

## Thinking Skills in Education: What Is the Alternative Approach to Educate Good Decision Makers?

Christina Andin@ Nur Qistina Abdullah<sup>1</sup>, Rohana Hamzah<sup>2</sup>,  
Mohd Shafiq Bin Abd Jabar<sup>3</sup>, Jabil Mapjabil<sup>4</sup>, Muhamad Suhaimi Taat<sup>5</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah

<sup>2</sup>Center for Modern Language and Human Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Pahang

<sup>3</sup>Center for Modern Language and Human Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Pahang

<sup>4</sup>Jabil Mapjabil, Borneo Institute for Indigenous Studies (Boriis), Universiti Malaysia Sabah

<sup>5</sup>Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah

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**Abstract:** The development of thinking skills is recognized all over the world as one of the most important educational objective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the Western world, the rationales that underlie in the need for developing students' thinking skills are always discuss from economic perspectives. However, concerns that are relating to the importance of thinking skill from those perspectives are limited to only the concept of solving problems related only to the worldly matter. Thus, this paper seeks to extend the discussion on the importance of thinking skills based on similar needs from Western and Islamic perspective which is to enhance thinking ability and also creates good judgement in decision making. Therefore, the focus is to analyse the gap exist in the current teaching of thinking skill approaches in the education field and invites us to reflect on the direction of our education for our current and next generation, especially within the context of choosing a suitable framework for cultivating students' thinking skills ability. Finally, this article proposes alternative approach in teaching thinking skill and how the approach will give impact in decision making with the value of justice.

**Keywords:** Islamic, Thinking skills, Education, Teaching, Decision Making

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### 1. Introduction

The development of thinking skills is recognized as one of the most important educational objectives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The term 'thinking skill' is commonly used in the field of psychology which can be related as a thinking process that help people to make sense out of their experiences by constructing meaning and imposing structures. The focus is on 'how to think' which is associated with procedural knowledge (Griffiths, 1987; Smith, 2002). Thinking skills are linked to a particular strategy for arriving at a decision or attaining the solution to a problem. Therefore, thinking skill is not simply a description of cognitive process but also involves judgment (Wegerif, 2007). In other words, thinking process involves the development of a person ability to differentiate between good and evil. Therefore, thinking process could not be labeled as being value-free (Rohana et. al., 2017).

The concept of thinking that is needed in Western world which is relate with the ability to think well and also make good judgemental is similar to the concept of thinking which is emphasized in the Qur'an. The Qur'an, for example, states a firm objection to Taqlid, the acceptance of any doctrine without any valid reasoning for doing so or acceptance without thinking and make judgement whether it is true or false. Therefore, the emphasis on intellectual exercise in pursuing good reasoning and drawing conclusions in order to discover the truth is evident in various chapters of the Qur'an. The frequent appearance of terms such as *tafakkur* (contemplating), *tadabbur* (pondering), *tabassur* (understanding), *tawassum* (reflecting), *nazar* (considering), *I'tibar* (take a lesson), *tadhakkur* (taking advice to heart) signifies the importance of thinking (Mohd Nuri Al-Amin and Wan Suhaimi, 2010). Therefore, the differences in the concept of thinking between Western and Islamic civilizations are not so much at the operational level, but rather, are deeply involved the "value" that interesting to discover.

Since the need for thinking skill is to develop an individual who can think well or become a good decision maker, this article attempts to analyse current approach in teaching thinking skills in education process. Moreover, the impact of current approach on decision making ability will also be analysed. Next, the researchers analyse the approach in teaching thinking skill from Islamic perspective and finally develop framework to present the real purpose of thinking process through education and it impact on decision making with the value of justice. This is the most important aim in teaching thinking skills which is to produce an individual that can think well thus being good in decision making and finally contribute for the betterment of the world and the universe.

