FUNDAMENTAL THINKING TERMS IN THE QUR'ĀN: A CONNOTATIVE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses a significant scholarly gap concerning a lack of a comprehensive framework for systematically examining the connotative dimensions of fundamental Qurʾānic terms related to thinking (*tafakkur*, *taʿaqqul*, *tadabbur*, *tafaqquh*) and knowledge (*ʿilm*, *maʿrifah*). While the presence and importance of these terms in Qurʾān are widely acknowledged, existing scholarship has tended to prioritise their denotative or literal meanings, often focusing on a restricted subset of these terms, particularly those associated with Qurʾānic epistemological discussions. As a result, insufficient attention has been given to the contextual and connotative significance of these terms and to how their deeper semantic layers articulate the Qurʾān's holistic worldview of thinking and knowledge. Consequently, this study proposes an innovative connotative analytical framework that categorises Qurʾānic thinking terms into four distinct semantic dimensions. It employs a qualitative method of textual analysis, drawing upon classical and contemporary Qurʾānic

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tafsīr literature, alongside studies on Qur'anic terminology (*musṭalaḥāt Qurʾāniyyah*), as its primary sources of data. The study demonstrates that a connotative and contextual interpretation of these terms reveals the dynamic, multi-layered, and holistic system of thought that characterises the Qurʾānic approach to human cognition and epistemology. Overall, it provides a comprehensive overview of these terms as foundational building blocks of an Islamic holistic epistemological framework of thinking and knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Fundamental Qurʾānic Terms, Connotative Meanings, Conceptual Thinking, Analytical Framework, Islamic Epistemology.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān's linguistic richness and stylistic features have been the subject of extensive scholarly and devotional study for centuries.[2] While its fundamental terms play a pivotal role in shaping Islamic theology, law, ethics, and spirituality, their meanings and applications have evolved across time, resulting in diverse interpretations and modes of engagement. Despite the centrality of these terms to the overall message of the Qur'ān, there remains a noticeable lack of comprehensive and systematic analytical frameworks—particularly in the English Language, —for examining them as the core conceptual terms of the Qurʾān, especially those related to the intertwined notions of knowledge and thinking. This constitutes a significant scholarly gap, as such frameworks are essential for exploring, at a deeper level, the implications of Qurʾānic "knowledge and thinking" terms for contemporary Muslim life. The Qurʾānic foundational terms—such as *tafakkur* (thinking), *taʿaqqul* or *ʿaql* (reasoning), *tadabbur*

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[2] See Balil Abd al-Karim, *Qurʾanic Terminology: A Linguistic and Semantic Analysis* (International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2017).

(contemplation), and *tafaqquh* (deep understanding)—capture various levels and dimensions of human psycho-cognitive and spiritual dispositions. They underscore the profound importance that the sacred text assigns to intellectual inquiry, reflective engagement, and the pursuit of wisdom. From the perspective of this study, these terms (and additional expressions discussed in subsequent sections) are not merely linguistic units; rather, they represent expansive conceptual structures that convey the Qurʾān's holistic viewpoint on the nature, scope and implications of thinking and knowledge. Although previous scholarship has offered valuable analyses of several Qurʾānic terms[3] —primarily focusing on their literal or denotative meanings[4]—such studies often do not provide systematic frameworks capable of uncovering their deeper, multi-layered, and connotative dimensions. In addition, only a limited set of these fundamental terms has typically been examined.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address this academic lacuna by proposing a novel analytical framework designed to transcend the predominant approaches restricted to denotative meanings and general interpretation. By exploring a wider range of fundamental Qurʾānic terms, this study contends that the Qurʾānic discourse on knowledge is far more nuanced than a simple glossary of terms might imply. The Qurʾān uses these expressions across diverse contexts to instruct humanity on how to engage with the world thoughtfully and attentively, encouraging deep reflection upon the realities of existence. In doing so, the Qurʾān aims to cultivate a culture of intellectual inquiry and moral excellence. Thus, those endowed with sound intellect are described as *ulū al-albāb*[5]—individuals who harmoniously integrate rational reflection with spiritual remembrance of God while contemplating the natural phenomena around them.[6] In

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[3] Abd al-Karim, Qurʾanic Terminology, 6–8.

[4] Ortiqova, Dilnoza. "Linguistic Insights into Qurʾanic and Hadith Discourse: A Study of Lexical Choices and Cultural Implications." Akademicheskie Issledovaniia v Sovremennoi Nauke 3, no. 38 (2024): 16–19.

[5] Al-Baqarah 2:269.

[6] Hassan, M. K. *Natural Science from the Worldview of the Qurʾan* (Kuala Lumpur:

the view of this study, the absence of systematic analytical approach has contributed to a fragmented understanding of the holistic intellectual significance of these terms within the Qurʾānic worldview. The contextual usage[7] and connotative meanings of words play a major linguistic role in shaping their conceptual impact[8] within a text and in influencing readers' cognitive and spiritual responses.[9]

For this reason, the study employs a qualitative method of textual analysis, drawing upon classical and contemporary Qurʾānic commentaries as well as on Quranic terminology as its data sources. It proposes an analytical framework that categorises Qurʾānic thinking terms into four connotative dimensions —positive, subjective, negative, and neutral. Through this framework, the study seeks to systematically classify and critically analyse these terms, offering a structured analytical lens for uncovering the depth and breadth of meaning embedded in the sacred text. It provides fresh insights into the psycho-cognitive, spiritual, and ethical implications of these fundamental Qurʾānic terms. Overall, this paper addresses the current absence of a comprehensive analytical framework capable of systematically examining the connotative dimensions of Qurʾānic thinking terms. Beyond identifying a wider range of these terms than those discussed in earlier scholarship, the study highlights the significant ways in which Qurʾānic linguistic devices—particularly its fundamental thinking-related expressions—shape Islamic thought and practice in contemporary times. In doing so, it bridges the gap between the Qurʾān's historical context and its enduring relevance to the modern world.

Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia Berhad, 2018), 37.

[7] Haqi Ismael Mohammed and Hanan Qadir Amin. "The Linguistic Context and Its Effect on Meaning in Interpretation: Al-Baghawi's Tafsir as a Model." Aran Journal for Language and Humanities 1, no. 1 (2025): 24–35.

[8] Orna Peleg, Rachel Giora, and Ofer Fein. "Contextual Strength: The Whens and Hows of Context Effects." In Experimental Pragmatics (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2004), 172–186.

[9] Thonthowi, T., and M. D. Muslim. "Iʿjāz al-Qurʾan in Linguistic Perspective and Its Impact on Readers." *Insyirah: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa Arab dan Studi Islam* 7, no. 1 (2024): 117–132.

1.1. Literature Review

The study of Qurʾānic terminology related to knowledge and thinking is rooted in a rich intellectual tradition that extends from classical exegesis to contemporary interdisciplinary inquiry.[10] This review first acknowledges and critically engages with the foundational contributions of a classical scholar, al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 1209 CE), alongside selected modern studies on Qurʾānic terminology and linguistic analysis. It then demonstrates how the present study engages with and builds upon these earlier works, as well as more recent scholarly contributions, thereby positioning its proposed analytical framework as a distinctive and significant advancement in the study of Qurʾānic epistemology.

1.2. The Classical Foundation: al-Fakhr al-Rāzī's Pioneering Contribution

Al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 606H/1209 CE) stands as a towering figure in Islamic theology and philosophy, widely regarded as a reviver of the faith in his century. His monumental exegetical work, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (also known as *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*), remains one of the most authoritative commentaries on the Qurʾān in history. More importantly, his analysis of a Qurʾānic verse on knowledge in Sūrah al-Baqarah, which represents one of the earliest systematic attempts to treat fundamental Qurʾānic terms as conceptual categories, especially in relation to knowledge and the cognitive disposition of the human being.

