

Critical Thinking Education in At-Thabari's Tafsir And Its Implications for Islamic Education

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Abstract

Critical thinking education plays an important role in addressing contemporary educational challenges, especially in the context of Islamic education. This article analyzes the application of critical thinking education in al-Thabari's interpretation and its implications for Islamic education. In al-Thabari's interpretation, the principle of critical thinking is clearly reflected through an analytical approach to the texts of the Qur'an, emphasizing the use of reason, reflection, and evaluation of information. Al-Thabari encourages readers not only to passively accept interpretations, but also to conduct in-depth analysis of the verses of the Qur'an, question their meanings, and evaluate the validity of various existing accounts and interpretations. This approach is in line with the need to develop critical thinking skills in students, which is very important in contemporary Islamic education. The implication of applying critical thinking principles in al-Thabari's interpretation is the importance of integrating analytical and reflective methodologies into the Islamic education curriculum. Education that emphasizes critical thinking will equip students with the ability to analyze and evaluate religious texts in depth, rather than simply accepting information literally. This encourages the development of analytical skills, intellectual independence, and the ability to face the challenges of the times with a holistic and rational understanding. Thus, al-Thabari's interpretation provides a highly relevant model for Islamic education, which integrates the teaching of critical thinking, theological reflection, and contextual understanding. This approach not only enriches the understanding of the Qur'an, but also contributes to the formation of character and intellectual skills necessary to deal with the complexities of modern life.

Keywords: *Critical Thinking Education, al-Thabari's interpretation, Islamic Education, Educational Implications*

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Introduction

Critical thinking education is essential in facing various problems that plague contemporary education, where a pedagogical approach is needed that is able to guide students to analyze and evaluate information in depth (Muqowim, 2005). In the context of Islamic education, this ability is not limited to cognitive analysis, but also includes reflection on fundamental values and their implications for the formation of noble character, as reflected in interpretations of the Qur'an such as Tafsir at-Tabari (Khairuni, 2024). This ability is crucial for developing students' analytical skills so that they can navigate complex religious, social, and ethical issues (Saepudin, 2022). Thus, the integration of the philosophy of science into the Islamic education curriculum can equip students with a theoretical framework for understanding knowledge and critical thinking methodologies, encouraging them to analyze and evaluate information independently rather than simply accepting it at face value. The development of this critical awareness also requires learning strategies that focus on deep understanding and interpretation of texts, rather than mere reproduction of content, which can be implemented through various stages from pre-reading to post-reading (Azwardi, 2018). This approach is in line with the principles of the philosophy of science, which emphasizes the development of analytical and evaluative thinking, which is crucial for the intellectual and moral growth of students (Destrianjasari et al., 2022; Rizqi & Bakar, 2025). Critical thinking itself is a higher-order thinking skill that is highly needed in the development of 21st-century skills, whose roots can be traced back to ancient philosophical thoughts (Rahardhian, 2022). This skill enables individuals to solve problems effectively in difficult situations, making it an important competency in modern education systems that aim to shape independent individuals (Rahardhian, 2022). Mastery of these skills enables individuals to not only understand subject matter holistically but also apply it in real-life contexts, thereby overcoming various challenges and developing innovative solutions (AR & Ismail, 2024; Lestari et al., 2025). This philosophical approach to education trains the mind to be critical and analytical, generating fresh ideas and equipping individuals with the ability to not be satisfied with ignorance or unclear information (Mohammad, 1999; Paulus Wahana, 2016). The philosophy of science, in this case, becomes an essential intellectual tool to equip individuals with an analytical-critical spirit, encouraging them to study deeply and produce new ideas that are relevant to various disciplines (Mohammad, 1999). Philosophy frees humans from fragmentary thinking and guides them toward integral and coherent reasoning, thus becoming the mater *scientiarum* or mother of all knowledge (Alaslan, 2022). This approach also fosters a constructive skepticism in students, encouraging them not to passively accept information but to test its validity and relevance (Talavera, 2016). In this context, critical readers are encouraged to question, analyze, and evaluate texts, as well as make deep reflections, which require authentic and extensive materials such as quotations from literary works or journal articles (Azwardi, 2018).

