arrogance, and requires verification before accepting or transmitting information. The Qur'anic instruction, "Do not follow what you have no knowledge of" (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Isrā'* 17:36), establishes a principle of intellectual accountability. Likewise, the command to verify information (Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Hujurat* 49:6) provides a powerful foundation for responsible judgment in the contemporary digital age. The comparison between modern critical-thinking theories and the

Qur'anic model shows both convergence and distinction. Both value evidence, reflection, and reasoned judgment. However, the Qur'anic model adds a teleological and ethical dimension by asking not only how human beings think, but why they think and toward what moral purpose their reasoning is directed. This does not require rejecting modern critical-thinking frameworks. Rather, it allows for an integrated model in which analytical rigor is joined with spiritual awareness and ethical responsibility (Junoh et al., 2021; Sahin, 2018; Nawi et al., 2025). The educational implication of this study is that Islamic education should move beyond passive memorization toward reflective understanding, verification, dialogue, and responsible application. Memorization remains valuable, especially in preserving sacred knowledge, but it should be accompanied by *tadabbur*, evidence-based reasoning, and *adab al-ikhtilāf*. Such an approach can help learners engage religious texts with understanding, examine contemporary claims carefully, and respond to intellectual challenges with confidence and humility. Accordingly, the contribution of this study lies in presenting Qur'anic critical thinking as a holistic model that integrates reason, revelation, ethics, and education. It does not claim that the Qur'an presents critical thinking in the same technical language used by modern educational theory. Rather, it argues that the Qur'an provides foundational principles for critical inquiry: reflection, verification, proof, humility, accountability, and moral purpose.

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