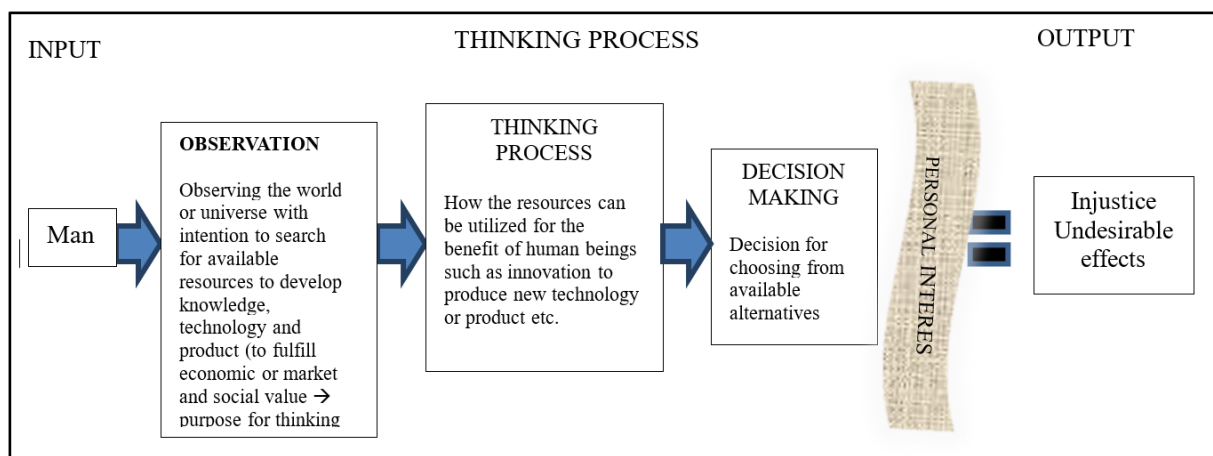
## 2. Contemporary Approach in Thinking Skill Education; what is the impact?

Policy-makers around the world strive to include thinking skills as an important educational goal. According to Craft (2007), by the late 1990s policy-makers in several countries including Australia, Canada, England, Hong Kong, China, Singapore and the Middle East had announced policy initiatives focused on fostering students' thinking. This is in line with Glevey (2006) who states technological advances and the need to stay competitive in these changing times is driving many of the educational reforms around the world, and for a number of national governments the enhancement of thinking is at the heart of their policies to raise the educational standards of their school children (p.291).

In Malaysia context, one of the six student aspirations in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MEB) is the need for developing thinking skills. In 2017, the revised version of secondary and primary schools' curriculum puts more emphasis on problem based learning. According to Tiew and Melissa (2019), the country's education is gradually moving away from examination-oriented system and rote learning into more emphasis is given to the development of students' Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Furthermore, Stromquist (2002) argues that, in order to compete in a global arena, a nation needs its workforce to, specifically: develop new ideas and solve problems successfully, collaborate and communicate effectively with other people, as well as adapt and function flexibly in different contexts and environments. The complexity of modern jobs requires thinking workers who demonstrate comprehension and judgment in the world of work (Wilson, 2000). The current era of technological advances has increased the requirement for skilled workers who are able to think critically, to evaluate alternatives, and to meet complex challenges intelligently (Pithers, 2000).

The purpose of thinking skills in education is more on the economics benefits. According to Adnan Abdul Rashid (2016), the outcome of this kind of education process may produce intellectual experts who pursue solely material desires and comforts without any spiritual progress and this has paved the way for exploitation and selfishness. Moreover, conflict of self-interest will arise in decision making when the answer for the truth and false end to human mind (Rohana Hamzah et. al., 2017). Hence, the ability to deny self-interest will determine the quality of decision and also thinking skill. Therefore, the purpose of developing thinking skills based on economic perspective without any spiritual value to guide human ability of justice in decision making will left many undesirable effects.