Literature Review

Several previous studies have identified elements of critical thinking in at-Thabari's work, including his emphasis on the use of evidence and logical reasoning in interpreting verses of the Qur'an (Rahardhian, 2022; Unwakoly, 2022). These studies show how at-Thabari consistently encourages readers not only to passively accept interpretations but also to engage in a rigorous intellectual reasoning process (Abdussamad, 2021).

Several studies have examined at-Tabari's methodology, including his linguistic and historical approaches, which can indirectly stimulate critical reflection on the text of the Qur'an (Azwardi, 2018). For example, studies on at-Tabari highlight the importance of questioning and evaluating texts in depth, rather than passively accepting information (Azwardi, 2018). Other studies also discuss how at-Tabari rejected baseless myths and legends, supporting a more rational and verified understanding (Alaslan, 2022).

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with *library research* to analyze the contents of at-Tabari's *Tafsir* in depth. This approach allows researchers to identify pedagogical concepts contained in at-Tabari's interpretation methodology, especially those related to the development of critical thinking skills. This method is relevant because philosophy, as a reflective and systematic thinking process, serves as a theoretical foundation for understanding the essence of something, including in the analysis of complex religious texts (Arsyad & Sauri, 2024).

This literature study focuses on text analysis and qualitative data interpretation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of *Tafsir at-Thabari* to the development of critical thinking in Islamic education (Hadi et al., 2021). This method involves the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of previous research and thought, with a focus on school environmental cleanliness from an Islamic perspective (Khairunnisa & Alwizar, 2024).

This approach will involve hermeneutic interpretation to uncover implicit and explicit meanings relevant to the formation of critical thinking skills (Ngazizah, 2025). This approach will also be enriched by a systematic review of relevant literature to support an in-depth analysis of the implications of *Tafsir at-Thabari* on contemporary Islamic education (Amadi & Sholikha, 2023).

The primary source used in this study is the book *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil Ayat al-Qur'an* by Imam Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari. Secondary data will include various scientific literature, journals, and books relevant to critical thinking, Islamic education, and the methodology of Qur'anic interpretation (Febrianingsih, 2025; Lubis et al., 2023). Data collection was conducted through a systematic search of these texts to identify sections that demonstrate the application or stimulation of critical thinking, as well as relevant pedagogical concepts (Furqan, 2023).

Results

4.1 Verses on critical thinking education in at-Thabari's *tafsir*

This section will identify and describe verses from the Qur'an interpreted by at-Tabari that have direct implications for the concept of critical thinking, such as the importance of observation, analysis, and reasoning (Budiasuti & Bandur, 2018). These verses often emphasize the use of reason (*nazar*), reflection (*tadabbur*), and learning lessons (*i'tibar*) from natural phenomena and history (Nafisah & Yulisetiani, 2023). Additionally, the emphasis on deductive and inductive reasoning in *tafsir at-Thabari* demonstrates how the interpretation of the Qur'an intrinsically encourages the development of critical thinking skills (Firdaus, 2022). Through analysis of these verses, it can be seen how at-Tabari consistently encourages readers not to passively accept information, but rather to actively question it and evaluate its validity (Azwardi, 2018). A critical analysis of the interpretation of these verses will show how at-Tabari's approach explicitly encourages independent thinking and evaluation of arguments (Azwardi, 2018). This is in line with the goal of Islamic education to foster moderate and inclusive understanding, supported by critical thinking skills (Ikhwan et al., 2023). The data collection method used in this study involved a comprehensive literature review, collecting and analyzing relevant materials from reliable sources such as books, scientific journals, and other writings related to at-Thabari's interpretation and critical thinking education (Fahrurroddin, 2014).

