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Scientific students' critical thinking skills on the fundamental concept of morality: Wisdom, courage, purity and justice in the perspective of Islamic education

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Abstract
Critical thinking skills are a series of structured and in-depth thinking processes aimed at solving problems holistically. In the context of Islamic education, the fundamental concept of morality as elaborated in *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* consists of four key elements: wisdom, courage, purity, and justice. These four elements form a solid foundation in shaping human morality, particularly for students as the nation's future generation. This study aims to assess the critical thinking abilities of science students at the Indonesia University of Education (UPI) regarding the fundamental concept of morality, through a critical thinking ability test. The findings indicate that the students' critical thinking ability falls within the moderate category. Although these students demonstrate a sufficient understanding of wisdom, courage, chastity, and justice, further efforts are needed to enhance their critical thinking capabilities.

Keywords: critical thinking skills; fundamental concept of morals; Islamic education

INTRODUCTION

Morality serves as the moral foundation that guides human behavior throughout life. According to Imam al-Ghazālī, morality is an intrinsic quality of the soul that naturally prompts a person to act without the need for extended deliberation (Busroli, 2019; Erisa Widiana Sukirman, 2023; Majid, 2022). Morality is also often regarded as the study of human behavior and disposition, providing insight into the virtues of the soul and the methods of nurturing and purifying it when corrupted (Supriatna *et al*., 2023).

In Islamic education, the fundamental concept of morality is constructed upon four principal pillars: wisdom (*ḥikmah*), courage (*shajāʿah*), purity (*ʿiffah*), and justice

(*ʿadālah*) (Ayu & Junaidah, 2019; Kustiawan *et al*., 2023; Maruapey *et al*., 2024; Nst, 2017; Taufik, 2021). These components are crucial in shaping an individual's noble character. Amid the challenges posed by modernity, critical thinking is considered an essential competency for students to develop in order to comprehend and apply these moral principles in their daily lives. This is particularly relevant for students in science and technology (commonly referred to as *saintek*), who often face ethical dilemmas related to scientific and technological advancement.

This study introduces a novel approach by integrating the concept of morality rooted in Islamic tradition—as articulated in *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* by Imam al-Ghazālī—with an assessment of science students' critical thinking abilities. Unlike previous studies that have generally focused on moral education in broader terms or have overlooked the integration of critical thinking, this research emphasizes the necessity of embedding moral values within a critical thinking framework to address contemporary challenges, particularly those related to ethics in science and technology.

A wide range of literature underscores the significance of morality in Islamic education as the core of both spiritual and ethical development (Maulidah, 2022; Nasution & Masyithoh, 2024; Rahman, 2015; Robaeah *et al*., 2024; Syamsul *et al*., 2023). In *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī designates wisdom, courage, purity, and justice as central elements in the cultivation of moral character. Complementary studies, such as that of Basila and Haryanto, highlight the importance of enhancing students' critical thinking to deepen their understanding of moral values (Basila & Haryanto, 2023). However, most of these studies address isolated aspects and do not account for the specific demands of contemporary science education.

Despite the growing volume of research on moral education, there remains a lack of studies that specifically assess students' critical thinking skills in relation to their understanding of Islamic moral concepts. Prior research tends to focus on moral development in general terms, without linking it to critical thinking or the unique needs of science-based education. This gap underscores the importance of a study that systematically integrates moral analysis with a critical thinking framework, especially for students in the science and technology disciplines.

Therefore, this research seeks to evaluate the critical thinking abilities of science students with regard to the fundamental concepts of morality in Islamic education. The central research question is: "What is the level of critical thinking ability among science students in understanding the fundamental concept of morality from an Islamic educational perspective?" Addressing this question will provide a more nuanced understanding of students' comprehension of moral values, which form the core of Islamic education.

This study contributes in two key areas. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on moral education by connecting Islamic moral values with critical thinking competencies. Practically, it offers a valuable reference for the development of more effective educational programs that integrate moral values within a critical thinking framework, particularly for science students. Thus, this research offers not only theoretical insights but also actionable recommendations for character education grounded in Islamic principles. It is hoped that this study will serve as a foundation for nurturing a generation that possesses moral integrity, critical thinking skills, and ethical awareness in the modern era.