A number of important works have been devoted to Qurʾānic terms, themes, and concepts in an effort to uncover the richness of meaning embedded in the sacred text and to facilitate its

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[10] Muh Barid Nizarudin Wajdi, Nur Iftitahul Husniyah, Victor Imaduddin Ahmad, Miftakhul Ilmi Suwignya Putra, and Ahmad Muhtar Syarofi. "Understanding the Qurʾan Holistically: An Interdisciplinary Study of Qurʾanic Language and Linguistics." *BASA Journal of Language and Literature* 3, no. 1 (2023): 11–17.

understanding[11]. These include al-Rāġib al-Isfahānī's *al-Mufradāt fī ġarīb al-Qurʾān* (in Arabic), Sayyid Abū al-Aʿlā Moudūdī's *Qurʾān kī chār bunyādī iṣṭilāḥāt* (in Urdu) and Mustansir Mir's *Dictionary of Qurʾānic Terms and Concepts* (in English), among others. Nevertheless, a pioneering effort to systematise Qurʾānic terms related specifically to knowledge and human cognition can be traced most clearly to al-Fakhr al-Rāzī. His intellectual originality and comprehensive approach are evident in his discussion of Qurʾān 2:29, where he identifies twenty-nine terms[12] that he considers synonymous with knowledge (*al-ilm*), though only seventeen of these appear explicitly in the Qurʾān. Across several pages, he examines these terms in detail, exploring their meanings, implications, and points of contrast. This analysis opened a wide horizon for understanding the multi-faceted nature of Qurʾānic epistemological concepts and demonstrated an early awareness of the layered semantic structure of Qurʾānic language.

At the same time, al-Rāzī's discussion was not intended to establish a comprehensive analytical framework for articulating these terms within a systematic, multi-dimensional connotative structure. While his work offers profound insights, it does not develop a formal methodology for categorising or analysing the connotative dimensions of these terms. Nonetheless, his contribution constitutes a crucial classical foundation for modern inquiries into Qurʾānic epistemology, exemplifying the intellectual rigour required to approach the subject.

Building upon al-Rāzī's pioneering contribution, the present study extends this line of inquiry by identifying a substantially larger corpus of Qurʾānic thinking-related terms, amounting to forty in total. It further expands the analytical scope by examining their contextual usage, connotative dimensions, and epistemological implications. In doing so, the study underscores both the originality and the scholarly necessity of developing a systematic framework capable of capturing

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[11] Gowhar Quadir Wani. "*Qurʾanic Terminology: A Linguistic and Semantic Analysis*, by Balil Abd al-Karim." *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qurʾan and Hadith Studies* 16, no. 2 (2018): 1.

[12] Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Tafsir al-Kabir*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), 222–226.

the depth and complexity of Qurʾānic discourse on knowledge and thinking.

1.3. Modern Linguistic and Semantic Studies on the Qurʾān

Beyond the classical scholarship, modern studies have approached the Qurʾān from a range of linguistic and conceptual perspectives. Nevertheless, a comprehensive and systematic analytical framework dedicated specifically to Qurʾānic *thinking-related terms* remains largely absent. Existing studies often address broader linguistic or rhetorical features without isolating and theorising the epistemological significance of these terms. For instance, Hassan's *A Pragmatic Analysis: Implications of Lexical Choices in Translating Quranic Rhetoric*[13] underscores the crucial role of pragmatics in Qurʾānic linguistic research. He defines pragmatics as the study of how context contributes to meaning and highlights the considerable challenges involved in translating the Qurʾān. Hassan correctly observes that a "significant loss of meaning" may occur when lexical choices fail to capture the rhetorical and contextual force of the original Arabic text. His findings demonstrate that a deep understanding of Qurʾānic vocabulary and its contextual usage is essential for accurate translation. While his study provides valuable insights into Qurʾānic rhetoric and translation, it does not focus specifically on *thinking-related terms* as conceptual units. The present study addresses this gap by concentrating on Qurʾānic terms associated with thinking and knowledge, offering a more targeted analysis of their connotative and pragmatic dimensions relevant to both interpretation and translation.

Closely related to this line of inquiry is *Understanding the Qurʾān Holistically: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Language and Linguistics of the Qurʾān.*[14] This work advocates a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to Qurʾānic studies, with particular

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[13] Hassan Badr Hassan. "A Pragmatic Analysis: Implications of Lexical Choices in Translating Qurʾanic Rhetoric." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 11, no. 3 (2020): 1.
[14] See Wajdi et al., "Understanding the Qurʾan Holistically."

attention to linguistic and literary features. It systematically identifies rhetorical and stylistic devices that convey layered meanings within the text, highlighting the importance of interpreting fundamental terms in their textual contexts. The study also points to the lack of methodological standardisation in Qurʾānic linguistic research, which often results in fragmented interpretations. The present study responds to this challenge by proposing a structured analytical framework that foregrounds the connotative dimensions of key Qurʾānic thinking terms, enabling a more coherent and systematic understanding of their conceptual implications.

Similarly, Abd al-Karim Balil's *Qur'anic Terminology: A Linguistic and Semantic Analysis*[15] argues that an adequate understanding of the Qurʾān is impossible without careful examination of its terminology and conceptual vocabulary. Bālīl rightly emphasises the role of context, noting that the meaning of a term varies according to its usage and thematic associations. While his work provides a valuable and extensive glossary of Qurʾānic terms accompanied by semantic analysis, it does not engage in a focused exploration of *thinking* or *epistemological* terms as a distinct conceptual field. Despite its significant contribution to Qurʾānic lexical studies, Bālīl's work does not offer a specialised or critical framework for analysing Qurʾānic epistemology or the Qurʾānic approach to cognition.

Nevertheless, the present study builds upon Bālīl's foundational insight that usage determines conceptual relevance,[16] extending it into a multi-dimensional analytical framework. By systematically categorising and analysing a corpus of Qurʾānic terms related to knowledge and thinking, the study advances beyond general terminological surveys and offers a focused conceptual investigation into the Qurʾānic epistemological worldview.

Another notable contemporary contribution is *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān from a Linguistic Perspective and Its Impact on Readers.*[17] Unlike

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[15] See Abd al-Karim, *Qurʾanic Terminology*.
[16] Abd al-Karim, *Qurʾanic Terminology* (2017), 3, 4, 9, 10, 13.
[17] See Thonthowi and Muslim, "Iʿjāz al-Qurʾan in Linguistic Perspective."

many earlier studies that emphasise the miraculous nature of the Qurʾān primarily in terms of content, this work highlights the aesthetic and expressive power of Qurʾānic language. Through analysis of letters, words, sentences, and textual structures, the authors examine the linguistic dimensions of *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* and its impact on diverse audiences, including scholars, thinkers, philosophers, and lay readers. While the study offers valuable insights into the Qurʾān's stylistic and rhetorical excellence, it does not treat Qurʾānic terms—particularly thinking-related terms—as conceptual entities with epistemological implications. Nor does it propose a comprehensive framework for analysing the connotative dimensions of such terms as part of the Qurʾān's multi-layered approach to thought and knowledge. In contrast, the present study directly addresses these limitations by developing a systematic analytical framework that captures the connotative, contextual, and epistemological dimensions of Qurʾānic thinking terms.

