

# Exploratory Study on Islamic Critical Thinking Skills: An Analysis of The Meaning, Trends, and Framework for Teaching Tawhid in Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

This study aimed to explore the elements of critical thinking skills required for Islamic Studies teachers in teaching *Tawhid* using an exploratory sequential mixed-method design. Nine Islamic Studies experts from educational institutions in North Eastern Nigeria participated in the study. In the qualitative phase, expert interviews were conducted, which served as the basis for the development of quantitative instruments. A 61-item questionnaire was analyzed for reliability using IBM SPSS version 25. Exploratory factor analysis identified thirteen factors that characterize elements of critical thinking in Tawhid teaching. Smart PLS and confirmatory factor analysis validated these items. The resulting framework includes three main themes and 12 sub-elements that focus on Knowledge Construction (KNC), Evaluative Reasoning (EVR), and Right Decision Making (RDM). Each theme includes four sub-elements. This framework serves as a guide for the development of critical thinking skills among Islamic Studies teachers in Nigerian secondary schools. The study is of theoretical, methodological and contextual relevance to policy makers, curriculum developers, lecturers, supervisors and teachers of Islamic Studies. Recommendations include integrating the framework into the Islamic Studies curriculum in northeast Nigeria to improve teachers' critical thinking skills and optimise Tawhid teaching in secondary schools.

**Keywords:** Islamic Critical Thinking Skills, Framework for Teaching Tawhid in Secondary Schools.

***...If you want to teach people a new way of thinking, don't bother trying to teach them. Instead, give them a tool, the use of which led to new ways of thinking. (Buckminster fuller)***

## **Introduction**

As a result of unawareness, the sin known as the worship of natural phenomena was born in human society. Man, attributes divinity to mere creatures. He began to worship almost all the things in the world, holding them to be gods. Owing to this intellectual anomaly, idolatry became a rooted feature of human civilization (Farooq, M. 2017). Not even the coming of thousands of prophets and reformers could bring about any change in this State of affairs, in the practical sense. (Anon n.d.) The rejection of the prophets brought down on the deniers the chastisement of Allah but *shirk* could never be wiped out of society. Then Allah took it upon himself to intervene. One major manifestation of this intervention in human history was the emergence of the prophet Muhammad (SAW). Qur'an 48:28 defines the divine intervention thus: "It is He that sent forth His prophet with guidance and the true faith, so that he may exalt it above religions. Allah is the all-sufficient witness. "It is recorded in Sahih Bukhari. "He (peace be upon him) will not depart from this world as Allah decreed, unless and until these people are brought to the straight path. (Fathul Bari 449–8). It is the purpose of this article to introduce a pedagogy based on the *Tauhidic* paradigm as the catalyst for quality education that enhances and unleashes the development of a whole person's growth in body, mind, heart, and soul (Hussien, 2006).

An American encyclopaedia has very appropriately described the emergence of Muhammad (SAW) as having "changed the course of history" Similarly, French historian Pirenne (2003) has expressed it thus: "Islam changed the face of the globe. The traditional order of history was overthrown" (Котлер, 2008). This shows that, for the prophets of the past, communication alone was required, whereas, for the sealed prophets and messengers of Allah SAW, not just communication but also implementation was required. No nation can rise above the qualities of its teachers. Equally, no teacher can rise above the quality of his or her thinking.

The function of education is to produce humans equipped with life skills that will enable them to be useful citizens. Citizens with sound morals, creative minds, intelligence, honesty, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities can think critically and, above all, be conscious of their Creator by being devoted servants (*Ibaadullah*). Unfortunately, the modern education system that is based on secular worldviews seems to be deficient in presenting such an ideal and useful citizen. Therefore, this article aims to introduce a holistic paradigm based on the *Tawhidic* worldview, hoping to be an antidote to the current crushing complexities in the world that are currently erring towards volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, and materialism. Infusing the Islamic critical thinking paradigm into the curriculum of secondary schools will enhance the spiritual and intellectual development of both teachers and students within secondary schools.

## **Purpose Statement**

Despite the extraordinary scientific and technological progress, humanity today experiences multiple challenges lacking solutions. These challenges are connected to a secular-based educational system that emphasises material needs over spiritual aspects. Ken Wilber (2008) states that the western system addresses only the physical aspects of life, ignoring the improvement of the human mind and spirit. This ugly trend turns man into a mere economic machine servicing industries and investors. For years, scholars have linked

this to the cause of most problems in the West. Khan (2001) states that after the fall of communism in 1991, the world was faced with an ideological vacuum. This vacuum can be filled by Islam alone.

