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The Concept of Critical Thinking from the perspective of Islamic Education Teachers

[1]Nursafra Mohd Zhaffar, [2]Mohd Isa Hamzah, [3]Khadijah Abd Razak and [4]Wan Ali Akbar Wan Abdullah

[123] *Faculty of Education, National University of Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.*
[4] *SMK Undang Jelebu, 71600 Kuala Klawang, Negeri Sembilan.*

Address For Correspondence:
Nursafra Mohd Zhaffar, Faculty of Education, National University of Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.
Tel: +6013-2744337; E-mail: nursaframz@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Critical thinking is important in education. Previous studies have found that critical thinking students are influenced by the teacher's teaching pattern. Therefore, Islamic education teachers (IETs) should apply critical thinking in their teaching. However, the concept of critical thinking today is developed and characterized by the West. Thus, IET should explore further about the concept of critical thinking to increase their understanding because this understanding will guide them in their classroom teaching approach. The main purpose of this qualitative study was to explore IET's understanding about the concept of critical thinking in Islamic education. The main findings of this study show that the concept of critical thinking according to IET is comprised of three categories, namely; critical dispositions, critical thinking skills and the values which guide their thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is important in Islamic education (IE). This is because; the thought process teaches students to develop their faith as a Muslim. This thought process includes the application of Islamic principles, researching and making appropriate consideration when facing a critical moment in their daily lives (Zakir Badwi, 1989; Suhailah Hussien, 2007; Sidek, 2009; Rosnani Hashim *et al*., 2014). The importance of this is seen in line with the transformation of the national education that emphasizes higher order thinking skills (HOTs); in which, one of the element is critical thinking (Ministry of Education, 2014; Mohd Zaidi, 2014; Rajendran, 2013). But, the reality is, students are not really internalizing within them the values of IE in their daily lives (Mahmood Zuhdi, 2003; Rosnani Hashim, 2009; Sarimah *et al*., 2011; Zaharah, 2005). Previous research shows that secondary school student's critical thinking is influenced by the quality and style of teaching (Raths *et al*., 1986; Points, 2003; Sabri, 2008; Marin & Halpern, 2011; Phillips, 2013; Rosnani *et al*., 2014). Thus, critical thinking needs to be applied in the teaching of IE to build or develop the character of Muslim students. To teach critical thinking, a teacher of Islamic education (IET) first needs to know and understand the concept or philosophy of critical thinking. Knowledge and understanding will guide the implementation of effective teaching (Dunkin & Bidle, 1974; al-Ghazali, 1988). Therefore, this study focuses on the understanding of IETs on the concept of critical thinking in the context of secondary school.

Statement Of Problem:

The concept of critical thinking which thrives today is mostly being shaped by the West (Noor Hisham, 2014; Sidek, 2009; Mohd Nuri & Wan Suhaimi, 2009). Western epistemology of critical thinking is contrasting

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to the Islamic epistemology (Ashraf, 1988; Ibn Khaldun, 2009). Critical thinking according to Western perspective solely connects the mind with the fundamentals of logic and rational based on the empirical approach. Instead, Islam places revelation as a guide to the thought activities. Thus, the concept of critical thinking in Islam is based on values and ethics. Of course these differences affect the implementation of the concept of critical thinking in the classroom.

In addition, the study which focuses on critical teaching by teachers shows that teachers' understanding of critical thinking concept influenced the pedagogical and teaching approaches. Teachers who do not understand the concept of teaching for thinking will lead to less effective teaching practice and vice versa (Alazzi, 2005; Steffen, 2011; Suhailah Hussin & Lisa Edwar, 2012; Wheeler, 2015). Therefore, this study is relevant to be conducted; to explore the understanding of critical thinking concept based on IETs' views.

Critical Thinking And Its Relation To Islamic Education:

Critical thinking means to weigh and assess the quality of the information, ideas or phenomena based on certain criteria (Beyer, 1995). This process is used to solve problems, make decisions or to learn new concepts (Sternberg, 1986) either in the form of belief or action (Ennis, 1985). Based on the definition of these scholars, it is understood that critical thinking is a deep thinking before accepting any information or ideas which actions and beliefs are based upon.