1.4. Studies on Thinking in the Qurʾān

Beyond linguistic and terminological analyses, a number of modern studies have examined the Islamic perspective on thinking as articulated in the Qurʾān.[18] A general overview of these insightful

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[18] Jamal Badi and Mustapha Tajdin, *Creative Thinking: An Islamic Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2004); Khoshman Hassan Ali, "Words Denoting Thinking in the Holy Qurʾan," *College of Basic Education Research Journal* 2, no. 2 (2006): 33–52; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Reading the Signs: A Qurʾanic Perspective on Thinking," *Islam & Science* 4, no. 2 (2006): 141–165; Abdul Wahab Mahmoud Hanaisha, "Thinking and Its Development through the Holy Qurʾan" (PhD diss., 2009); Jamal Badi, "'Thinking' Terminologies from a Qurʾanic Perspective and Their Impact on Human Intellectual Development," *International Journal of Arab Culture, Management and Sustainable Development* 2, no. 1 (2011): 41–54; Mohd Shuhaimi Ishak and Wan Mazwati Wan Yusoff, "Thinking from the Qurʾanic Perspective," *Al-Shajarah* 20, no. 1 (2015); Thoraya E. Abdel-Maguid and Rabie E. Abdel-Halim, "The Qurʾan and the Development of Rational Thinking," *Urology Annals* 7, no. 2 (2015): 135–140; Awil Hashi, "Revisiting Critical Thinking through a Qurʾanic Lens," *Al-Burhān: Journal of Qurʾan and Sunnah Studies* 8, no. 1 (2024): 22–41.

studies indicates that they collectively present a holistic thinking approach, integrating ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions into the traditional critical thinking frameworks. However, while the studies establish *what* the Qurʾān promotes in terms of thinking, they generally do not examine *how* the Qurʾān linguistically and conceptually constructs this approach, nor do they systematically analyse the implications of its thinking-related terminology for the coherence of its overall message. More specifically, despite valuable insights into Qurʾānic ethics and cognition, a critical gap remains: the absence of a detailed, term-by-term linguistic and semantic analysis of Qurʾānic thinking vocabulary. This omission results in a fragmented understanding of the comprehensive intellectual mechanisms embedded in the Qurʾānic text. Even studies that explicitly address Qurʾānic terminology related to thinking tend to focus on a limited selection of terms, often without offering an integrated framework through which these terms can be analysed holistically as conceptual building blocks of the Qurʾānic epistemology. As a result, the deeper connotative, contextual, and relational dimensions of these terms— and their collective role in shaping the Qurʾānic approach to thinking—remain underexplored.

Consequent upon this, the present study aims to provide linguistic and conceptual evidence that substantiates and refines the broader claims made in earlier scholarship regarding the Qurʾānic approach to thinking. By proposing an analytical framework that systematically examines more than forty Qurʾānic thinking-related terms, this study supplies the foundational data necessary to demonstrate the Qurʾān's structured and intentional approach to cultivating intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. It advances Qurʾānic studies beyond a general appreciation of linguistic richness and ethical orientation towards a more integrated understanding of the Qurʾān's epistemological architecture. This is achieved through a contextual and connotative analysis of Qurʾānic terminology related to thinking and knowledge, highlighting the interconnections among these terms and their cumulative conceptual significance.

Overall, the reviewed studies seem to show that while there is research on various dimensions of the Qurʾānic language, no major attention is given to the key thinking terms and their implications remains limited. This is not to discount earlier studies that have demonstrated the Qurʾān's unique linguistic character, its contextual depth, and its impact as a revelatory and intellectually transformative text. Nor does it diminish the value of studies that offer broad semantic or linguistic insights into Qurʾānic discourse.

Nevertheless, no comprehensive framework has yet been developed to systematically analyse the connotative dimensions of Qurʾānic thinking terms as a means of understanding the Qurʾān's multi-layered approach to thought. While several studies explore thinking from Qurʾānic perspectives, few have examined the holistic epistemological implications of the Qurʾān's fundamental thinking-related vocabulary. The significance of the current study, therefore, lies in its connotative analysis of the meanings of these terms; it specifically focuses on their positive, subjective, negative, and neutral dimensions. By analysing these terms as core concepts for the Qurʾānic approach to thinking, it seeks to uncover the depth and breadth of meaning embedded within the sacred text.

2. A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR THE QURʾĀNIC FUNDAMENTAL THINKING TERMS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

To address the fragmentation evident in existing studies of Qurʾānic thinking-related terminology and to offer a more holistic understanding of the Qurʾān's intellectual framework, this study proposes a novel analytical model. Grounded in the crucial distinction between denotative and connotative meanings, the framework is premised on the view that the Qurʾān employs a spectrum of connotations in its thinking-related terms in order to guide believers' understanding of good and evil, divine attributes, and human responsibility.

Denotative meaning refers to the literal and relatively stable definition of a term, whereas connotative meaning encompasses the associated, subjective, and context-dependant dimensions that shape a word's impact and resonance. Almost all words have both types of meaning.[19] Most lexical items possess both dimensions. However, it is the connotative aspect of language that "plays a crucial role in how we communicate and understand each other … Choosing words with the right connotations helps ensure our message resonates with the audience and avoids unintentional negative reactions."[20] By attending to connotative meanings,[21] subtle layers of discourse can be uncovered, allowing texts to be interpreted in ways that reflect their intended ethical and conceptual orientations.

Approaching the fundamental thinking terms of the Qurʾān through this methodological lens enables a deeper engagement with the nuanced messages embedded within its discourse on cognition and moral reasoning. It facilitates a more refined theological reflection and supports the development of a comprehensive moral framework. Most previous studies—particularly those in English—either privilege denotative meanings or approach connotation indirectly, often in the context of translation studies[22] or general semiotic analyses of Qurʾānic language, such as examinations of colour symbolism.[23]

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[19] Ali Albashir Mohammed Alhaj. "Translating Some Qurʾanic Connotative Meanings into English: A Socio-Pragmatic Comparative Study." *Journal of Literature, Languages, and Linguistics* 41, no. 3 (2018): 47–65.

[20] Khamidovna, N. N. "Words That Paint a Picture." *Miasto Przyszłości* 47 (2024): 1175–1178.

[21] Muhammad Erdy. "The Origins, Theories, and Linguistic Development of the Qurʾan." *Jurnal Kajian Islam* 2, no. 1 (2025): 13–22.

[22] Majda B. A. Abdelkarim and Ali A. M. Alhaj. "Probing Meaning Loss in the Translation of Arabic Qurʾanic Connotative Words into English: A Linguistic Semantic Perspective." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 13, no. 10 (2023): 2644–2651.

[23] Mona Al-Shraideh and Ahmad El-Sharif. "A Semiotic Perspective on the Denotation and Connotation of Colours in the Qurʾan." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 8, no. 1 (2019): 18.

The proposed framework is therefore not intended as a descriptive catalogue of terms, but as an analytical tool that serves as the primary interpretive lens through which Qurʾānic terms related to knowledge and thinking are examined. Its objective is to articulate a holistic Islamic epistemological perspective grounded in the Qurʾān's linguistic and conceptual structure.

Moving beyond purely literal meanings, the framework identifies four connotative categories—positive, subjective, negative, and neutral—based on careful analysis of contextual usage and linguistic patterns within the Qurʾānic text.[24] Through a systematic review of the Qurʾān, the study identifies forty terms associated with knowledge and conceptual thinking. While the fourfold categorisation emerges inductively from Qurʾānic usage, the analysis is informed by established insights from linguistic and semantic theory.[25] These terms are treated as fundamental conceptual units that collectively reflect how the Qurʾān represents diverse dimensions of human psycho-cognitive processes and moral dispositions.