METHOD

This study was conducted in November 2024 using a quantitative descriptive research design. The research involved administering a critical thinking ability test to 48 science students at the Indonesia University of Education (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, UPI), focusing on the fundamental concepts of morality, namely wisdom (*ḥikmah*), courage (*shajāʿah*), purity (*ʿiffah*), and justice (*ʿadālah*). Each stage of students' critical thinking ability was evaluated based on the scores obtained and subsequently analyzed to determine their overall level of critical thinking.

Prior to the assessment, students were provided with a brief introduction to the fundamental concept of morality through an information discussion model. Following this orientation, students were required to answer a series of open-ended questions related to these moral concepts. The students' responses were then analyzed using criteria based on the core dimensions of critical thinking.

The evaluation focused on seven essential components of critical thinking:

1. **Problem Identification** – the ability to recognize and understand core moral issues;
2. **Analysis of Information** – the ability to process and interpret relevant information;
3. **Argument Construction** – the ability to formulate coherent and logical arguments;
4. **Evaluation of Evidence** – the ability to assess the credibility and relevance of supporting evidence;
5. **Logical Conclusion** – the ability to arrive at sound conclusions based on analysis;
6. **Self-Reflection** – the ability to evaluate one's own reasoning and improve it;
7. **Problem Solving** – the ability to propose effective solutions based on critical analysis.

This methodological approach was intended to obtain a comprehensive overview of students' critical thinking abilities in relation to Islamic moral principles, and to identify specific strengths and areas requiring improvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Results of the Critical Thinking Ability Test among 48 Science Students

Nama	Soal 1	Soal 2	Soal 3	Soal 4	total	Nama	Soal 1	Soal 2	Soal 3	Soal 4	total	Nama	Soal 1	Soal 2	Soal 3	Soal 4	total
A	12	17	18	13	**60**	Q	23	17	18	20	**68**	GG	18	22	17	19	**76**
B	35	35	35	35	**140**	R	20	27	27	18	**92**	HH	35	30	35	32	**132**
C	13	16	18	21	**68**	S	17	20	13	22	**72**	II	20	20	24	20	**84**
D	30	33	27	30	**120**	T	30	30	32	32	**124**	JJ	28	28	28	28	**112**
E	17	15	20	20	**72**	U	12	14	16	12	**56**	KK	20	18	22	20	**80**
F	30	30	30	22	**112**	V	30	35	30	33	**128**	LL	32	28	29	31	**120**
G	18	20	20	20	**78**	W	15	16	15	18	**64**	MM	18	16	17	21	**72**
H	22	30	28	24	**104**	X	30	28	30	32	**120**	NN	30	36	31	31	**128**
I	18	20	20	22	**80**	Y	15	16	19	18	**68**	OO	23	21	17	23	**84**
J	20	22	28	30	**100**	Z	34	32	32	30	**128**	PP	28	28	29	27	**112**
K	21	21	23	19	**84**	AA	20	18	20	22	**80**	QQ	21	18	18	19	**76**
L	24	24	28	20	**96**	BB	32	28	32	28	**120**	RR	33	35	33	35	**136**
M	15	23	23	27	**88**	CC	13	12	14	17	**56**	SS	15	16	15	18	**64**
N	21	29	20	30	**100**	DD	35	35	35	35	**140**	TT	34	30	30	34	**128**
O	20	18	22	20	**80**	EE	15	16	14	15	**60**	UU	28	27	28	29	**112**
P	26	28	26	28	**108**	FF	30	32	34	32	**128**	VV	24	22	22	20	**88**

Description:
This study aimed to evaluate the critical thinking skills of 48 science students from the Indonesia University of Education (UPI) in relation to the fundamental moral concepts—wisdom (*ḥikmah*), courage (*shajāʿah*), purity (*ʿiffah*), and justice (*ʿadālah*)—from the perspective of Islamic education. The assessment was conducted by analyzing students' answers to open-ended questions, which were evaluated based on seven key elements of critical thinking:

1. **Problem Identification**: Ability to understand the core issues related to the moral concepts.
2. **Information Analysis**: Ability to process information relevant to the given questions.
3. **Argument Construction**: Ability to formulate logical arguments based on existing knowledge and data.
4. **Evidence Evaluation**: Ability to assess the validity and relevance of supporting evidence.
5. **Logical Conclusion**: Ability to draw rational conclusions from the analysis.
6. **Self-Reflection**: Ability to evaluate one's own reasoning to improve argumentation.
7. **Problem Solving**: Ability to offer effective solutions based on critical reasoning.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics Output

Statistics

Critical thinking skills

N	Valid	48
	Missing	0
Mean		95.79
Median		90.00
Mode		128
Sum		4598

Description:
The descriptive statistical analysis yielded the following findings:

1. **Mean Score**: The average critical thinking score was 95.79 out of a maximum ideal score of 140, equivalent to 68.42%. This indicates that, in general, students possess moderately strong critical thinking abilities.
2. **Median and Mode**: The median score was 90.00, meaning half of the students scored below or above this value. The mode was 128, suggesting that the most frequent score among students was relatively high.
3. **Total Score**: The cumulative score of all 48 students was 4598.

These findings indicate that while most students demonstrated adequate to strong performance, there remains a degree of variance, suggesting a need for targeted development in certain aspects of critical thinking.

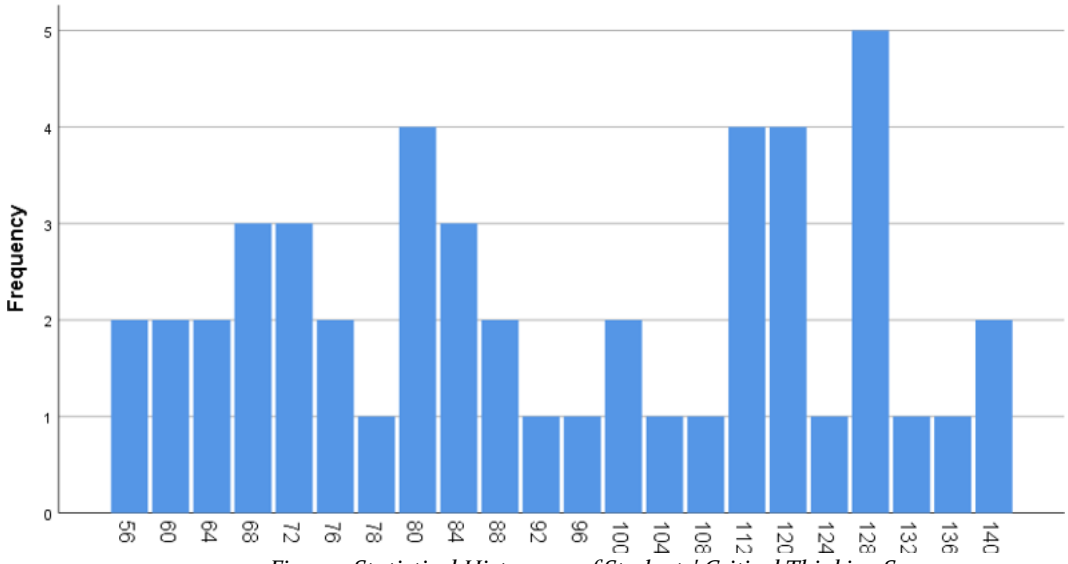

Figure 1 Statistical Histogram of Students' Critical Thinking Scores

The histogram illustrates the distribution of scores obtained by science students in the critical thinking ability test. The most frequently occurring score was 128, representing 91.14% of the highest frequency within the score distribution.

These results indicate that the majority of science students possess strong critical thinking abilities when engaging with the fundamental concepts of morality—*ḥikmah* (wisdom), *shajāʿah* (courage), *ʿiffah* (purity), and *ʿadālah* (justice)—within the framework of Islamic education. The high score of 128 reflects students' competencies in various critical thinking elements, including problem identification, information analysis, argument construction, evidence evaluation, and logical conclusion.

This outcome supports the findings of Suyadi and Sutrisno (2023), who noted that students exposed to Islamic moral education tend to demonstrate enhanced critical thinking skills. Similarly, Hasanah *et al.* (2022) found that integrating moral values into learning processes can significantly improve students' analytical and evaluative capacities in moral decision-making. Therefore, the predominance of high scores in this study suggests the effectiveness of Islamic educational approaches in fostering a critically engaged mindset among science students, although further improvement is still needed in some specific components to achieve optimal levels.