For example, verses that emphasize "*ulu al-albab*" (people of understanding) are often interpreted by at-Tabari as a call to use reason in understanding the signs of Allah's greatness (Abror & Zuhdi, 2018). Furthermore, he emphasized that a deep understanding of the Qur'an would instill a critical and dynamic spirit in seeking knowledge, encouraging individuals to not only understand the structure of the text, but also to practice precision and discipline (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Therefore, *Tafsir at-Thabari* provides a theological-scriptural foundation and epistemological-conceptual tools for Islamic education, although this effort needs to be further developed to identify and elaborate on the important

characteristics of a small number of research subjects in a careful and in-depth manner (Samsu, 2017; Surahman, 2019).

One example is his interpretation of Q.S. Ali 'Imran verses 190-191, where at-Tabari explains that reflection on the creation of the heavens and the earth encourages individuals to achieve a higher understanding of God's existence and the wisdom behind it, which is the essence of critical thinking (Adel et al., 2025). This is in line with the view that logical, systematic, and critical thinking are the main characteristics of rational thinking, which is essential in evaluating arguments and making the right decisions (Abdussamad, 2021; Paulus Wahana, 2016). This verse encourages humans to reflect on Allah's creation in order to understand His oneness and power, a process that integrates reasoning with divine revelation (Bhat & Bisati, 2025; Mahmudin, 2023). Verses such as these, interpreted by at-Tabari, illustrate how observation and reflection on natural phenomena can lead to a deeper understanding of divine existence, thus forming the basis for the development of critical reasoning in an Islamic perspective (Fahrurrozi, 2021). Similarly, the Qur'an as a whole contains many verses that encourage humans to use reason, reasoning, and deep understanding in facing reality (Fathurin, 2022). Many scholars also argue that the Qur'an consistently encourages the use of reason, critical thinking, and empirical analysis to achieve a comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings (Bhat & Bisati, 2025).

For example, Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 269 talks about the gift of wisdom, where at-Tabari interprets wisdom as deep understanding gained through reflection and the use of reason, not just superficial knowledge. This verse implicitly encourages Muslims to develop higher cognitive abilities, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which are crucial components of critical thinking (Qardhawi et al., n.d.). Furthermore, at-Tabari's interpretation of Q.S. Yusuf verse 109, which emphasizes the importance of traveling and observing the history of previous nations as a source of lessons, shows the empirical dimension in the development of critical thinking, where experience and evidence are used as a basis for drawing rational conclusions (Alaslan, 2022).

Similarly, Q.S. al-Hashr verse 2, which invites humans to learn from the events that occur around them, forms the basis for the development of reflective and analytical thinking, an integral aspect of critical thinking education recommended by at-Tabari (Abdussamad, 2021). The compatibility of at-Tabari's interpretation with these principles shows that the Qur'an intrinsically encourages critical inquiry, empirical observation, and ethical verification as divine commands, linking faith, reason, and ethics in a continuous process of knowledge (Mannan & Farhana, 2025). This indicates that Islam, through the interpretation of the Qur'an, places reason as an essential divine guidance for understanding symbols, analyzing, comparing, and distinguishing truth from error (Sutrisna & Suyadi, 2022).

4.2 Aspects of at-Thabari's Interpretation that Reflect Critical Thinking Education

After examining at-Thabari's interpretation, and with the help of technology, ten aspects were found that reflect critical thinking education in the interpretation. These ten aspects can be seen in the following description (at-Tabari, 2023).