This article therefore, presents the Adab-based curriculum as the future-ready curriculum that will see the making of man as a whole person integrated into all his four dimensions of intelligence (body, mind, heart, and soul). These future graduates will not only be citizens endowed with competence but rather those with a strong, active, and functional conscience. In this way, the human race will be freed and rescued from the negative effects of bad education. In the words of both Albert Einstein, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education, and similarly, John Sloan and Dicky in Covey (2014) states, "The end of education is to see men made whole, both in competence and in conscience. To create the power of competence without creating a corresponding direction to guide the use of that power is bad education. Furthermore, competence will finally disintegrate apart from conscience. "It is the firm belief of the author that the ABC Model is just out to ensure the conscience is strengthened to enable both teachers and learners to get connected with high spiritual power that would guide their affairs and be a solution to all their unforeseen challenges, for those who obey Allah will succeed and indeed get away out of any problem.

The ABC Model combines three frameworks with tauhid as the base. The first is the Qalb framework based on revelation as understood and explained by Imam AlGhazali; the second is the Paul-Elder model of critical thinking skills with emphasis on the intellectual traits aspect of his framework; and the third is Stephen Covey's 7 habits of highly effective people. Pragmatism and connectivism, in the light of revelation, form the underpinning paradigm for this research. to fill the aforementioned gap, Khan further explained.

Uncritical teaching of Islamic studies in general and Tawhid in particular is causing divisions among Muslim sects and occasionally leading to violence and fighting among Muslims, necessitating an immediate solution. Leo Igwe (2018) mentioned that the Education Minister of Nigeria, (former) Mallam Adamu Adamu, made an urgent call for critical thinking skills in the Nigerian educational system in an article published in a newspaper. 'The Guardian (2018). This article attempts to explore the elements of critical thinking skills in the teaching of tawhid in secondary schools. But before then, the researchers analysed and explained the meaning and trends and presented a comprehensive framework for teaching tauhid, laying more emphasis on critical thinking.

### **Literature Review**

The 1977 First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah was significant as it marked the acknowledgement by the Muslim world of the 'crisis' in Muslim education. The conference was successful in raising the consciousness of the Muslim world to the basic issues of liberalising secularisation within the inherited public education system due to Western colonialization on the one hand and rigid and conserving traditional religious education on the other hand (Abdullahi, 2018). These two systems are dualistic in nature and cannot be merged unless a new system is developed to integrate Western sciences with Islamic knowledge and teachings. Below explains.

Among the most common criticisms by students in Islamic Studies classes globally is that they feel disengaged (Ashaari et al., 2012). Another empirical study has found that students feel Islamic studies does not respond to the issues and problems they face and that the content taught does not connect to their overall learning. In short, students are

increasingly concerned about the relevance of Islamic studies. As with all subjects, a significant responsibility falls on the shoulders of us as educators to make learning relevant.

Studies have connected this failure to the traditional approach to teaching Islamic studies subjects, isolating the content of teaching Islamic studies from modern subjects. These issues focused on the only teacher/subject-centered approach and the lack of a proper teaching model that instills the culture of thinking critically against the traditional memorization and text reading that yield robot-like students with uncritical minds moulded for passing terminal exams. Ashaari et al (2012) that in the present world, developed countries have become superpowers due to their economic and military might. A huge vacant that is unfilled is an ideological superpower that potentially belongs to Islam. This article, therefore, proposes critical thinking skills based on the *Tawhidic* paradigm as a suitable framework to rescue modern man from these material-based educational models that result in crushing complexities. To do that, the researchers stated:

### **Critical Thinking Skills and Problem Solving**

To solve any problem, we need critical thinking (CT), and CT is directed by theoretical frameworks. The study of theories for solving current global issues, in general, is heavily dominated by modern Western-centric frameworks. Some of these approaches are elevated to a level of 'canon' or sacred and divine. For instance, the modern liberal-scientific/Secular, critical-Marxist, and religious All three suffer fundamental hitches, which incapacitate them in solving the challenges of the human race in the contemporary world. Behar-Horenstein and Lian (2011) asserted that the main cause of the failure is linked to their emphasis on conjecture instead of knowledge. This ugly trend throws humanity into the sad realities of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) as it separates man from his or her spiritual and material aspects. Also, the religious perspectives are limited to only personal and private matters.