Decision made by individual who is self-indulge with his own interest at one point may solve certain problem but we tend to overlook the effect of the decision in the bigger, larger picture. For example, the invention of plastic bag may give economic value to industries and social value to human life but the invention also brings negative effect to the nature. Therefore, lack of spiritual and moral value may lead man to ultimately destroy the earth and cause an imbalance within the ecosystem. These include problems such as air pollution, water pollution, landslides, global warming and so on. The environment is both directly and indirectly affected by human activities. For example, automobiles produce carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides, which consequently contribute to air pollution. The agricultural fields laden with pesticides and fertilizers, pollute water bodies. These are only a few examples which show how human activities pollute the environment. Figure 1 summaries our argument related to the effects of thinking skills when the intentions more on the materialistic benefits. The utilization of thinking for the benefits of human beings without spiritual element will lead to injustice and undesirable effects.



**Figure 1:** The purpose and possible impact of teaching thinking skills

## 3. Alternative Approach in Teaching Thinking Skill In Education

Thinking is the most venerable characteristic of human beings. One of the important words “al-nas” uses as collective word to discuss about the concept of human being. The word defined human being as a being that can learn from his observation in order to acquire knowledge and to distinguish between rights and wrong (Solehah, 2007). Therefore, human beings can think and learn very fast in terms of understanding, adapting and changing something to be beneficial in our life. Human being ability to think is clearly stated in the Holy Qur’an and it is a gift from Creator that is not given to other beings. Therefore, God endowed man with capability to generate knowledge and the ability to understand the meaning of things. In other words, man observation and discovery on physical world will develop meaning the existence of things in abstract world. This enables man to think in his mind, to conceptualize, to have inner dialogue and self-reflective and develop his consciousness and also communicate with others (Muhammad al’-Mahdi, 2004; Rohana Hamzah, 2010). Human beings who do not think and develop correct concepts or idea will remain in the state of ignorance and muddle (Wahid Bakhsh Shaikh, 1999). Moreover, they may also have a tendency to act like animals, as stated in the Qur’an: “*Many are the Jinns and men We have made for hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, nay more misguided: for they are heedless*” (Qur’an 7: 179)

Thinking is the vital function of *al-‘aql* (intellect) which enables human beings to think and reflect on the signs from Almighty God. According to Mohd Nuri Al-Amin and Wan Suhaimi (2010), references to *al‘aql* appear forty-nine times in various chapters of the Qur’an. The Qur’an emphasizes deeply the utilization of thinking faculties for recognizing Allah SWT as the sole Creator of the universe and all creatures. Therefore, Allah SWT encourages everyone to think and acquire knowledge, because *iman* or faith grows with knowledge. Through thinking and knowledge of Allah SWT, one may remove any suspicions or any misconceptions about the Creator of this universe. With the light of knowledge man will gain the truth and promote his ability to discriminate between good and evil (Adnan Abd Rashid, 2017). This ability (differentiate between good and bad) is very crucial in decision making and give an impact of justice in human action. Therefore, acquisition knowledge in Islam is the acquisition of faith in the existing of Allah SWT as the source of the truth and justice for human beings to establish good deeds not only to mankind but also all creatures as a whole.

Therefore, the entire purpose of thinking from Islamic perspective is to develop knowledge and the knowledge does not end within the human mind. The knowledge should bring them to the abstract of the world by recognizing and realizing the real concept of God and get close to Him. This is the ultimate purpose of man creation which is to know and acknowledge Allah SWT as the Lord and Creator and to arrange his life as God’s servant and a vicegerent (Wan Mohd Nor, 2005). In general, this purpose of educational aim is to obtain fulfilment of the heart and wisdom of the mind by developing equilibrium in mind, spirit and body. The equilibrium develops sense of balance and harmony internally when human beings get the right concept of relationship between himself and God. Moreover, the internal peace will create peace impact on external world in term of man relationship with others and all God’s creation in this universe (Zuraida Ahmad et. al., 2016).