Table 3 Output of the Normality Test

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Critical thinking skills	.136	48	.027	.934	48	.010

Lilliefors Significance Correction

Description:

The results of the normality test show that the data in this study meet the assumption of normal distribution, as indicated by both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The significance value for the K-S test is 0.027, while that of the S-W test is 0.010. Both values are below the threshold significance level of 0.05, suggesting that the dataset can be considered normally distributed.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test assesses the conformity of sample data with a theoretical normal distribution, while the Shapiro-Wilk test is more sensitive, especially for small to moderate sample sizes. The consistency of both test results in this study supports the assumption that the data are close to a normal distribution. This is further confirmed through visual analysis using the P-P plot.

Figure 2

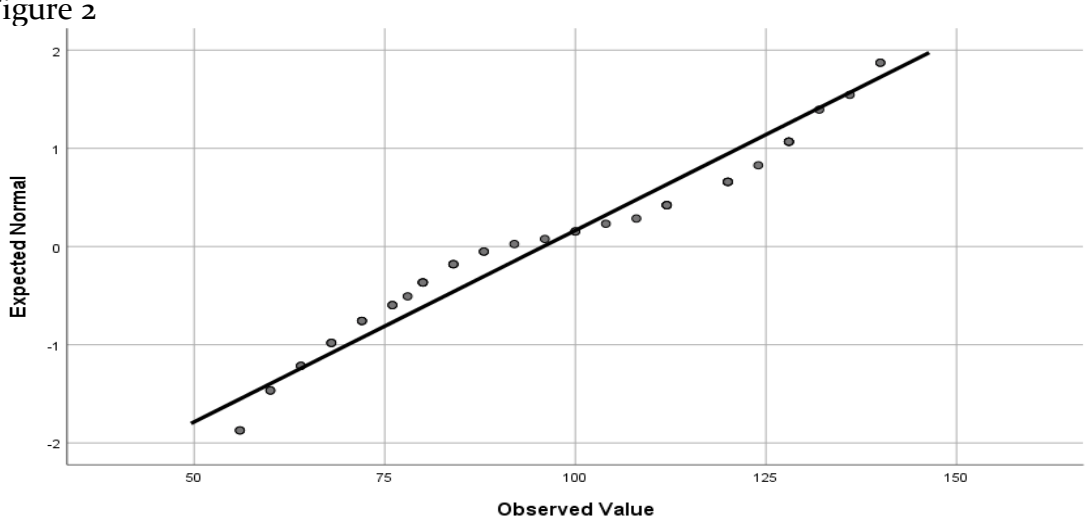

Figure 2 Normal Q-Q Plot of Critical Thinking Ability

Description:

The Normal Q-Q Plot (P-P Plot) displays data points distributed closely along the diagonal reference line, which indicates theoretical normality. This visual evidence further supports the statistical finding that the data follow a pattern consistent with normal distribution. As a result, parametric statistical methods such as *t*-tests or linear regression analysis may be reliably applied in further analysis.

These findings are in line with research conducted by Lestari and Rahman (2021), who emphasized that the K-S and S-W tests are effective tools for testing data normality in educational research. Hasan *et al.* (2020) also confirmed that normal data distribution is a prerequisite for applying parametric methods, which yield more valid and reliable analytical results.

Data Visualization

The bar chart representing the distribution of students' scores in the critical thinking ability test demonstrates that most students fall within a high-performance category, with the score of 128 appearing as the most dominant. This visualization reinforces the descriptive statistical findings that the critical thinking skills of science students—particularly in relation to the moral foundations of wisdom (*ḥikmah*), courage (*shajāʿah*), purity (*ʿiffah*), and justice (*ʿadālah*)—are generally at a satisfactory level.

In conclusion, the data indicate that science students at the Indonesia University of Education (UPI) exhibit relatively strong critical thinking skills when it comes to understanding and analyzing the core concepts of morality. However, areas such as self-reflection and problem-solving still require further development to enhance overall critical thinking competence.