This is due to the influence of modern worldviews that overshadow religious perspectives. Unlike the religion of Islam, whose worldviews are based on divine revelation as enshrined in the primary sources of knowledge (the Qur'an and Sunnah), which provide and address holistically the needs of humanity, they offer comprehensive and practical solutions to the problems bedeviling human life, especially in contemporary times. Farooq (2017) therefore, this paper argues for the need for a fourth paradigm that is capable of giving humanity a total solution to the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects of his life. This is the Islamic reformist framework of critical thinking skills (IRFCTS) in teaching the subject of tawhid in Nigerian secondary schools.

In his book 'The Spirit of Islam' Amir Ali describes Muhammad SAW as a "great teacher," a believer in progress, an upholder of the use of reason, and indeed the great pioneer of rationalism. He further states, "We have already referred to the Arabian prophet's devotion to knowledge and science as distinguishing him from all other teachers and bringing him into the closest affinity with the modern world of thought. The author disagrees with Amir's assertion as he utterly ignores the fact that modern thought is based on conjectural premise and speculative tendencies; hence, it leads humanity to rebel against their Creator and the Qur'an as the book of guidance. Therefore, Muhammad SAW was not sent to authenticate or validate modern thought, but rather to fully liberate humanity from baseless guesses and doubts and lead humanity to the light of revelation, the Qur'an (Muhammad, 2018b).

### Evolution of CTS Frameworks

Several scholars attempt to integrate the various approaches to CTS into learning. In this article, the researcher highlighted the contributions of Paul-Elder and Ibn Khaldun to CT, with an emphasis on learning. However, there is a need to integrate these seemingly disparate streams of thought to provide an explanatory framework for the status of Islamic studies in secondary schools, which were built on the Western concept of education. To achieve this end, it is essential to overview the fundamental theories and their respective scholars. Their works collectively justify the emergence of CT as a necessary skill in teaching as a whole and Tawhid teaching in particular. Boa & Wattanatorn(2018) Figure 1 below highlights this process of emergence, starting from the Socratic philosophical tradition (Representative of the Modern Educational System) and its Islamic counterpart (i.e., the Khaldunian Paradigm)