1. Historical Approach (*Asbabun Nuzul* and Historical Context)

The historical approach in at-Tabari's interpretation requires critical evaluation of the authenticity and relevance of data, including testing the motives and limitations of the authors of the history, so that the information presented is not biased or falsified (Syahza, 2021). At-Tabari often presents various views and different accounts of a verse, allowing readers to compare, analyze, and draw their own conclusions, thereby training critical thinking skills and intellectual independence in understanding sacred texts (Azwardi, 2018). This method, which is similar to external and internal criticism in historical research, ensures the accuracy and authenticity of the information used for interpretation (Syahza, 2021). By comparing various

narratives and evaluating their chains of transmission, readers are encouraged not to simply accept an interpretation, but to cross-check and use inductive reasoning (Rahmadi, 2011) . This is a form of critical education that encourages readers not only to passively accept information, but also to actively engage in the process of interpretation and validation, similar to the approach used to analyze authentic hadith and questionable accounts (Farhani & Hidayat, 2023) . This approach is in line with critical methodology in historical studies, which requires systematic precision in reviewing primary and secondary data to achieve objectivity (Syahza, 2021).

2. Intertextuality (Relationship between Qur'anic Verses and Hadith and Narratives)

At-Tabari also frequently connects different verses of the Qur'an to produce a more comprehensive understanding, a practice of intertextuality that encourages readers to see patterns and relationships between texts, as well as develop critical synthesis and interpretation skills (Yusuf, 2014) . In addition, At-Tabari's interpretation implicitly teaches readers to conduct comparative analyses between various theories and research results, combining various perspectives to achieve a richer understanding (Rinaldi & Mujianto, 2017) . This method integrates deductive and inductive reasoning, encouraging divergent thinking to explore various possible interpretations before concluding coherently. This method of analysis helps identify the major and accurate ideas contained in the texts of the Qur'an and hadith (Mouw, 2022) . This is in line with the idea that deep interpretation requires the ability to see the Qur'an as a coherent whole, where each verse explains and reinforces the meaning of the others (Sobki et al., 2023).

3. Linguistic and Grammatical Analysis

At-Tabari paid close attention to the linguistic and grammatical aspects of the verses of the Qur'an, analyzing sentence structure, word choice, and context of use to uncover the most accurate meaning, which trains readers in precision of thought and deep textual analysis. This approach is in line with the view that awareness of the role of language as a tool for conveying ideas, which contain the author's ideology, is at the core of critical reading (Azwardi, 2018) . Therefore, at-Tabari's interpretation explicitly indicates the importance of careful linguistic analysis as the foundation for achieving a comprehensive and unbiased understanding of sacred texts (Azwardi, 2018) . At-Tabari's interpretation, with its linguistic depth, encourages readers to critically analyze each diction and syntactic construction in order to uncover implied meanings, thereby forming a strong foundation for the development of critical thinking skills in the field of Islamic scholarship (Kafrawi et al., 2025) . This method of linguistic analysis also allows readers to appreciate the complexity of the Qur'an and its various layers of meaning, thereby encouraging an intellectual attitude that does not rush to conclusions and always seeks validation from various linguistic perspectives (Zakaria, 2025) .

4. Contextual Understanding (Internal and External)

The contextual understanding promoted by at-Tabari requires readers to consider the social, cultural, and historical conditions when the verses of the Qur'an were revealed, which is essential to avoid anachronistic interpretations and develop a holistic perspective (Mouw, 2022) . This approach is also relevant in addressing the spread of hoaxes, where critical thinking, self-introspection, and avoiding assumptions are key to building religious harmony (Khair & Alfiyah, 2023) . The ability to analyze context in depth allows individuals to verify information and identify potential biases or hidden interests behind a narrative (Sinambela, 2014) . Thus, the contextual understanding taught by at-Tabari indirectly equips readers with methodological tools to conduct critical discourse analysis of various information, as suggested by the CDA

approach, which encourages the reconstruction of understanding and comparison of meaning with contemporary reality (Mouw, 2022).

5. Isnad and Matn in Hadith History

In examining isnad, at-Tabari examined the chain of narrators, verifying the integrity and credibility of each individual in the transmission of hadith, a process that inspired the development of constructive skepticism and thoroughness in examining information sources (Sinambela, 2014). This method is also applied to the matn of the hadith, where at-Tabari analyzes the content of the text to ensure its consistency with the teachings of the Qur'an and broader Islamic principles, thereby strengthening the reader's ability to evaluate the internal coherence of an argument (Aboamro & Rizapoor, 2023). At-Tabari also highlights the importance of considering the validity of information based on systematic and logical thinking, as well as promoting a critical attitude in assessing the content of a text so as not to easily accept views without thorough reasoning (Azwardi, 2018). This is in line with the critical reading strategy, which does not simply accept statements that are considered clear in the text, but encourages learners to question the content and ideological assumptions of the text presented (Azwardi, 2018).

