

Metacognitive Awareness in Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Contemporary psychological research conceptualizes metacognition as a higher-order cognitive capacity enabling individuals to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own thinking. While this construct has contributed significantly to educational and cognitive sciences, it is commonly treated as an epistemologically neutral skill, largely detached from moral accountability, spiritual consciousness, and existential purpose. This paper argues that the core functions attributed to metacognition are neither novel nor value-neutral within the Islamic intellectual tradition, but are deeply embedded in Qur'ānic anthropology and classical ethical discourse through concepts such as *tafakkur* (reflective contemplation), *muḥāsabah* (self-accountability), and *murāqabah* (conscious awareness under divine observation). Employing a qualitative conceptual analysis grounded in Islamic epistemology, the study engages contemporary psychological theories of metacognition as descriptive frameworks rather than normative authorities. Through comparative examination, it demonstrates that Islamic reflective consciousness constitutes a holistic form of metacognitive awareness oriented toward ethical self-regulation, moral agency, and accountability before Allah. By addressing cognitive heedlessness (*ghaflah*) and unexamined thought prevalent in contemporary contexts, the paper highlights the relevance of Islamic metacognitive disciplines for intellectual renewal, ethical formation, and the moral resilience of the Muslim ummah.

Keywords: Metacognition, Islamic Epistemology, Tafakkur, Muḥasabah, Muraqabah, Reflective Consciousness

Introduction

Metacognition is widely defined in contemporary psychology as a higher order cognitive capacity that enables individuals to monitor, understand, and regulate their own cognitive processes (Shea et al., 2014). Often described as “thinking about thinking,” it explained awareness of how one learns, reasons, and solves problems, as well as the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate cognitive strategies (Nelson, 1990). Researchers generally identifies metacognition as comprising interrelated components such as metacognitive knowledge concerning one’s cognitive strengths and limitations; regulatory processes that guide planning, monitoring, and evaluation; and subjective cognitive affective experiences that accompany learning and decision-making (Begum, 2025). Together, these dimensions

position metacognition as a sophisticated form of reflective self-awareness that integrates cognition and emotion, enabling intentional, adaptive, and self-directed thought.

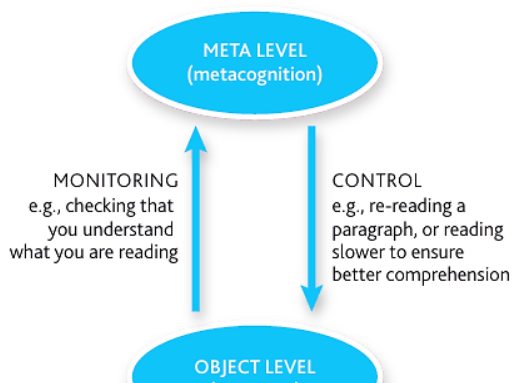


Figure 1: Nelson and Narens' (1990) Model of Metacognition

Long before the emergence of modern psychological theory, Islam has emphasized the action on it. The Quran repeatedly called human beings to reflect, reason, and self-examination (Arshad, 2019). These imperatives are not framed as optional intellectual exercises but as constitutive of faith, moral responsibility, and human agency (Abdul Razak, 2012). Quranic expressions such as *afalā ta'qilūn* ("Will you not then reason?"), *afalā tatafakkarūn* ("Will you not then reflect?"), and *afalā yatadabbarūn* ("Do they not then reflect deeply?") indicate that reflective consciousness occupies a central place in the Islamic conception of the human intellect. The Quran explicitly asks: "Do they not then reflect deeply upon the Quran?" (Al-Quran, 4:82).

Classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship has long examined this Quranic emphasis on reflection, situating thinking not merely as a cognitive function but as an epistemological and ethical responsibility grounded in revelation (Ishak & Wan Yusoff, 2015). However, despite this rich intellectual heritage, contemporary Muslim societies like their non-Muslim counterparts are increasingly characterised by reactive cognition, unexamined assumptions, and attentional fragmentation (Masud et al., 2009). Individuals often respond automatically to narratives and emotions without sustained reflection on intention, consequence, or moral accountability (Wheatley & Wegner, 2001). This condition reflects not only a moral concern but a cognitive one: a weakening of reflective self-awareness that undermines ethical judgment and intellectual integrity.