Positive Connotation: This category refers to terms that evoke favourable associations, commend virtuous qualities, and denote concepts regarded as inherently good and praiseworthy within the Islamic worldview. Such terms inspire hope, encourage moral excellence, describe divine perfection, and promise reward for obedience to God. They form the ethical and moral foundation of the Qurʾānic vision of human flourishing.

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[24] See Pipin Armita, "Mapping the Contextual Meanings of the Qurʾan Using Artificial Intelligence: A Data-Driven Tafsir Approach," Al-Mashadir: Journal of Qurʾanic Sciences and Tafsir 1, no. 1 (2025): 11–23; Ali Albashir Mohammed Alhaj, "Translating Some Qurʾanic Connotative Meanings into English"; Muhammad Erdy, "The Origins, Theories, and Linguistic Development of the Qurʾan"; Wajdi et al., "Understanding the Qurʾan Holistically" (2023); Abd al-Karim, Qurʾanic Terminology (2017), 3, 4, 9, 10, 13.

[25] In addition to the above, see Şaban Çepik, "Positive, Neutral, and Negative Evaluation in Connotation," *IBSU Scientific Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 144–147.

Subjective Connotation: This category includes terms whose moral or theological significance varies according to context. Although their core meanings may remain constant, their evaluative force depends on their association with other terms, the intention behind their use, and their situational placement within the text. These terms may assume either positive or negative implications, with their connotation shaped by ethical orientation and contextual framing.

Negative Connotation: This category comprises terms that evoke unfavourable associations, describe morally blameworthy qualities, or refer to actions and states of mind condemned within the Islamic ethical framework. Such terms function as warnings, delineate prohibited conduct, highlight the consequences of disobedience, and underscore the importance of adherence to divine guidance.

Neutral Connotation: This category refers to terms that, in their ordinary usage, do not inherently carry strong positive or negative emotional valence. Their connotative force arises almost entirely from the context in which they appear, often to indicate the improper or ineffective use of a cognitive faculty. Although all Qurʾānic terms possess some theological significance by virtue of their revelatory context, certain terms function primarily as foundational conceptual vocabulary, acquiring ethical or evaluative meaning only through contextual association and textual positioning.

2.1. The Connotative Dimensions of Qurʾānic Thinking Terms

The table below presents a synoptic overview of the proposed analytical framework for examining fundamental Qurʾānic terms related to knowledge and thinking. It expands the linguistic, analytical, and contextual scope of key terms that articulate the spectrum of human cognitive processes and dispositions as portrayed in the Qurʾān.

Table 1: Connotative Dimensions of Qurʾānic Thinking Terms

Connotative Dimension	Description	Associated Terms	Analytical Purpose
Positive	Terms that inherently evoke favourable associations and describe admirable intellectual, moral, or divine qualities. They encourage virtue, wisdom, and reflective engagement and serve as foundational elements of Islamic ethical and epistemological thought.	*al-ʿilm, yatafakkarūn, yaʿqilūn, al-tadabbur, al-ḥikma, ulū al-albāb, al-fahm, al-nuhā, al-yaqīn*	To identify the core virtues underpinning intellectual, spiritual, and moral development in the Qurʾān.
Subjective	Terms whose evaluative meaning is context-dependent and may assume either positive or negative connotations depending on intention, usage,	*al-ẓann, al-muḥājja, al-īḥāʾ, al-jadal, al-samʿ, al-fiqh, al-ibṣār*	To demonstrate the Qurʾān's nuanced and context-sensitive approach to human cognition and moral reasoning.

	and ethical orientation.		
Negative	Terms that evoke unfavourable associations and describe cognitive or moral states leading to misguidance, error, or spiritual harm. They function as warnings against intellectual negligence and ethical deviation.	*al-rayb, al-taḥayyur, al-ʿamah, zuyyina, sawwalahu, ḥasiba*	To illustrate the Qurʾānic condemnation of intellectual and spiritual failures and their consequences.
Neutral	Terms that are not inherently positive or negative but acquire evaluative significance through contextual association, often highlighting the proper or improper use of human faculties.	*al-fuʾād, al-aḥlām, al-shuʿūr, al-maʿrifa, al-qalb*	To show how the Qurʾān employs human cognitive faculties as indicators of faith, awareness, and moral accountability.

2.2. Qurʾānic Fundamental Terms on Knowledge and Thinking

The table below presents a comprehensive overview of the identified Qurʾānic terms related to knowledge and thinking and their proposed classification within the analytical framework developed in this study.

Table 2: Qurʾānic Fundamental Terms on Knowledge and Thinking

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning (English)	Connotative Category	Qur'anic Verse
al-ʿilm	Knowledge	Positive	al-Baqarah 2:120
yatafakkarūn	Reflecting/giving thought	Positive	al-Ra'd 13:3
yaʿqilūn	Reasoning	Positive	al-Baqarah 2:164
al-tadabbur	Contemplation	Positive	Muhammad 47:24
al-tadhakkur	Remembrance	Positive	al-Anʿām 6:126
al-tawassum	Discernment	Positive	al-Ḥijr 15:75
al-muḥāwarah	Dialogue/discussion	Positive	al-Mujādilah 58:1
darasta	Studying/learning	Positive	al-Anʿām 6:105
al-bāl	Mind/inner state	Positive	Muhammad 47:2
al-iʿtibār	Consideration/reflection	Positive	al-Nūr 24:44
al-ḥikmah	Wisdom	Positive	al-Baqarah 2:269

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning (English)	Connotative Category	Qur'anic Verse
ulū al-albāb	People of understanding	Positive	al-Zumar 39:18
al-naẓar	Observation	Positive	al-Ghāshiyah: 88:17
al-fahm	Understanding	Positive	al-Anbiyāʾ 21:79
dhī ḥijr	Intellect/restraint	Positive	al-Fajr 89:5
al-nuhā	Intelligence	Positive	Ṭā Hā 20:54
al-raʾy	Judgement/opinion	Positive	Yūnus 10:78
al-idrāk	Perception	Positive	al-Anʿām 6:103
al-dhikr	Remembrance	Positive	al-Qamar 54:17
al-dirāyah	Awareness / familiarity	Positive	al-Anʿām 6:68
al-yaqīn	Certainty	Positive	al-Baqarah 2:4
al-ẓann	Assumption/conjecture	Subjective	al-Najm 53:28
al-muḥājjah	Argumentation	Subjective	al-Baqarah 2:258
al-īḥāʾ	Inspiration	Subjective	al-Naḥl 16:68
al-jadal	Debate	Subjective	al-Kahf 18:56
al-samʿ	Hearing	Subjective	al-Isrāʾ 17:36
al-fiqh	Comprehension	Subjective	al-Tawbah 9:122

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning (English)	Connotative Category	Qur'anic Verse
al-ibṣār	Insight	Subjective	al-Ḥajj 22:46
al-rayb	Doubt	Negative	al-Baqarah 2:2
al-taḥayyur	Confusion	Negative	al-Anʿām 6:71
al-ʿamah	Blind wandering	Negative	al-Anʿām 6:110
zuyyina	Deceptive beautification	Negative	al-Naḥl 16:24
sawwalahu	Enticement	Negative	Yūsuf 12:18
ḥasiba	Misjudging	Negative	al-Kahf 18:47
al-fuʾād	Heart (inner faculty)	Neutral	al-Naḥl 16:78
al-aḥlām	Minds/reasoning	Neutral	Yūsuf 12:44
al-shuʿūr	Awareness	Neutral	al-Baqarah 2:9
al-maʿrifah	Knowledge (recognition)	Neutral	al-Aʿrāf 7:51
al-qalb	Heart	Neutral	al-Baqarah 2:7
yastanbiṭūnahu	To infer/derive	Positive	al-Nisā 4:83

In the subsequent sections, each of these terms is analysed comparatively alongside others within the same connotative category, with attention to their contextual usage, semantic nuance, and epistemological implications within the Qurʾānic worldview.