6. Literal and Metaphorical Approaches

In his interpretation, at-Tabari carefully distinguishes between literal and metaphorical meanings, a distinction that trains readers not to be fixated on a single interpretation, but to explore deeper nuances of meaning and their implications for theological understanding. This approach also emphasizes that comprehensive contextual understanding often requires an appreciation of the various layers of meaning contained in sacred texts (Listrianti et al., 2025). Critical thinking education through this approach encourages individuals to not only understand the explicit meaning, but also to identify broader implications, and to realize that a text can have various levels of valid understanding (Mohammad, 1999). By emphasizing multiple levels of understanding, at-Tabari effectively guides readers to develop flexible interpretive capacities and reject dogmatism, encouraging a holistic critical analysis of the Qur'anic text (Rahman et al., 2022). Furthermore, the pedagogical implications of at-Tabari's method in fostering critical thinking skills include the development of an Islamic education curriculum that integrates in-depth analysis of primary texts (Fahrurrozi, 2021; Maulida et al., 2024).

7. Openness to Differences of Opinion

At-Tabari often presents various views of earlier scholars on a verse, even if these views are contradictory, encouraging readers to analyze arguments from various perspectives and form conclusions based on strong reasoning, in accordance with the principle of renewal of thought in Islam ("Jurnal Ilmiah Iqra", 2019). This highlights that critical thinking education not only involves in-depth textual analysis, but also requires the ability to appreciate and evaluate the diversity of interpretations in the Islamic scholarly tradition, which can enrich understanding and encourage intellectual innovation (Hidayatulloh, 2024). This approach is in line with the view that interpretive pluralism in public discourse, even when it leads to dissent, can enrich democratic debate and deepen understanding (Sulhan & Sadasri, 2021). This ability is very important for developing individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have strong character, are able to reason, think critically, creatively, and reflectively in facing diverse views (Pembelajaran Mendalam Sebagai Landasan Aksiologis Kurikulum Merdeka: Telaah Filsafat Ilmu Dalam Pendidikan Matematika, n.d./Deep Learning as the Axiological Foundation of the Independent Curriculum: A Study of the Philosophy of Science in Mathematics Education, n.d.). Thus, Islamic education that adopts at-Tabari's methodology can

equip students with the capacity to engage in constructive dialogue and logical reasoning, even amid differences of opinion (Piri & Avarsin, 2022).

8. Balance between *Nasakh* and *Tajsim* (Mention and Deletion)

At-Tabari, in interpreting verses related to *nasakh* (abrogation of laws) and *tajsim* (anthropomorphism), shows how theological arguments are built on a strong textual foundation, while also opening space for discussion and critical reflection on religious doctrine. This practice encourages learners to explore various perspectives and reject the acceptance of dogma without careful intellectual examination, a vital competency in the context of religious moderation and digital literacy in the information age (Fauziah, 2024; Huda et al., 2024). This methodology is crucial in modern education because it trains students to critically analyze information from various sources and develop systematic reasoning (Azwardi, 2018; Piri & Avarsin, 2022). At-Tabari's approach shows that critical thinking skills are not only cognitive skills but also an important foundation for changing individual mindsets and values (Ngazizah, 2025). Islamic education that adopts at-Tabari's framework can guide students to develop critical, adaptive, and transformative thinking, which is essential for facing contemporary challenges and building a society based on strong Islamic values (Lestari et al., 2025).