In Islam, the concept of critical thinking is based on the verses of the Qur'an which encourages thinking through the clarification of Ulul Albab features (Al-Qur'an, 3: 190-191), the prohibition to follow without reasonable excuse (Al-Qur'an, 5: 104), prohibition to accept news without checking its authenticity (Al-Qur'an, 49: 6) and a directive to bring or produce solid evidence as the nature of truthful person (Al-Qur'an, 27:64). Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Messenger of Allah also plays a role to eliminate uncritical elements in the Pagan Arabs society, for example blindly accepting ancestral practices (al-Bukhari, No. 1043), making false accusations (al-Bukhari, No. 18) and others (Mohd Fauzi, 2004). Thus, the role of IE is to foster critical thinking based on Ulul Albab educational concept. These people are portrayed to have the ability to 'read' the words of Allah in Scripture and nature (Al-Qur'an, 3: 190-191), checking the validity before believing any information, being able to distinguish between good and bad, learn the lesson from history and to embody the results of deep thought into action either for their own benefits or for the society. In principle, the ability to think critically in IE is summarized in order to bear witness to the truth (Ismail Abbas, 2012; Syed Muhammad Dawilah, 1992).

Study Objectives And Issues:

Based on the discussion of the background of the study, the research aims to explore the IET's understanding of the concept of critical thinking in Islamic Education (IET). The main question in this study is about the views of IETs about the concept of critical thinking in Islamic Education (IE).

Methodology:

This study used a qualitative approach in the form of case study to gain deeper understanding about the concept of critical thinking from IETs' perspectives. In this study, the case refers to individual IET who helped generate the concept. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews on six IETs. Their names have been proposed by State Education Department. The sample selection is based on purposeful sampling technique (Merriam, 2009). Participants were selected based on criteria identified in advance by the researcher to ensure the information collected is appropriate and adequate. Among the criteria for the selection of study participants is being in the service for more than five years, displaying critical teaching in IE and easy to cooperate. The researcher obtained the permission to conduct the study from the Ministry of Education, State Education Department, school principals and IETs involving in this study. The interview process lasted 4 months; 12 meetings with the total minutes of 1210.

Data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti software version 7.5.9. The content analysis process involves selecting, reducing and giving meaning to the data obtained (Patton, 2002). Constant comparison method is also used. This comparison was made towards the concept of critical thinking based on participants at different times and also among participants in different locations to identify pattern similarities and differences in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Findings:

The results of data analysis provide important information on the concept of critical thinking in the view of IETs studied. Overall, the teachers show critical thinking of three major categories; 1) critical thinking dispositions, 2) critical thinking skills, and 3) values which guide critical thinking.

1) Critical thinking dispositions:

Participants were of the view that critical dispositions is internal motivation and a prerequisite for students to acquire critical thinking skills. If this disposition is not able to be applied, the student chooses to ignore high level questions either in education or even in their lives. It is based on what is mentioned by Teacher B:

I am experiencing right now, she's lazy to think, to a thinking question, she just ignored it. Attitude. She is lazy to think. When the question is a bit difficult, she did not want to think even just a bit. She blocked herself from thinking. She is lazy to think. There is no point to trouble herself to think. It is a matter of attitude.

Lazy habits affect the habits of those who do not want to analyse. Add Teacher B, "If she did not want to think, how can she analyse?" (GPI2 TB 1/4).

On the other hand, if students have critical thinking dispositions, they will have an open mind that is tolerant to different opinions and trying to understand the argument from different angles. It is based on what is stated by

Teacher F:

Usually when people share their views, but others did not accept ... he's a professional, he is not the kind that got angry, not responding back why he is satisfied or not. This means, he is open-minded (GPI6 TB1 / 11-12).

Teacher C added:

What I know, critical is, if there is a problem, people will try to find a solution from various angles. Then, they try to get answers from different perspectives and then find out what the best answer is from all available answers (GPI3 TB1 / 5).

In addition, having an open mind can also sharpen the view of a thinker for his willingness to listen to different views for his consideration. Otherwise, if someone is reluctant to listen, the information to be considered will be limited around his experience. He will not take into account the other alternative solutions.