2.3. An Analytical Exploration of Qurʾānic Thinking Terms

The analytical framework proposed in this study represents a distinctive contribution to the examination of the identified Qurʾānic terms. Most of the existing scholarship tends to examine these terms in isolation, without situating them within a comprehensive framework capable of capturing the full range of their connotative and contextual usage. In contrast, the present study adopts a systematic and integrative approach that enables a cohesive analysis of these terms and reveals their conceptual interconnectedness within the Qurʾānic discourse. It is structured around the four connotative categories—positive, subjective, negative and neutral—demonstrating how the proposed framework provides a comprehensive understanding and implications of the Qurʾān's intricate discourse on human cognition. More importantly, it provides a holistic perspective on the Qurʾān's comprehensive approach to human understanding, showing how spirituality, intellectual reflection, and moral responsibility are presented not as separate domains, but as an integrated ethical and cognitive system within the Islamic worldview.

2.4. The Positive Dimensions and Categories

The Qurʾān employs a range of positively connoted thinking terms not merely as descriptive vocabulary, but as a deliberate rhetorical and epistemological strategy that reflects a multi-layered Islamic approach to intellectual and spiritual development. However, this is not a simplistic, one-dimensional perspective; the sheer number of terms identified in this study suggests the high value that the Qurʾānplaces on intellectual pursuit. More specifically, it indicates a holistic ecosystem of interrelated cognitive activities that emphasise a multifaceted pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

At the core of this are terms like *al-ʿilm* (knowledge) and *al-yaqīn* (certainty), the latter representing the culmination of profound understanding. A closer analysis reveals that these terms are not interchangeable synonyms but rather denote a progressive hierarchy of knowing. In classical Islamic epistemology, *al-yaqīn* unfolds through

three ascending stages: ʿilm al-yaqīn (knowledge of certainty), ʿayn al-yaqīn (eye of certainty), and ḥaqq al-yaqīn (truth of certainty). This epistemic structure elevates knowledge beyond a purely cognitive exercise, transforming it into a spiritually transformative state. From this perspective, sustained intellectual effort—through learning, reflection, and observation—leads to unshakable conviction, demonstrating a direct causal relationship between intellectual striving and spiritual perfection.

Furthermore, an exploration of the Qurʾānic discourse through its employment of relevant positive connotations of some terms reveals a deep interconnectedness among various cognitive activities. For instance, tafakkur (giving thought) denotes an active and sustained process of reflection, while tadabbur (contemplating) refers to a more focused and deliberate engagement with the Qurʾān and the signs (āyāt) of God. Continuous engagement in these practices transforms the individual into one of the ulū al-albāb (people of understanding)— not a static label, but a state of being achieved through persistent intellectual and spiritual labour. Such individuals integrate empirical observation with spiritual remembrance, embodying the Qurʾānic ideal of harmonised cognition. This understanding resonates with classical Sufi traditions, in which tafakkur is regarded as a disciplined act of worship that cultivates spiritually enlightened individuals— those capable of discerning wisdom in life's trials and maintaining firm intellectual grounding that is not easily swayed. This close relationship between intellectual action and moral-spiritual state directly challenges any notion of passive or unreflective faith.

In addition, the Qurʾān highlights the faculties and mechanisms through which this elevated understanding is attained. Positively connoted terms delineate the means, tools, and conditions of intellectual growth within a comprehensive epistemological framework. These include: (a) al-tadhakkur (remembrance), denoting disciplined intellectual and spiritual recall; (b) al-tawassum (discernment), the capacity to perceive deeper meanings beyond surface appearances; (c) al-muḥāwarah (discussion) and darasta (study), which underscore the social and formal dimensions of

knowledge acquisition. Cognitive readiness is also emphasised through terms such as *al-bāl* (inner mental state), *al-nuhā* (intelligence), and *dhī ḥijr* (intellect), all of which denote sound mental faculties as prerequisites for the intellectual journey. Likewise, *al-naẓar* (observation) and *al-idrāk* (perception) function as sensory and cognitive tools for engaging with reality, while *al-fahm* (understanding) represents the cognitive outcome of this engagement. *Al-raʾy* (considered opinion) signifies the formation of reasoned judgement, distinguishing thoughtful deliberation from superficial impression.

Crucially, *al-dhikr* (remembrance), particularly remembrance of God, serves as the spiritual anchor that ensures intellectual pursuits remain aligned with divine purpose. Terms such as *al-dirāyah* (thorough familiarity) denote advanced awareness, while *istinbāṭ*—from which *yastanbiṭūnahu* is derived—represents the pinnacle of positive intellectual effort, describing the scholarly process of extracting meaning and legal judgement from revelation. This activity is not only legitimised but highly valued in Islamic thought, reflecting profound trust in human reason when guided by divine principles.

Collectively, these twenty-two positive terms (see Table 3 below) represent interconnected dimensions, stages, tools, and prerequisites that articulate the Qurʾān's holistic vision of knowledge and thinking, integrating intellectual discipline, moral responsibility, and spiritual awareness.

Table 3: Positive Qurʾānic Thinking Terms and Their Contextual Usage

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning	Contextual Use
al-ʿilm	Knowledge	God teaches Adam the names of all things, establishing knowledge as a divine gift (2:31).

yatafakkarūn	Giving thought	Encourages reflection on divine signs in creation (59:21).
yaʿqilūn	Reasoning	Exemplars benefit only those who use reason (29:43).
al-tadabbur	Contemplating	Urges believers to reflect deeply on the Qurʾān (47:24).
al-tadhakkur	Reminding	Examples are given so people may remember (14:25).
al-tawassum	Discernment	Signs exist for those who discern (15:75).
al-muḥāwarah	Discussion	Exemplifies meaningful dialogue (18:37).
darasta	Study	Refers to studying divine revelation (6:105).
al-bāl	Heart / Mind	God amends the inner state of believers (47:2).
al-iʿtibār	Consideration	Calls for reflective learning from events (59:2).
al-ḥikmah	Wisdom	A great good bestowed by God (2:269).
ulū al-albāb	People of Understanding	Those with sound judgement (2:179).
al-naẓar	Observation	Encourages observing creation (29:20).
al-fahm	Understanding	God grants understanding to Solomon (21:79).
dhī ḥijr	Intellect	Appeals to those of intellect (89:5).
al-nuhā	Intelligence	Lessons are for those of intelligence (20:54).
al-raʾy	Opinion	Distinguishes reflective judgement (11:27).

al-idrāk	Perception	God perceives all vision (6:103)
al-dhikr	Remembrance	Central cognitive-spiritual act (35:3).
al-dirāyah	Through familiarity	Awareness of revelation (42:52).
al-yaqīn	Certainty	Certainty of the Hereafter (2:4).
yastanbiṭūnahu	To derive/infer	Scholarly extraction of meaning and rulings (4:83).

2.5. The Subjective Dimensions and Categories

Apart from the above positive terms, the Qurʾān also employs a distinct category of subjective thinking terms, which are neither inherently positive nor negative, but whose moral and epistemological value is determined by context, intention and mode of application. This category reflects one of the most significant features of the Qurʾān's intellectual project: its insistence on moral responsibility in cognition.