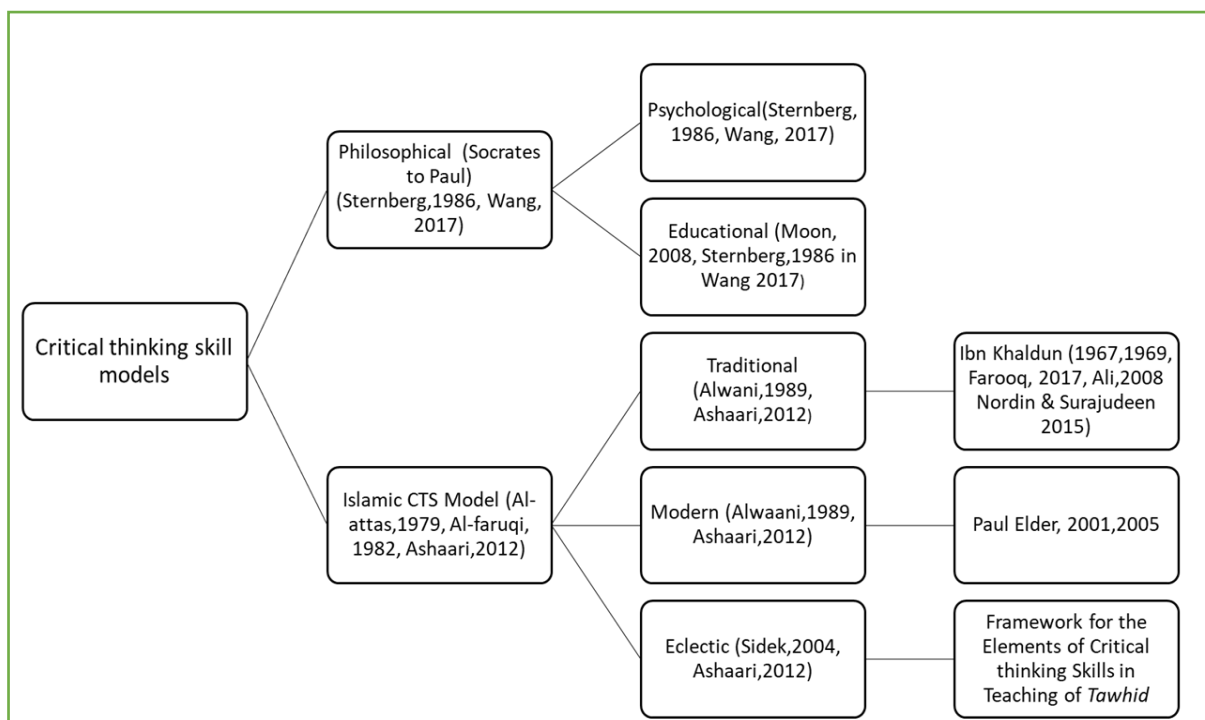


Figure 1 Evolution of CTS Frameworks

Adapted from Author's PhD thesis Inda (2022)

Based on the above framework we can comprehend that There are three traditional approaches corresponding to critical thinking conceptions. These academic traditions have developed distinct models, each with its concerns and goals. The philosophical approach to the critical thinking model articulates reasoning elements and thought standards for evaluating the elements. The psychological model of critical thinking is concerned with problem-solving skills or components. In educational settings, the educational model evaluates thought (Abrami et al., 2008). Typical models of three traditions include Richard Paul's model, Robert Sternberg's componential model, and the Bloom taxonomy. Model by Richard Paul: Since it was first proposed in 1993 Richard Paul's model has evolved and improved. The goal of Paul's model has always been to create a flexible theory of critical thinking that can be applied across multiple disciplines. Such disciplines include Islamic studies (Ibid, 2008).

Several researchers have attempted to combine the preceding models to make them more relevant to the need for critical thinking in learning. For example, Alwani (1989) grouped these models into three groups based on the traditional, modernist, and reformist approaches. The first approach is also known as the approach of authenticity, which focuses on presenting content as it is with no or minor alteration from the original text. The second approach entails the modernistic approach, which argues the impossibility of a systematic approach to be built in isolation from Western or modern thoughts and worldviews. (Inda, A., Ismail, A. et al (2020). The eclectic as the third approach serves as the conduit pipe that combines both the Islamic and modernist perspectives on education. This approach allows one to choose the best of traditional thought and the views from the 'modernist' approach, which do not contradict the traditional Islamic views with clear proof of their correctness. (al-Faruqi, I. 1982).