Meanwhile, in the process of recognizing signs of God, human beings are required to engage in critical contemplation with in-depth reasoning skills; because those signs could not be grasped by relying solely on human senses. For example, in capturing His signs through the miracles of natural phenomena, the Qur’an points out that meanings of His signs cannot be simply read at face value of the signs, but instead require thinking so as to properly interpret them. “*He it is who sends down water from the sky; from it You drink and from it (grows) the vegetation on which You send Your Cattle to pasture. With it He causes to grow for You the crops, the olives, the date-plums, the grapes, and Every kind of fruit. Verily! In this indeed an evident proof and a manifest sign for people who give thought.*” (Al-Nahl, 16: 10-11) – Emphasis added by the author.

Islam demands the quality of thinking for recognizing His signs since man is regarded as both an *abd*(servant) and a *khalifah* (vicegerent) of Almighty God. Therefore, education process means to produce man with abilities to fulfil these roles. However, in Islam it is difficult to talk about these responsibilities without referring first to man’s nature and his relationship with his Creator (Rohana Hamzah, 2009; Ros Eliana, 2014; MuhdAfzamiman, 2017). Therefore, as a servant to God in his nature means:

- i. Every single individual is responsible to develops himself up to the highest level which is the level of knowing and understanding the truth of his existence.
- ii. Every single soul is responsible for full submission only to God.
- iii. Every single soul is bonded to obey God’s command in using his intellectual potentials and his abilities of manipulating and changing nature into something new in order to fulfill his needs.
- iv. Every single soul is responsible for his freedom of choice and is bonded to the law of thinking in using his intellect. Every soul is also responsible to every decision that he has made.(Nata, H. Abuddin 2005).

Meanwhile, God's khalifah means man has been assigned as a leader to all God's creation. However, man has to act accordingly to God's Will, not his own will and thus the power that God has given to him not by any power of his own (Muhamad al'-Mahdi, 2004). Allah SWT created man and endowed him with physical ability along with external senses and internal senses or soul. The soul is just like a "software" or computer program, meanwhile the external senses just like the "hardware". However, the most important part is the soul which can determine the quality of man. The soul of man is a very different program as compared to other creatures. Man's soul has been programmed with attributes of knowledge and freewill or the power of freedom but in a limited degree (Muhamad al'-Mahdi, 2004). Therefore, man is the only creature who is able to accept responsibility as a leader to all God's creation. We have to use the freedom power given to us by Allah SWT to continue His plan for creation. Hence, our responsibility is to ensure that His Creation continues to progress so that His signs will be more and more perfectly expressed in the physical world. Therefore, as Khalifah of Allah SWT we are responsible to decide and lead the way of our life according to the Will of Allah SWT; to respect and help all of human society according to the Will of Allah SWT; and to perfect the physical world of space and time according to the Will of Allah SWT (Muhamad al'-Mahdi, 2004).

Hence, the most crucial part is man's life in this world. In the world of existence, every soul will be tested for spiritual development growth, which means to know the reality of self-existence and to choose between right and wrong path as which is inspired by God: "Have We not made for him a pair of eyes, and a tongue and a pair of lips, and shown him the two ways (good and evil)?" (Qur'an 90:8-10). Without recognizing and believing in the existence of Allah SWT and His Greatness, the attribute of freewill may encourage man to hinder himself from the responsibilities of *abdankhalifah*. At the same time they will lose sense purpose of life and self-control and also ability to differentiate between good and bad. Therefore, self-awareness towards being the servant and vicegerent to Allah SWT, will develop a sense of responsibility towards living in this world accordingly to His commandments. In this regard, there is a need for human beings to recognize Allah SWT and believe in His Greatness. The more one knows about Allah SWT, the more one will become close and build a spiritual bond with Allah SWT.