At-Tabari carefully navigates between the concepts of *nasakh* (abrogation of law) and *tajsim* (anthropomorphism) in his interpretation, encouraging readers to develop nuanced thinking and avoid extremes in understanding divine attributes. This approach is also important for shaping individuals who are critical and able to read carefully, as well as having an awareness of objectivity in assessing information in the digital age (Fauziah, 2024). This approach is in line with critical theory, which emphasizes the importance of analyzing how language and social structures influence the construction of reality, encouraging skepticism towards dominant conceptions (Mohammad, 1999). Thus, at-Tabari's interpretation stimulates the ability to question basic assumptions and explore various interpretive perspectives (Mohammad, 1999). Through this approach, he teaches the importance of not only passively accepting dogma, but also actively engaging in a deep and reflective process of interpreting religious texts, in line with a critical paradigm that views humans as dynamic creators of their own destiny (Raihan, 2017).

9. The Use of Logic and Rationality

The discussion of at-Tabari's methodology then focuses on the integration of causal reasoning and deductive principles in the interpretation of the Qur'an, which trains readers to develop coherent and evidence-based arguments. This approach emphasizes the importance of logical and systematic thinking to achieve true knowledge, as well as how objectivity can be tested through optimal observation (Paulus Wahana, 2016). This is in line with the philosophy of science, which emphasizes that rational thinking enables a person to systematically uncover reality, identify correlative and causal relationships, and predict future events (Paulus Wahana, 2016). In the context of critical education, the integration of logic also means training students to continuously evaluate arguments and not easily accept a truth before it has been thoroughly tested and questioned (Abdussamad, 2021). This underscores that critical thinking, as the core of rationality, requires the ability to continuously evaluate claims of truth through a logical and systematic process (Alaslan, 2022).

10. Openness to Fiqh and Kalam Approaches

At-Tabari did not limit his interpretation to a single discipline but combined arguments from fiqh and kalam, indicating the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in understanding sacred texts. This approach facilitates the development of comprehensive reasoning that transcends traditional scientific boundaries, encouraging the synthesis of knowledge from various fields to achieve a more holistic understanding (Falahi et al., 2025).

This is in line with the needs of modern education to create individuals who are able to integrate various perspectives and disciplines in solving complex problems (Mohammad, 1999; Paulus Wahana, 2016) . This open-minded attitude encourages learners to view issues from various dimensions, strengthening their ability to make decisions based on diverse and tested information. The implication for Islamic education is the development of a curriculum that encourages students to think logically, systematically, and critically, as are the main characteristics of rational thinking in philosophy (Abdussamad, 2021) . This approach also reflects the concept of *rabbaniyyah* in teaching, where education is rooted in faith and acknowledges Allah SWT as the source of all wisdom, thereby promoting spiritual integrity (Suhaimi et al., 2024) .

Conclusion

Research on Critical Thinking Education in al-Thabari's Tafsir and Its Implications for Islamic Education shows that al-Thabari's tafsir contains critical thinking principles that can make a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education. In his interpretation, al-Thabari emphasizes an in-depth analysis of the texts of the Qur'an, both from a linguistic, contextual, and historical perspective. He also uses a very open approach to differences of opinion and emphasizes the importance of a holistic and rational understanding of revelation.

The application of critical thinking in al-Thabari's interpretation reflects a scientific approach, which does not only rely on the literal text, but also considers the social, cultural, and historical context when the revelation was revealed. This approach provides space for deeper reflection, discussion, and analysis of Islamic teachings, which is very relevant in contemporary Islamic education.

The implications of al-Thabari's principles of critical thinking applied to Islamic education are that Islamic education should encourage students to think analytically, critically, and reflectively about religious texts. This is important in order to avoid narrow and dogmatic interpretations, and to provide a more contextual and applicable understanding in everyday life. In the context of education, this understanding encourages students to develop critical thinking skills, which can help them respond to the challenges of the times with a strong and rational foundation in Islamic teachings.

Overall, al-Thabari's interpretation provides a model of critical thinking that can be applied in Islamic education and can enrich a more open and dynamic approach to religious education.

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