A particularly illustrative example is the term *al-ẓann*. In its negative usage, *al-ẓann* denotes unfounded assumption or conjecture lacking evidence and is explicitly criticised as epistemically unreliable and spiritually misleading. In contrast, when employed positively, the same term signifies strong conviction or certainty—especially in relation to faith in God and the Hereafter. The distinction between these meanings is not merely linguistic but spiritual and moral. A believer's *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive expectancy grounded in faith) emerges from a sound spiritual state cultivated through remembrance of God (*dhikr*), itself regarded as an act of worship.

Similarly, the terms *al-muḥājjah* and *al-jadal*, both associated with argumentation, demonstrate this duality. The Qurʾān condemns argumentation when it is undertaken without knowledge or for the sake of obstinate opposition to manifest truth. At the same time, it explicitly permits—and even encourages—argumentation conducted "in the best manner" (*bi-allatī hiya aḥsan*) when its purpose is to clarify truth

through sound evidence and ethical intent. This distinction establishes that the moral value of debate lies not in the act itself, but in its intellectual integrity, ethical orientation, and evidentiary grounding.

The term *al-īḥāʾ* (inspiration) further illustrates the subjective dimension of Qurʾānic thinking terms. While it denotes divine inspiration that guides prophets toward truth, it is also used to describe the deceptive whisperings of devils, who inspire alluring but misleading speech. The Qurʾān thus differentiates between authentic inspiration and destructive suggestion based on source, purpose, and outcome, reinforcing the necessity of discernment in cognitive reception. Likewise, sensory and cognitive faculties such as *al-samʿ* (hearing) and *al-ibṣār* (insight) are presented as morally contingent. Hearing divine guidance may result in obedience or rebellion, depending on the individual's disposition. Similarly, possessing physical sight does not guarantee spiritual insight; one may have eyes yet lack the capacity to truly perceive the signs of God. These examples demonstrate that the epistemic value of human faculties is contingent upon their spiritual orientation and ethical use.

Finally, *al-fiqh* (deep comprehension) exemplifies this subjectivity. While some individuals attain profound understanding, others—despite possessing the same faculties—fail to comprehend due to moral negligence or spiritual resistance. Through this framework, the Qurʾān advances a critical model of intellectual engagement in which intention and ethical orientation take precedence over mere cognitive activity.

Table 4: Subjective Qurʾānic Thinking Terms and Their Dual Connotations

Term (Arabic)	Negative Connotation	Supporting Verse	Positive Connotation	Supporting Verse
al-ẓann	Unfounded assumption	Indeed, assumption avails	Conviction	Those who are certain

		nothing against the truth. (10:36)		that they will meet their Lord. (2:46)
al-muḥājjah)	Argument without knowledge	Why do you argue about that of which you have no knowledge? (3:66)	Argument grounded in knowledge	…those who have argued about that of which you have knowle-dge. (3:66)
al-īḥā	Satanic inspiration	Devils inspiring one another with decorative speech. (6:112)	Divine inspiration	We inspired Joseph… (12:15)
al-jadal	Disputing clear truth	They dispute with you concerning the truth after it has become clear. (8:6)	Ethical debate	Do not argue with the People of the Book except in the best manner. (29:46)

al-sam'	Hearing with disobedience	We hear and disobey. (2:93)	Hearing with obedience	We hear and we obey. (2:285)
al-fiqh	Lack of comprehension	They have hearts with which they do not comprehend (7:179)	Deep understanding	For people who compreh-end. (6:98)
al-ibṣār	Lack of insight	They have eyes with which they do not see. (7:179)	Spiritual insight	Then they rememb-erand at once they have insight. (7:201)

This analysis demonstrates that subjective terms function as ethical tests within the Qurʾānic epistemology, revealing whether cognition is exercised in submission or defiance, humility or arrogance, truth-seeking or self-deception.

2.6. The Negative Dimensions and Categories

The Qurʾān employs a carefully structured set of negatively connoted thinking terms to depict the progressive consequences of intellectual and spiritual deviation. Rather than presenting misguidance as a sudden or arbitrary state, the Qurʾānic discourse portrays it as a gradual, step-by-step cognitive and moral decline, rooted in the misuse or neglect of human intellectual faculties.

This process typically begins with *al-rayb* (doubt), a state of inner hesitation and epistemic instability that obstructs an individual's

willingness to accept truth. Unlike healthy inquiry, *al-rayb* reflects a paralysing uncertainty that weakens conviction and disrupts moral resolve. When such doubt persists, it develops into a condition of intellectual and spiritual disorientation, expressed through terms such as *al-taḥayyur* (confusion) and *al-ʿamah* (wandering blindly). These terms signify a deeper stage of misguidance in which individuals lose clarity of judgement and become incapable of distinguishing truth from falsehood. The Qurʾān associates this state with a hardened disposition in which cognitive faculties remain intact in form but are rendered ineffective in function.

The primary mechanism driving this deterioration is articulated through the verbs *zuyyina* and *sawwalahu*. The verb *zuyyina* literally means "to make something appear attractive". Although it is occasionally used positively to describe God's adornment of creation, it is predominantly employed to characterise Satanic deception—specifically, the act of making falsehood and moral corruption appear appealing. In a related manner, *sawwalahu* refers to the process of enticement or self-deception, often attributed to Satan or the lower self (*nafs*), whereby wrongful actions are rationalised and gradually normalised.

This cumulative process culminates in the state described by *ḥasiba* (misjudging or falsely assuming), in which the misguided individual, having been thoroughly deceived, sincerely believes that their actions are righteous and productive, despite their objective moral failure. The Qurʾān strikingly describes such individuals as those "whose efforts are lost in worldly life while they think that they are doing good work" (18:104). This represents the most perilous stage of misguidance, as the capacity for self-correction is undermined by false moral self-assurance. An ironic contrast is evident between the divine name *al-Ḥasīb* (the Reckoner, the One who gives due account) and the human condition of *ḥasiba*, which reflects an ego-driven miscalculation of one's moral standing.

Taken together, these negative terms outline a coherent Qurʾānic psychology of misguidance, illustrating how cognitive

deviation progresses from doubt to confusion, from deception to self-delusion, and ultimately to spiritual ruin.

Table 5: Negative Qurʾānic Thinking Terms and the Stages of Misguidance

Term (Arabic)	English Meaning	Role in the Process of Misguidance	Key Verse
al-rayb	Doubt	The initial state of hesitation and uncertainty that prevents embracing truth.	…whose hearts have doubted, and so in their doubt they waver. (9:45)
al-taḥayyur	Confusion	The state of intellectual bewilderment caused by the influence of devils.	…like one whom devils have enticed upon the earth, confused. (6:71)
al 'amah	Wander blindly	A state of spiritual blindness and transgression, unable to see the truth.	...We leave them in their transgression, wandering blindly. (6:110)
zuyyina	Misconceiving	The deceptive act of making evil appear attractive, often attributed to Satan.	Satan made attractive to them what they were doing. (29:38)
sawwalahu	Enticement	The act of enticing or tempting to do	Satan enticed them and prolonged hope

		wrong, leading astray.	for them. (47:25)
ḥasiba	Misperceiving	The final state where one believes their misguided efforts are righteous.	…they think that they are doing good work. (18:104)

This category demonstrates that, within the Qurʾānic epistemological framework, intellectual failure is fundamentally a moral failure. Misguidance arises not from a lack of cognitive capacity, but from the ethical misuse of intellectual faculties. The negative thinking terms thus serve as warnings against complacency, self-deception, and the erosion of moral accountability.