According to Malik Badri (2000), the concept of *tafakkur* that involves the contemplation of the created object and thinking about its Creator leads to a sense of submission and appreciation of Allah SWT. This will result in strengthening a believer's *iman* (faith) in Allah SWT; the unshakeable belief that Allah SWT is the Eternal, the Absolute, and the Creator of the universe. This includes the strong belief that man must be held accountable for his own deeds. In other words, man is fully responsible for the choices he made. Those who choose the right path and abide by the rules of Allah SWT in satisfying their instincts will be rewarded, while those who choose the wrong path will be punished. Therefore, *Iman* forms the foundation for shaping and screening behaviour, in addition to cleansing it from all impurities.

Hence, thinking is obligatory in Islam. There are three basic elements of Islamic thinking: (a) *Tafakkur* – reflection and contemplation; (b) *Al-Yaqin* – emphasising the verification of knowledge by which to reach the truth and strengthen the *iman* or faith; and (c) *Al-Adl* – stressing the objectivity and justice in the decision-making process, thereby prohibiting any type of personal interests. It is the duty of Muslim parents and teachers to equip their children and students with these thinking skills. The highest impact of thinking process is to develop sense of internal unity and faith as the fundamental principles of life (Rohana, Sarimah and Kamarudzaman, 2012) as the following:

### **i. The Unity of God**

Thinking and education process should develop sense of Unity of God as the only One and everything else is different from Him as Creator. This principle of life is the fundamental value for spiritual maturity development. Therefore, man can realise that every God's creation in its existence is bonded by space and time. Therefore, it will keep changing in the evolution that come to existence, matured and die. In other words every God's creation bonded to the law of nature as well as the law of morality as His Will.

### **ii. The Unity of Creation**

The unity of God's creation proven by the unity and the consistency of cosmic order for example today we can observe rotation of electron around proton in atom just like rotation of planets around the sun. Every being in the cosmos and every event that takes place do so by God's command. Therefore, the cosmic order consists of the law of nature or the Divine pattern in it. The unity and the consistency of cosmic order enables man to recognize the permanence substances of things and the repetition of events produce cause-effect relations. Everything has a purpose which is never final but always subject to other purposes and God is the ultimate cause and the ultimate end.

### **iii. Unity of The Truth and Unity of The Source of Knowledge**

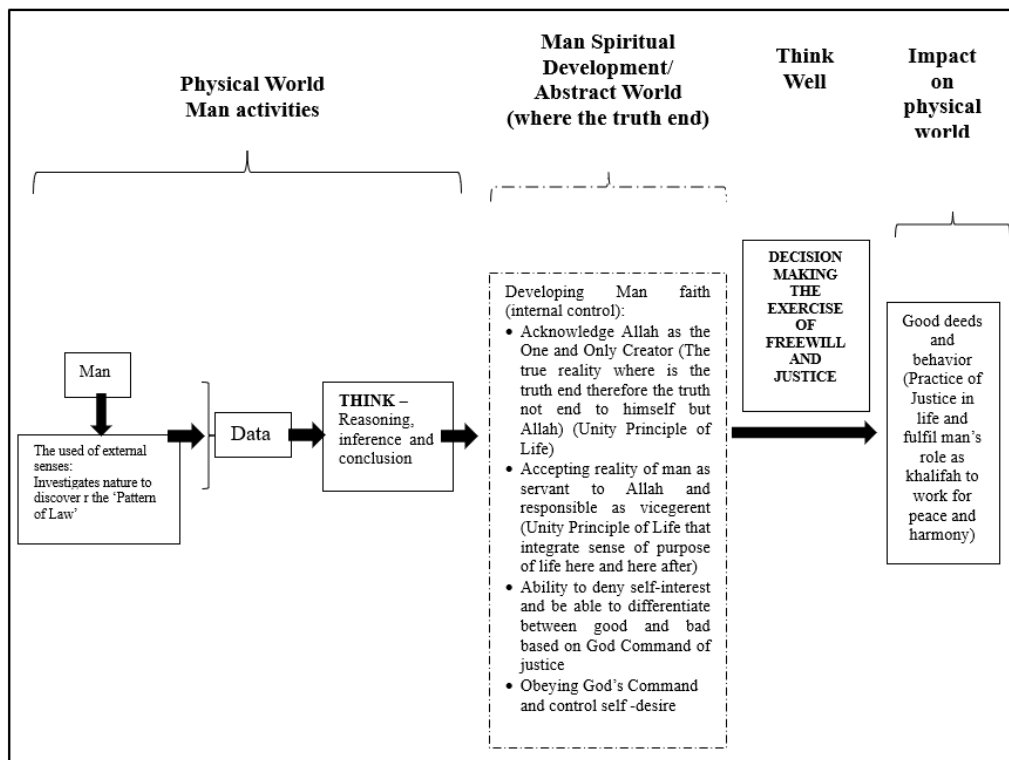
When one investigates nature and attempts to discover the truth using observation on the patterns of laws in the universe, it is certainly possible to make mistakes, to fall under illusion and to think one has grasped the truth while being in error. In other words, what we perceive through our senses, does not necessarily represent the ultimate reality or the truth (Rohana et al., 2017). The truth, which is the object of reason, is embodied in the laws of nature. These are the patterns of God’s command in His creation, which are constant and unchangeable and hence are possible to discover, to establish and to use for the benefit of humanity. Since Allah SWT is the One and Only Creator, the only source of knowledge, the truth cannot be equivocal. He knows the truth and in His Revelation, He tells it as it is. What He conveys in the revelation cannot be different from reality, since He is the Creator of all reality as well as of all truth. Therefore, logical equivalence of reason, truth and reality with the facts of revelation is the most critical principle in knowledge development and thinking process in Islam. The unity of truth prescribes that no contradiction or variation between reason and revelation is ultimate. As the result, this principle enables man from generation to generation to develop their faith through thinking process.

