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ACADEMICIANS INSPIRE OPINION

What's Happening with Thinking?

A Guest Submission H March 22, 2021 O 2 Comments

By Wan Mazwati Wan Yusoff

When I entered IIUM, the first thing that was taught was correct definitions based on clear worldview developed by the Quran and Sunnah. The first few months in IIUM was like months of soul searching, reflecting, redefining, modifying, adapting and adjusting all the concepts in my mind, that I thought were according to the teachings of Islam but were not, to the clear concepts which were defined in the light of the Quran and Sunnah.

Immersing myself into reading hundreds of articles and books made me realised the importance of defining concepts correctly because these concepts set the frameworks within which ideas are constructed into practices. Wrong concepts will result in wrong ideas and wrong practices. Since man is at the centre of education, therefore I was taught the definition of man from the perspective of the Quran and Sunnah. It is only logical to look in the Quran for the meaning of "human" since we believe that Allah is the Creator of human, therefore Allah knows best what and who human is, thus the right place to look to understand the essence of human and to be human is in the Quran and in the lifestyle of Prophet Muhammad.

Concisely we answer the question of "What is human?" as a creation of Allah who is endowed with body, mind and soul. Human is responsible to ensure that all of these dimensions are developed to produce an individual who is well-balanced physically, psychologically, intellectually and spiritually. All endeavour of education at all level must ensure that the human is developed holistically. From here my lamentation of the state of education in the Garden of Knowledge and Virtue begins.

I am a staunch supporter of Islamic education which I define as an education with the continuous effort of developing the whole human, the body, the mind, and the soul. And this can be done via Islamisation and relevantisation. For the past few months, I realised that the university is no longer putting the emphasis on the development of the mind when they scrapped out Creative Thinking from the university core course with an argument that the course failed to develop creative students who can provide creative solutions to solve problems in their field of studies.

Those who hold on to this claim are not aware that thinking is a habit of mind and a habit of mind cannot be developed in one semester. What we taught were tools of thinking skills. If we just think for a minute, we will realise that a skill can be taught but one will not be skilful until one practices the skills taught to them. If one went to a driving school, took driving lessons, and passed the driving test and one never drives after passing the test, one will not be a good and skilful driver. Same thing with thinking skills, teachers only taught them how to use the thinking tools in order to be skilful in thinking. But students will not be skilful if they have not used the skills after passing the course.

The sad thing is, I view teaching thinking as a religious obligation to develop human's mind because mind is not only a part but the most important part of man. And now this will be gone when the university sidelined thinking and made thinking as not an integral part of man. I have been teaching thinking for more than ten years now. When students came into my class, I found that no students, even though their kulliyyahs were proud of them as high achievers, but to this date NOT A SINGLE student can explain to me why Allah said creations are signs for THOSE WHO USE THEIR 'AQL.

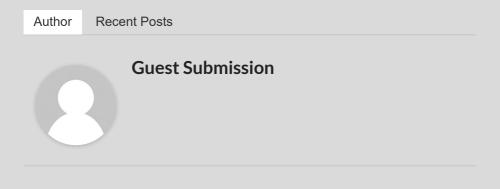
Furthermore, no one could make conclusions based on this verse how our 'aql works and how our thinking moves. This also tells me that the courses students took in their kulliyyah have not trained them to make logical conclusions based on claims not necessarily Quranic claims. No student could make conclusion on how human understand from this single verse. NO STUDENT could explain the definition and functions of 'aql based on verses 30-31, Surah al-Baqarah. NO student yet could explain human cognition based on the Qur'anic verses. When I gave them an assignment to write an essay explaining what thinking is based on the teaching of the Qur'an, they would go and refer to the western sources and ignored the Quran. Their explanation is very mechanical based on naturalism worldview.

The Qur'an is addressed to "THOSE WHO USE THEIR 'AQL" critically, creatively, ethically and spiritually. If the students do not know how to use their 'aql, then the Qur'an is not for them. In my class, students opened their eyes and minds wide when they formed syllogism to make falsification test on the Qur'anic claims and when they found Allah's words "If only we had listened OR used our 'aql we will not be in the blazing flames" (67: 10). I am western educated who do not understand the lowest level of Arabic but with training of the mind I am able to teach thinking from Qur'anic perspective.

My mission is to make students realise that al-Qur'an is the source of knowledge not just a tool that they use to calm their stressful and depressed heart but the source of knowledge so that their 'aqidah will be strong even a tsunami cannot break it. When I heard that thinking is no longer offered to students, my heart sank, my motivation plunged into the drain. I felt like my mission is sabotaged and now students can go back to their old life thinking that al-Qur'an did not explain 'aql and thinking and the only source that they have on thinking is western knowledge. And even though they graduated with a first class degree in rocket science but when someone say, for example, feelings are prayers, they would swallow hook, line and sinker. And now they would not learn to be creative in asking questions from multiple perspectives on Qur'anic verses and Hadiths. Now they would not know Quranic cognitive theory but probably would refer to Piaget cognitive theory.

When Muslims in the western world set up Islamic psychology department and taught Islamic cognitive theory we could only marvel their achievement because at home we are happy to be a really big NGO. ***

(The writer, Dr. Wan Mazwati Wan Yusoff is an academic in the Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies, Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences)



2 Replies to "What's Happening with Thinking?"

1.

Wahed says:

March 23, 2021 at 12:01 am

I think the university should reconsider not scrapping out (Creative thinking course) as a core course...The course providing the students a very important platform for changing mindset and giving them an Islamic framework for thinking. Creativity does not happen overnight, it is jus like going to gym when u want to build a strong muscle, it requires time, take years...I am receiving many thanking messages from students who have taken the course with me before, they are expressing their feelings, how the course have changed their life...they are no longer stress, they are positive, happy, confident.. etc...

2. Mohammed Farid Ali al-Fijawi says:

March 23, 2021 at 1:37 am

I can feel the lament of the author. Her concern is valid, because the Philosophy and Islamic Worldview class and the likes are only teaching students what Islamic worldview 'aught to be' for a good Muslim. There is a need for classes that can teach students how to 'be' according to Islamic worldview. To 'be' starts from 'aql and fikr (thinking) according to the dictates of the Qur'an and Sunnah. I hope thinking skills class can be reinstated for the good future of the students. Prof Jamal Badi, the author and several other FIDS lecturers has made this subject their forte through years of teaching and researching. They not only mastered the general thinking skills taught in world universities, but they managed to Islamise and relevamtise the subject and introduce Islamic thinking skills. This is indeed a great milestone of iium awaiting for recognition and appreciation.

I also request the author and the FIDS specialists to come up with Module or something like Islamic thinking skills for dummies, so students specifically and Muslims in general can learn this subject.