I*Et al*so stressed that a stance in ensuring adequate information as a feature of a critical thinker. Students who like to ask questions, read, listen carefully and then reflecting back the information is deemed as a critical student. So, in this case, students need to be trained to be good listeners and good observers. In addition, critical thinkers are also cautious people in making a stance or decision and considering opinions from various angles on an issue. Said Teacher D:

It means that, critical person is,....he likes…he himself likes to seek knowledge. But the one who is not critical, he just live in his own adolescence… with gadgets, doesn't read books, doesn't like to go to lectures….. that is not critical (GPI4 TB1 / 6).

The relationship between critical thinking and communication skills were also highlighted by IETs. Critical thinkers normally are confident of themselves. This is due the fact that they can justify the views they share. Teacher F said:

Arguing professionally is not talking in a coffee shop; blaming other people or others, must have the proof. Proof and having its rationale, there is a good and bad effect on things…he has confident and has a consistent stance (GPI6 TB1 / 1).

In addition, to present his arguments convincingly, language skills are also required. These skills include on how to process sentences, to use conjunctions and to clarify the meaning of a concept with their own words.

A critical thinker is also characterized as a seeker of truth. Therefore, a thinker must be ready to change their minds and actions when he finds stronger evidence. In this case, curiosity is essential, so that students are encouraged to seek information to distinguish between right and wrong. As Teacher A said:

It means that if we have made a decision, what is right is right, what is wrong is wrong. It means that we have to defend our arguments….. except [changing] arguments for improvements or our ideas are for improvement, is ok. (GPI1 TB2 / 27).

2) Critical thinking skills:

IETs were linking critical thinking with problem solving activities and decision making process. This is because these activities involve thinking skills such as analysing, elaborating, evaluating evidence, make inferences, interpreting and meta-cognitive. According to IETs, the forms of thinking skills as described are needed in the teaching and learning IE to provide experience in processing information to make judgments. These skills can be applied in the teaching of IE in the areas of understanding the Qur'an, the Hadith, faith, jurisprudence, and akhlaq. However, critical thinking is not suitable to be applied in the teaching of Jawi and memorizing the Qur'an because it is more in need of rote-learning, as stated by Teacher F:

However, not all [the areas], for example jawi. [In] Jawi, we only give them the principles. The principle "aa aa" is open and close [techniques]. That is all. At that point we can't really see how the critical is. One more thing, memorizing is also the same. That is all. Others, majority are. When it is related to life, normally it can still be developed (GPI6 TB2 / 32).

The process of applying critical thinking skills has its own standards, namely the ability to make judgments with reference to the Qur'an, Sunnah and Maqasid syariah. Said Teacher C, "It's just on the part of teachers, they only see if they know the evidence from Quran and Sunnah (dalil naql), he makes sure the rational evidence (dalil aql) does not contradict. At least with the Maqasid. Maqasid syariah. "(GPI3 TB1 / 5)

3) Guiding values of critical thinking:

IETs also commented on the values which need to be held by a critical thinker. The theme of these values is divided into two; 1) the faith, and 2) the manners (adāb). For the faith, IETs stated that individual critical values depend on the ability to deduce a solution. In the end, the conclusion is attributed to Allah. This means that critical thinking is a tool to increase the faith in Allah. As stated by Teacher A and Teacher C:

Along the period when he was facing hunger, did he wondered whether he would be able to feed from us. No right? Who is it that made Ustazah to feed you? Allah. Eventually he'll say 'Allah'. This means that when he answered Allah, when he mentioned Allah, it meant that it is already at the highest level. He did not answer, "Ustazah wants to give it to me because Ustazah loves me," If that, it means he is still not there yet [the critical level] (GPI1 TB2 / 38).

We, as teachers, we guide them so that eventually they will believe with total faith that Allah exists. It is that simple. That thing is sometimes being doctrine since we were children. Allah indeed exists. But people might never have thought about the question, is it true that Allah exist? So, from there we will guide the students so that they will really believe in their hearts that Allah exists. (GPI3 TB1 / 7).