**iv. Sense of Unity of Life**

All God’s creations are united and purely submit to God’s command to accept man. Man is the only creature carries the Divine trust of freedom to exercise his pure submission to God or not. Therefore, man is the only creature that carry the moral freedom of law. In other words, the moral life is a higher, superior, nobler, and greater creature in this life. The main corpus of religious or moral laws consists of actual practices of living, of being, and of doing. When and what we do fulfil the moral requirement, it is good; when it does not, it is evil. Therefore, human deeds alone could be good or evil, depending upon whether they bring about justice, righteousness, beauty, happiness or otherwise. In other words the fulfilment of khalifah’s responsibilities is the development an establishment of good culture or way of life and civilization.

**v. Unity of Humanity**

All humans are one and the same; this is the basis that forms the groundwork of Islam’s universalism. There is no different between humans just because the differences exist in their colour, their races, their heredity and etc. Therefore, no one can underestimate other just because of their physical looks. All humans are one in the eye of Allah SWT except for their deeds, which distinguish them in terms of moral virtue, cultural and civilization achievement.



**Figure 2:** The real purpose of thinking process through education and its impact on decision making

**4. Conclusion**

This paper discusses the current approach of thinking skills education and how it will give an impact on

student ability in decision making. We realised the real purpose in teaching thinking skills in education is to teach human being to think well and make good judgement in decision making. Therefore, we try to improve current approach by analyse the purpose of thinking skills education from Islamic perspective. Then, we realize the ability to think is a special gift from God to human being. The gift has accomplished man with ability to develop knowledge about the true concept of Allah SWT and remove any suspicions or misconception about Him. The true concept of Allah SWT will promote man ability to discriminate between good and bad and also be able to deny his self-interest or desire because he realizes the truth in the end leads to Allah SWT and not himself. This awareness will improve man's ability in decision making and develop sense of responsible to be just. Therefore, the entire purpose of thinking from Islamic perspective is to develop knowledge and the knowledge does not end with the human mind capability and bring them to recognizing and realize the truth which is the real concept of God and finally gets close to Him. Finally, this article propose alternative framework for teaching thinking skill in education which is not only to bring goodness to human being but also all creatures in this universe as a whole.

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