2.7. The Neutral Dimensions and Categories

The Qurʾān's use of fundamentally neutral cognitive terms constitutes a powerful rhetorical and epistemological strategy for highlighting human moral responsibility. These terms denote God-given faculties that are intrinsically neither virtuous nor blameworthy; rather, their ethical significance emerges from how they are employed. When applied to unbelievers, such terms often acquire a paradoxically negative connotation, not because of any inherent deficiency in human capacity, but because of a deliberate failure to use these faculties in accordance with truth and guidance. In this sense, the Qurʾānic critique targets moral and intellectual neglect, not innate incapacity.

This critique is especially evident in the Qurʾān's nuanced treatment of the heart and mind. Two key terms are *al-qalb* and *al-fuʾād*, both commonly translated as "heart" but carrying distinct conceptual implications. In Islamic theology, the heart is not merely a physical organ; it is the centre of understanding, moral discernment, and faith. The term *al-qalb* functions as the general designation for the heart and is associated with faith (*īmān*), receptivity, and moral

orientation. Its etymological sense of "turning" or "changing" reflects the heart's susceptibility to guidance or misguidance.

The Qurʾān repeatedly states that unbelievers possess hearts, yet fail to understand with them (7:179; 22:46). This condition is described metaphorically as the heart being "sealed", indicating not a biological defect but a self-inflicted spiritual and intellectual paralysis resulting from persistent rejection of truth (2:10; 2:88; 2:93). The Qurʾānic assertion that God "turns their hearts and eyes away" (6:110) must therefore be understood as a consequence of prior moral choice rather than arbitrary deprivation. Disbelief, in this framework, is portrayed as the outcome of wilful cognitive negligence.

By contrast, *al-fuʾād* refers to the heart in a state of intense emotional agitation and is derived from a root associated with "burning" or "kindling". The Qurʾān employs this term to emphasise moral accountability, declaring that hearing, sight, and the *fuʾād* will all be questioned (17:36). This verse establishes a profound ethical principle: human beings are accountable not only for rational decisions, but also for their emotional dispositions, insofar as these shape perception, judgement, and openness to truth.

Other neutral terms further reinforce this critique. The term *al-aḥlām* (minds) is used rhetorically to question whether the intellect of unbelievers actually compels them toward falsehood (52:32), suggesting a misuse of reasoning rather than its absence. Similarly, *al-shuʿūr* (perception or awareness) and *al-maʿrifa* (recognitive knowledge) are used to expose a critical paradox: despite perceiving or recognising the truth, individuals may still reject it. The Qurʾān explicitly condemns this state, noting that when truth came to them and they recognised it, they nevertheless disbelieved (2:89).

This pattern reveals a consistent Qurʾānic epistemology in which disbelief is framed as an intellectual and moral failure, not a cognitive limitation. Neutral faculties become instruments of either guidance or misguidance depending on human will and ethical orientation. The Qurʾān thus presents unbelief as a conscious refusal to actualise one's epistemic potential rather than a lack of the necessary faculties.

Table 6: Neutral Qurʾānic Thinking Terms and Their Contextual Functions

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning	Contextual Use	Key Verse
al-fuʾād	Heart (emotional–cognitive faculty)	Accountable inner faculty alongside hearing and sight	Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart … will be questioned. (17:36)
al-aḥlām	Minds	Used rhetorically to criticise corrupted reasoning.	Or do their minds command them to [say] this, or are they a transgressing people?" (52:32)
al-shuʿūr	Perception/awareness	Failure to perceive one's own self-deception.	They seek to deceive Allah and the believers, yet they only deceive themselves, but they fail to perceive it. (2:9)
al-maʿrifa	Recognitive knowledge	Knowing the truth yet rejecting it	But when there came to them that

			which they recognised, they disbelieved in it? (2:89)
al-qalb	Heart (intellectual–moral centre)	Possession of the faculty without its proper use	They have hearts with which they do not understand... (7:179) ….they not travelled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? (22:46)

It is important to acknowledge that the categorisation of Qurʾānic thinking and knowledge terms is informed by predominant usage and contextual patterns, rather than rigid semantic boundaries. Consequently, some terms classified as positive may, in certain contexts, acquire negative connotations, and vice versa. This does not undermine their dominant meaning but rather highlights the dynamic interplay between language and context in the Qurʾān.

For example, *al-ʿilm* (knowledge), while predominantly positive, may evoke negative implications when associated with misguidance (2:102), deception (2:101), denial (2:144; 2:146), or when divorced from practice and ethical commitment (3:71; 3:78). Similarly, terms that are primarily negative—such as *zuyyina*—may

assume a positive connotation in rare contexts, as when God adorns faith in the hearts of believers (49:7).

These shifts underscore a central methodological insight of this study: connotative meaning in the Qurʾān is inseparable from context[26] The ethical and epistemological force of a term emerges not only from its lexical root, but from its relational placement within the discourse.[27] This reinforces the necessity of a contextual and connotative analytical framework for understanding the Qurʾān's holistic approach to knowledge, thinking, and moral responsibility.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE QURʾĀNIC FUNDAMENTAL TERMS

The Qurʾān's employment of a wide range of thinking-related terms constitutes a deliberate epistemological strategy aimed at integrating reflection into the very act of recitation and engagement with its verses. Rather than encouraging passive reception, the Qurʾānic discourse seeks to cultivate active cognition, reshape mental attitudes, and foster intellectual openness. Through this process, readers are guided towards deeper appreciation, conscious recognition, and informed acceptance of truth. Thinking, therefore, is not peripheral to the Qurʾānic message but is embedded at the core of its pedagogical and transformative intent.

3.1. How Does the Qurʾān Promote Thinking?

The Qurʾān promotes the use of thinking-related faculties through multiple, interrelated strategies designed to stimulate intellectual engagement, ethical reflection, and the pursuit of wisdom. These strategies collectively reinforce the Qurʾānic vision of a reflective and morally responsible human being.

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[26] See Stefano Predelli, *Contexts: Meaning, Truth, and the Use of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
[27] Deborah Schiffrin, "Discourse Markers."

A. Commanding All Mankind to Use Their Mind Capabilities

The Qurʾān explicitly commands human beings to activate their cognitive capacities and engage critically with revelation. It challenges readers to examine the coherence, consistency, and truth-claims of the Qurʾān itself:

> Do they not reflect upon the Qurʾān? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found in it many inconsistencies. (4:82)

This verse exemplifies the Qurʾānic endorsement of reflective inquiry, presenting rational examination as a legitimate and necessary pathway to conviction and faith.

B. Praising Those Who Reflect, Contemplate, and Ponder

In addition to issuing commands, the Qurʾān repeatedly praises individuals who engage in deep reflection and contemplation, particularly in relation to the signs of God in creation:

> Those who remember God while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying: *'Our Lord, You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You; so protect us from the punishment of the Fire.'* (3:191)

Here, intellectual reflection is presented as inseparable from spiritual remembrance, illustrating the Qurʾānic ideal of integrated cognition that unites reason, devotion, and ethical awareness.

C. Condemning the Neglect or Suppression of Intellectual Faculties

Conversely, the Qurʾān strongly condemns those who deliberately refuse to engage their intellectual faculties or who seek to suppress reflection:

> Those who disbelieve say: 'Do not listen to this Qurʾān, and speak noisily over it, so that you may prevail. (41:26)

This verse criticises wilful intellectual obstruction and highlights the moral culpability associated with rejecting thoughtful engagement. The failure to think is thus portrayed not as a neutral omission, but as an ethically charged act of resistance to truth.