Discussion

This study reveals that science students' critical thinking ability in comprehending the fundamental concept of morality from an Islamic educational perspective is categorized as fairly strong, with an achievement rate of 68.42%. This suggests that students have understood core moral values, such as:

1. **Wisdom (*ḥikmah*)** – reflected in the capacity to make thoughtful and prudent decisions (Fithriyana, 2019);
2. **Courage (*shajāʿah*)** – embodied in ethical and fair actions (Hidayat, 2020);
3. **Purity (*ʿiffah*)** – representing personal integrity and sincerity;
4. **Justice (*ʿadālah*)** – a principle that promotes balance and fairness in decision-making and behavior.

Despite this promising performance, certain critical thinking elements—particularly *argument construction* and *self-reflection*—require further strengthening to reach their optimal potential.

Relevance of Research Results

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of integrating moral values within a critical thinking framework. For example, Suyadi and Sutrisno (2023) highlighted the role of moral education in enhancing students' ability to make ethically grounded decisions. Their research shows that when moral principles are embedded into learning processes, students are better equipped to assess issues from ethical perspectives.

Additionally, Hasanah *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that the application of moral-based learning models in Islamic education significantly improves students' critical thinking capacities, particularly in situations that demand moral judgment. These parallels reinforce the conclusion that integrating Islamic moral values into academic settings not only strengthens moral reasoning but also promotes intellectual rigor in ethical decision-making.

Data Normality Context

The statistical analysis in this study confirmed that the data were normally distributed, as evidenced by:

1. **Statistical tests**, such as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, which yielded significance values below the 0.05 threshold;
2. **P-P plot visualization**, in which the data points align closely along the diagonal reference line of normal distribution.

This normality assumption justifies the application of parametric analysis techniques for deeper data exploration. The findings are supported by Lestari and Rahman (2021), who concluded that normal data distribution serves as a strong foundation for ensuring the validity and accuracy of statistical interpretations, particularly in educational research involving cognitive assessment.

Gap Analysis

Although students' critical thinking ability was found to be moderately strong, their performance still falls short of the ideal level. This indicates the necessity of further

reinforcing both the understanding and the practical application of fundamental moral concepts.

Several strategies are proposed to bridge this gap:

1. **Deep and interactive discussions** – Rahman and Ismail (2020) emphasize that reflective, dialogue-driven learning environments enhance logical reasoning and moral sensitivity.
2. **Self-reflection-based learning** – Encouraging students to reflect on their own reasoning processes can raise awareness of their cognitive patterns and promote the development of more structured, moral, and analytical thought.

These strategies are essential for optimizing critical thinking outcomes, particularly in the context of moral education within science and technology disciplines.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications:

This study supports Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1991), which posits that transformative learning occurs when learners are able to connect their experiences with core values. Islamic education, by integrating values such as *ḥikmah* (wisdom), *shajāʿah* (courage), *ʿiffah* (purity), and *ʿadālah* (justice), offers a strong foundation for the development of students' moral character and critical thinking abilities.

Practical Implications:

The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for designing:

1. Morality-based instructional programs, such as reflective and interactive discussions;
2. Value-oriented educational models, which enable students to:
3. Critically analyze information,
4. Construct logical arguments.

This approach is further validated by Hasanah *et al.* (2022), who found that educational models integrating moral values have a positive impact on students' critical thinking development. By applying this model, educators can foster an academic environment that balances intellectual growth with moral integrity.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the critical thinking abilities of science students at the Indonesia University of Education (UPI) concerning the fundamental concepts of morality—*ḥikmah* (wisdom), *shajāʿah* (courage), *ʿiffah* (purity), and *ʿadālah* (justice)—within the framework of Islamic education. Based on the results, the students' critical thinking skills fall into the moderately strong category, with an average score achievement of 68.42% of the ideal maximum. This suggests that students have an adequate understanding of the application of Islamic moral values in academic and everyday contexts.

The study recommends strengthening students' critical thinking abilities through more innovative teaching strategies, including interactive discussions, case-based learning, and reflective practices. Integrating moral values more explicitly into university curricula will enhance students' awareness of

the relevance of morality in contemporary life. Practically, this implies that educational institutions should implement character-based learning programs centered on Islamic moral principles. This approach will not only cultivate critical thinking but also instill noble values needed to confront global challenges and modern realities with integrity.

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