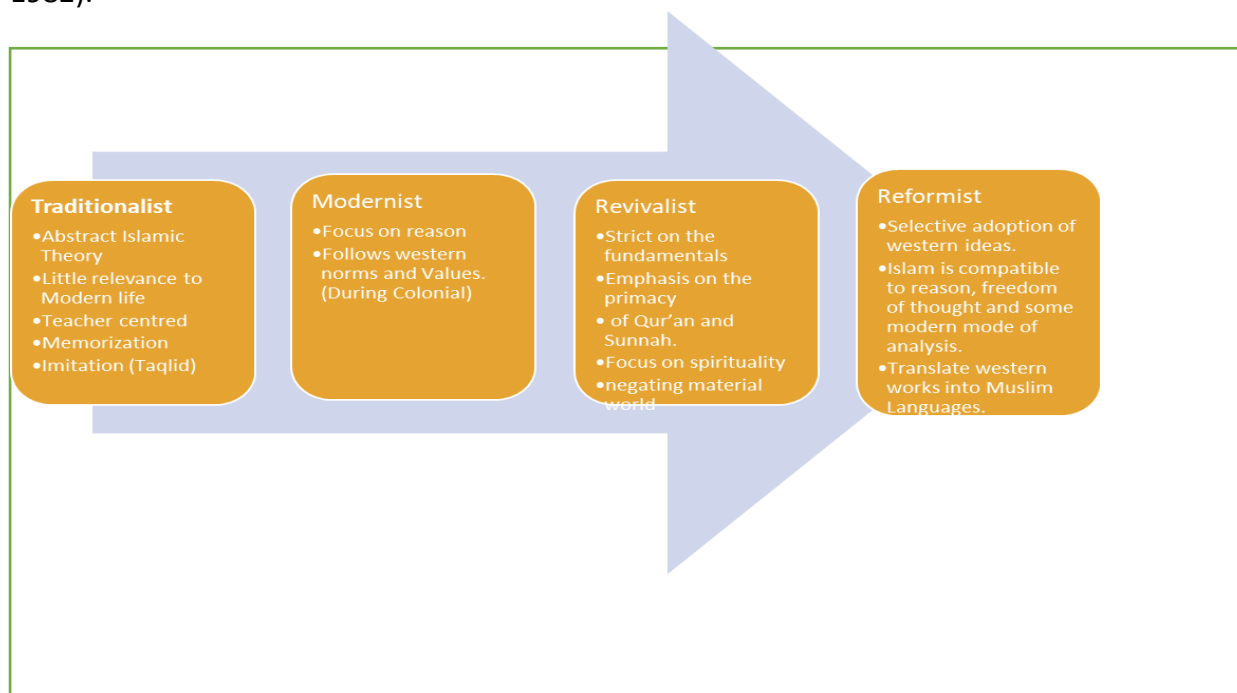


Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.** Trends of Islamic models of Critical thinking skills.

Source: adapted from: Alwani (1989)

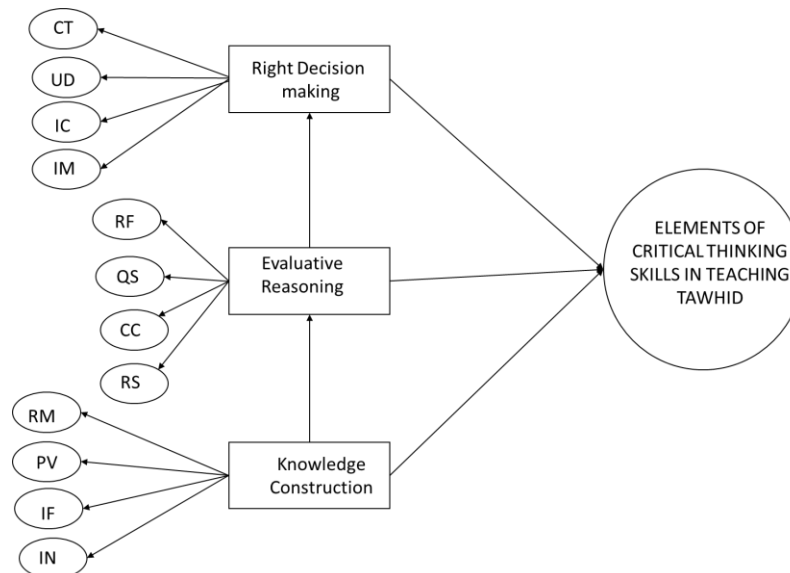
### Framework for the Elements of CTS in Teaching of *Tawhid*

To describe the proposed framework developed in this study, we can express all the 12 elements and their main themes in one paragraph thus: "As the teacher of Islamic studies teaches the subject of *Tawhid* he begins with an implementable **Intention** geared towards seeking **Information** with respect to others' **Point-of views** that are worth **Remembering** based on sound **Reasoning** to build a **Concept** that allows room for **Questioning** igniting the spirit of **Reflection** on the **Implication** to draw **Inference** for the purpose of **Understanding** leading to **Certainty** of *knowledge constructed* by the use of *reflective reasoning* leading to *right decision making*" (Alkouatli, 2018).

Therefore, this section helps in achieving the main objective of this study. Develop a proposal for the nature of the framework for the elements of CTS in the teaching of *Tawhid*. The framework was proposed based on the findings after analysis, as presented below in this article. And also based on the result of the exploratory factor analysis, which indicated



knowledge construction, evaluative reasoning, and right decision-making are the core themes of this framework, each of the themes has four underlying sub-elements KNC, for instance, has intention (*Anniyya*), information (*Naba'*), point of view (*Ra'y*), and remembering (*Tazakkur*) as its sub-elements; EVR has reasoning (*Ta'qil*), concept (*Mafhum*), questioning (*Istijwab*), and reflection (*Tadabbur*) as its underlying sub-elements. Finally, as shown in the framework, RDM is the ultimate goal this framework intends, and it has implication, inference,



understanding, and certainty as its sub-elements.

Figure: 3 Framework of Critical Thinking Skills in teaching of tawhid

Source: (Adapted from Author's PhD thesis Inda (2022)).

**Methodology**

This research adopted a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design. It is a method of collecting, analysing, and integrating or mixing qualitative and quantitative data in a particular study to get a better insight into the research (Creswell, 2018). The approach began as early as 1959, and then, in the middle and late 80s, a mixed method developed into its

status as a dynamic research design. also, historical analysis, reviews of literature, and drawing from extensive action research.