D. Employing Rhetorical Questioning to Stimulate Thought

The Qurʾān frequently utilises rhetorical questioning as a powerful pedagogical tool to provoke observation, reflection, and intellectual awakening:

> Do you not see that God sends down water from the sky, and then the earth becomes green? Truly God is Subtle, All-Aware. (22:63)

Such questions are not posed to solicit information, but to activate the reader's cognitive faculties and encourage contemplation of natural phenomena as signs (*āyāt*) pointing towards divine wisdom.

E. Cultivating a Reflective and Analytical Mode of Thinking

Beyond specific commands and rhetorical devices, the Qurʾān functions as a comprehensive tool for reflective thinking. It consistently invites believers to engage deeply with its verses, evaluate arguments, and observe empirical evidence within the universe. This

method nurtures critical discernment, enabling individuals to distinguish truth from falsehood and to make ethically informed decisions.

Moreover, the Qurʾān fosters an enduring culture of inquiry and lifelong learning. By encouraging questioning, reflection, and self-examination, it promotes intellectual humility and moral accountability. This introspective orientation urges individuals to scrutinise their beliefs, intentions, and actions, aligning their lives more closely with divine guidance and striving towards continuous personal and ethical refinement.

3.2. Objectives of Employing Multiple Thinking Terms in the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān's employment of multiple thinking-related terms serves a multifaceted epistemological and pedagogical objective, aimed at embedding reflective thought into the very act of reciting, engaging with, and internalising its verses. This linguistic strategy does not merely convey information; rather, it seeks to cultivate intellectual discipline, reshape mental attitudes, and foster openness to truth. The use of diverse thinking terms fulfils several interrelated purposes, as outlined below.

A. Infusing Thinking into the Process of Qurʾānic Recitation

By employing a wide range of terms associated with thinking and cognition, the Qurʾān encourages a dynamic and reflective mode of engagement with its text. Terms such as *yatafakkarūn* (to reflect), *yaʿqilūn* (to reason), *al-tadabbur* (deep contemplation), and *al-tadhakkur* (remembrance) describe distinct yet complementary modes of intellectual activity. Each term invites the reader to approach the Qurʾānic discourse from a particular cognitive orientation, thereby fostering a comprehensive and layered understanding of its message.

The frequent repetition of these terms across diverse contexts reinforces their epistemic significance and promotes the habitual

practice of reflection. Through such repetition, the Qurʾān gradually embeds reflective thinking into the reader's cognitive framework, transforming recitation from a ritual act into an intellectually and spiritually engaging process.

B. Cultivating New Mental Attitudes

The Qurʾān's varied thinking terminology also plays a central role in cultivating new mental attitudes oriented towards awareness, insight, and wisdom. For example, terms such as *al-tawassum* (discernment) and *al-naẓar* (careful observation) nurture curiosity and attentiveness, encouraging individuals to observe, question, and reflect upon the world around them.

Similarly, terms such as *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom) and *ulū al-albāb* (people of understanding) emphasise the pursuit of profound insight rather than superficial knowledge, fostering an appreciation for intellectual depth and moral clarity. In addition, terms such as *al-dhikr* (remembrance) and *al-tadhakkur* reinforce mindfulness and spiritual awareness, ensuring that intellectual activity remains anchored in divine guidance and ethical consciousness.

C. Transforming Mindsets and Fostering Open-Mindedness

A further objective of employing multiple thinking terms is to transform entrenched mindsets and promote intellectual openness. Terms such as *al-muḥāwarah* (dialogue) and *al-raʾy* (considered opinion) encourage critical engagement, reasoned discussion, and the evaluation of differing perspectives. This linguistic emphasis supports the formation of well-considered judgments rather than unreflective conformity.

Likewise, terms such as *al-ʿilm* (knowledge), *al-fahm* (understanding), and *al-nuhā* (intelligence) underscore the importance of continuous intellectual development and the expansion of human understanding. In parallel, terms such as *al-iʿtibār* (taking lesson) and *al-yaqīn* (certainty) encourage ethical reflection and moral

responsibility, directing individuals towards integrity in belief and action.

Importantly, the Qurʾān's use of these terms also cultivates intellectual humility. While encouraging rigorous thinking, terms such as *al-ʿilm* and *al-ḥikmah* simultaneously remind individuals of the limits of human knowledge, fostering openness to learning and receptivity to truth. This balance between confidence and humility is central to the Qurʾānic intellectual ethos.

Overall, the Qurʾān's rich and varied discourse on thinking reflects a profound commitment to intellectual inquiry and reflective engagement. The extensive use of diverse thinking terms encourages a multifaceted approach to understanding revelation, nurturing a culture of critical reflection, wisdom, and moral discernment.

It has been observed by Western sociologists that the frequency with which a culture employs terms related to a particular concept often reflects the value it assigns to that concept. This observation is particularly apt in relation to the Qurʾān: the abundance and diversity of thinking-related terminology unmistakably signal the high value placed on reflection, reasoning, and intellectual pursuit within the Islamic worldview. Through this linguistic richness, the Qurʾān positions thinking not as an optional activity, but as an essential pathway to faith, ethical responsibility, and human flourishing.

4. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that the Qurʾān's discourse on knowledge is not a simplistic aggregation of synonymous terms, but rather a dynamic and interconnected system of thought. A comprehensive analysis of Qurʾānic thinking terms and their connotative dimensions reveals several profound implications for understanding the Islamic intellectual tradition. Most notably, the presence of numerous terms relating to thinking, reflection, and knowledge constitutes a powerful indication of the high value accorded to intellectual engagement within Islamic culture.

This finding aligns with sociological observations that the

frequency and diversity of terms associated with a concept within a culture's lexicon often reflect the significance that culture assigns to it. In this regard, the Qurʾān's abundant use of thinking-related terminology actively cultivates a culture that values creativity, innovation, reflection, and continuous learning. It thus offers a compelling counter-narrative to the widespread misconception that Islam is inherently opposed to intellectual inquiry or critical reasoning.

More significantly, the proposed analytical framework offers a robust methodological tool for scholarly investigation. By systematically analysing the connotative meanings of fundamental Qurʾānic terms, the study demonstrates that the Qurʾān promotes a holistic approach to reasoning that integrates intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of human life. The analysis of subjective terms, for example, foregrounds the ethical centrality of intention and context, while the conceptual model of intellectual deviation articulated through negatively connoted terms provides a sophisticated psychological and theological critique of spiritual and moral decline. Furthermore, the Qurʾān's use of ostensibly neutral terms to critique moral and intellectual negligence underscores the principle of personal responsibility, which lies at the heart of the Qurʾānic worldview.

This study is therefore not merely an academic exercise, but a substantive contribution that deepens contemporary understanding of the Qurʾān and addresses persistent misrepresentations of Islamic thought. Its findings reaffirm the timeless relevance of Qurʾānic guidance and highlight the central role of intellectual pursuit in Islam's civilisational vision. By introducing a replicable and systematic analytical framework, the paper moves the field beyond descriptive glossaries of Qurʾānic terminology towards a more nuanced, conceptually rigorous, and interpretively rich engagement with meaning and implication.

Future research may build upon this framework to explore other categories of fundamental Qurʾānic terms, including those related to ethics, civilisation, history, and human agency. In particular, the framework offers promising potential for systematic studies of Qurʾānic concepts concerning human civilisations and historical

development, thereby extending its applicability across broader domains of Islamic thought.