Other than that, believing the thinking boundary was also touched by all participants. Things which could not be explored with the ability to think critically, includes thinking about the Essence of Allah, the question of the prophetic and supernatural things like spirits, sins and virtues, as well as juristic rulings that have been fixed such as obligation to perform obligatory prayers and moral matters related to *mahmudah* and *mazmumah* categories. However, matters involving restriction of critical thinking can be considered from the point of wisdom of thinking prohibition. For example, the question, "what is the wisdom (*hikmah*) of Allah forbids us to think about what Allah looks like?" (GPI3 TB4 / 6)

Manner or adāb values are concerned with impartiality in decision making. Justice can be seen through conscientiousness in making allegations and thorough validity examination and the relevance of the evidence to support the claim. In addition, IETs view that critical thinking in IE is only used for good purposes, not vice versa. Thus, the activity of thinking should be directed towards the search for truth. Teacher F said:

Lawyers, who are not critical, can carry on doing their job ... but that does not necessarily mean he is responsible for the work he has done. Meaning to say, maybe in terms of the fact that they can be enticed to accept bribe, and they accept it. Because they lost their rationality. They want to win a case, a bit of bribe, they can win the case. Yes, they will try to confuse the jury or whatever or by any means. Because critical is for the better (GPI6 TB1 / 26).

In addition, other manners value derived from the data is to respect other speakers. IETs explained that the act of respect is seen when students listen to the opinions of their classmates until the end, do not insult or undermine their friends' answers and trying to understand the perspectives of different views from their own views. Finally, the value of the love of knowledge possessed by critical thinkers in which these values are highlighted with a willingness to seek knowledge through reading, listening to lectures and asking questions or exchanging ideas.

IET's critical thinking concept model is built based on the findings obtained through interviews with six participants of the study. IETs explained that critical thinking is based on three main categories: (i) disposition that involving open-minded, ensuring adequate information, looking holistically, self-confidence and seeking the truth, (ii) skills involves analysing, elaborating, evaluating evidence, making inferences, interpreting and meta-cognitive and (iii) values involving faith and manners (adāb). Figure 1.0 illustrates the Islamic Education teachers' concept model of Critical Thinking.

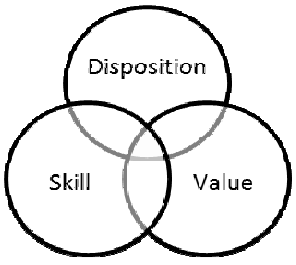

Fig. 1.0: Model of Critical Thinking Concepts Islamic Education Teachers.

Discussion:

These findings demonstrate that critical thinking in IE is consisted of three categories, namely dispositions, skills and values. This shows that IETs being studied possessed a blend of theoretical orientation between philosophy (value orientation) and modern psychology (skills and attitudes orientation) (Yıldırım, 1993). The teachers didn't only focus on the dispositions and skills to represent a critical thinker, but even includes the value of belief which guides their thinking. Understanding this concept will influence the teaching approach to

apply critical thinking in IE (Bailin *et al*., 1999). This finding coincides with the concept of mind education in Islam i.e. the potential of thinking needs to be nurtured and begins with faith in Allah. The combination of reason and faith will establish full faith in Allah (Ashraf, 1988; Mujamil Qamar, 2002; Muhammad Qutb, 2001). So, IET's emphasis on the value in the concept of critical thinking created unification between the role of mind and guidance of revelation (Mohd Farid, 2013). Hopefully this will produce Ulul Albab generation. (Qur'an, 3: 190-191).

Putting a limit on critical thinking is one of the peculiarities of this study. This is a sign of faith in a person, because conformity to the ability of the mind cannot match the knowledge of the Omniscient (Noor Hisham, 2014). This is what distinguishes the context of critical thinking in IE and other fields. Furthermore, IETs were of the opinion that mind potential, attitude and value need to be developed to explore other knowledge. If the concept of critical thinking is successfully applied and consistently nurtured, it will contribute to the building and culturing of civilization (Ibn Khaldun 1967; Muhammad Mumtaz Ali, 2012; Noor Hisham, 2014).

The implications of the conceptual critical thinking framework provides guidance to other IETs to better understand the context of critical thinking in the field of IE at secondary schools level and shape the form of teaching approach in the classroom. In addition, the teachers' professional development party will be able to develop training modules for teaching based on this framework specifically to stimulate the effectiveness of teaching thinking in school.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study shows that IETs have comprehensive views about the concept of critical thinking in IE covering the aspects of dispositions, skills and values. Therefore, all these aspects can be integrated to form an effective teaching of IE where students become aware the importance to be a better Muslim. They can think and reason better Islamically, able to communicate their idea with confidence, engage with others in careful consideration, respect each other and finally to produce a balanced and holistic Muslim generation as desired by the National Education Philosophy and Philosophy of Islamic Education.

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