Furthermore, nine experts in Islamic Studies were sampled from the Faculties and Colleges of Education at the State Ministries of Education and Higher Institutions of Learning in North-Eastern Nigeria. The experts were interviewed, and the qualitative findings were used to develop instruments for this study's quantitative phase. The 61 questionnaire items were analysed using IBM SPSS software version 25 to ascertain the instrument's reliability.

### **Analysis**

The framework considers right decision-making as ultimate, as this attitude, which teachers and students develop, guides their choices during difficult times in the era of rampant information. It can be suggested that the framework is a timely skill needed to survive in contemporary times, and it will further help in making the teacher of Islamic studies useful to himself and society. He lives in especially North-Eastern Nigeria, where wrong decisions affect the choices of individuals. Consequently, the conceptual framework, which is the overall finding of the research, has summarised the 12 elements suitable for inclusion in the framework for the elements of CTS in teaching, especially in the north-eastern Nigerian secondary schools. The finding was based on the results from both the qualitative and quantitative studies. A close look at the framework in [Figure 5.1](#) shows that the main themes are three, while the sub-elements are all 12.

Further, the framework reveals how all the sub-elements were grouped under three main themes, as shown in the middle of the framework. This is vital in the sense that the foundational steps for teaching Tawhid using those elements require following the framework as a guide, starting with KNC, followed by EVR, and then RDM. This means that a teacher of Islamic studies, when teaching Tawhid, should focus on the first four sub-elements under the first main theme, as knowledge is considered a very strong foundational element that helps in making right decisions and problem solving, which forms the key goal of a critical thinking skill (Manzoor, 2021). For instance, the sub-elements of intention, information, point of view, and remembering build in the learner an attitude of respect for others' opinions, an action-oriented habit, recalling and verifying information, and so on. This solves the serious problem of dogmatism and narrow-minded thinking by requiring careful consideration of one's intentions, which is geared towards understanding and certainty. The researcher is of the opinion that in the first two years of a secondary school student learning Tawhid, a focus should be made on KNC. This will give the learner a strong foundation for viewing and solving problems related to his studies and life endeavours. Samson, P. L. (2018)

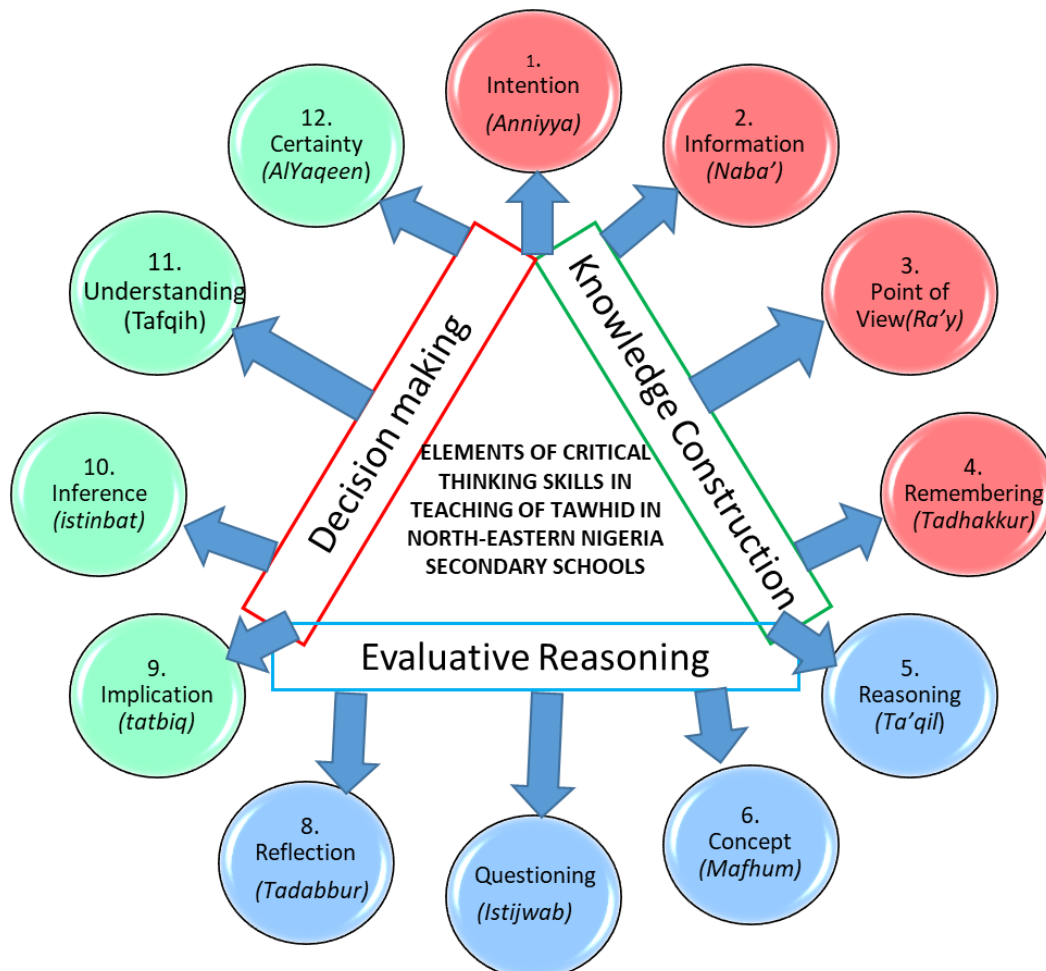
Furthermore, the second theme Evaluative reasoning, as can be seen from the framework, can be applied during the third and fourth years of the students learning process. The framework suggests important elements that can help in building the spirit of evaluative reasoning. The sub-elements, as suggested by experts and affirmed by the teachers of Islamic studies, are reason, concept questioning, and reflection. These elements are key in the sense that through reasoning, the teacher of Tawhid can still instill in students the skill of reasoning, and it will help in boosting the minds of the students to look for reason for doing things instead of blind followership that may affect their lives.

### **Results**

This part of the study explains the findings based on the question: What are the elements of critical thinking skills in teaching Tawhid according to experts (curriculum



developers, lecturers, and supervisors)? The data were fully discussed from qualitative and quantitative perspectives solely to give a clear understanding of elements of CTS in the teaching of Tawhid in North-Eastern Nigerian secondary schools. The elements that were considered suitable for the proposed framework as elements of CTS in the teaching of Tawhid in secondary schools were obtained from those experts. As below.



Source: Adapted from Author's PhD thesis Inda A. (2022)

The integrated discussion is based on the qualitative and quantitative findings, as demonstrated above. The 12 constructs were purposely grouped into three themes: *knowledge construction*, *evaluative reasoning*, and *right decision-making* for thematic analysis. The three themes and the underlying constructs or elements constitute the final framework. All the findings were made considering the research design used in this study (Sequential Exploratory Mixed Method Design). Therefore, as the teacher of Islamic studies teaches the subject of *Tawhid*, he begins with an implementable **intention (IN)** geared towards seeking **information (IF)** with respect to others' point-of-view (**PV**) that is worth **remembering (RM)** based on sound **reasoning (RS)** to build a **concept (CC)** that allows room for **questioning (QS)**, igniting the spirit of **reflection (RF)** on the **implication (IM)** to draw **inference (IC)** for the purpose of **understanding (UD)** and leading to **certainty (CT)** of *knowledge constructed* by the use of *reflective reasoning* and consequently leading to *right decision making*.

## Conclusion

This framework is a filler for the wide gap left by the traditional and modern perception of the existing models of CTS and the unfillable gap left by philosophical, psychological, and educational theories, which focus on theoretical idealistic approaches, practical approaches, and methodological approaches, respectively, i.e., the application of philosophic and psychological models in classroom activities. None of them discusses the overarching impact of Islamic views on critical thinking skills in Tawhid teaching. The few studies on CTS elements use modern secular theories limited to man's spiritual and moral aspects of traditional religious approaches that migrate from current realities that demand solutions. The two world views (modern and Islamic) are on par based on the philosophies that differentiate them.

To give a lucid one-paragraph description of this framework, the researcher, after a thoughtful encounter, suggests the following paragraph for an easy grasp of what the whole framework entails. The paragraph explains the themes and sub-elements discovered in this study: As the teacher of Islamic studies teaches the subject of Tawhid, he begins with an implementable intention (IN) geared towards seeking information (IF) with respect to others' point-of-view (PV) that is worth remembering (RM) based on sound reasoning (RS) to build a concept (CC) that allows room for questioning (QS), igniting the spirit of reflection (RF) on the implication (IM) to draw inference (IC) for the purpose of understanding (UD) and leading to certainty (CT) of knowledge constructed by the use of reflective reasoning and consequently leading to right decision making.

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