Modern psychology addresses aspects of this problem through metacognition research, demonstrating its positive effects on learning, decision-making, and self-regulation (Katyal & Fleming, 2024). Nevertheless, dominant psychological frameworks tend to conceptualise metacognition as a value-neutral, functional mechanism, largely detached from questions of intention (*niyyah*), moral accountability, and ultimate purpose. This creates a conceptual gap between descriptive cognitive models and the normative, ethically charged understanding of reflection articulated within Islamic thought.

This paper argues that the Islamic intellectual tradition offers a more comprehensive and integrated account of reflective consciousness one that unites cognition, ethics, and accountability before Allah SWT. Choosing an Islam-first epistemological approach, the study

engages contemporary metacognitive theory as a descriptive and analytical framework rather than a normative foundation. The primary objective is to demonstrate that concepts such as *tafakkur*, *muḥāsabah*, and *murāqabah* constitute a holistic Islamic model of metacognitive awareness, and to argue for their relevance in addressing cognitive heedlessness (*ghaflah*) and fostering intellectual renewal and moral resilience within the ummah.

Methodology

Epistemological Orientation

This study is grounded in an Islamic epistemological framework, wherein knowledge (*‘ilm*) is understood as inseparable from ethical orientation, moral responsibility, and accountability before Allah. Unlike positivist or secular cognitive paradigms that treat mental processes as value-neutral mechanisms, Islamic epistemology conceives cognition as a morally situated faculty shaped by intention (*niyyah*), spiritual state, and ethical commitment. The centrality of intention (*niyyah*) in Islamic epistemology is grounded in the Prophetic guidance, “Actions are judged only by intentions,” which establishes internal intentionality as the decisive criterion of moral and spiritual evaluation (*Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī, Kitāb Bad’ Al-Waḥy, Ḥadīth* No. 1). Within this worldview, reflective awareness is not merely descriptive but normative, guiding human conduct toward truth, justice, and self-rectification.

Accordingly, this paper adopts an Islam-first epistemological stance, in which the Quran and the Islamic intellectual tradition constitute the primary sources of conceptual authority. Contemporary psychological theories of metacognition and mindfulness are engaged secondarily, as analytical and descriptive tools that illuminate cognitive mechanisms without defining their ultimate meaning or purpose. This orientation aligns with the methodological commitments of Islamic scholarship, which privileges revealed knowledge and classical thought while allowing principled interdisciplinary engagement.

Conceptual-Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical framework of this study is constructed through a tri-layered model of reflective awareness, integrating:

1. Metacognition as articulated in contemporary cognitive psychology
2. Mindfulness as an attentional and experiential construct
3. *Murāqabah*, alongside *tafakkur* and *muḥāsabah*, as indigenous Islamic disciplines of reflective consciousness

In psychological literature, metacognition is commonly conceptualised as the capacity to monitor, evaluate, and regulate one’s cognitive processes, particularly in relation to learning, decision-making, and problem-solving (Fleming & Lau, 2014). While empirically robust, this conceptualisation largely brackets questions of ethical orientation, intention, and accountability (Sellers et al., 2017). Mindfulness, as developed in contemporary psychology, emphasises sustained present-moment awareness and non-reactive attention to internal states. Although often presented in secularised form, mindfulness functions as a bridge construct, revealing the role of disciplined attention in cultivating reflective awareness.

Islamic intellectual tradition, however, offers a more comprehensive framework through *tafakkur* (deliberate reflection), *muḥāsabah* (systematic self-accountability), and *murāqabah* (continuous awareness of Allah SWT’s observation). These practices collectively constitute a

theocentric model of reflective consciousness, where cognitive monitoring is inseparable from moral evaluation and spiritual vigilance. Rather than rejecting metacognition or mindfulness, this framework subsumes and orients them, transforming reflective awareness into an act of ethical responsibility and worship (*iḥsān*).

Methodological Approach

This study employs a qualitative conceptual–analytical methodology, appropriate for addressing epistemological, theoretical, and normative questions concerning human cognition and moral awareness. Rather than seeking empirical generalisation or psychometric validation, the research aims to clarify concepts, interrogate assumptions, and construct an integrative theoretical model grounded in Islamic thought. Primary data sources consist of:

1. Qur’anic verses addressing reflection, self-awareness, and accountability
2. Prophetic traditions defining intelligence, self-regulation, and moral agency
3. Classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship on cognition, ethics, and spiritual discipline

Secondary sources include peer-reviewed psychological literature on metacognition, mindfulness, and self-awareness, which are analysed comparatively to identify conceptual overlaps, divergences, and limitations.

Analytical procedures involve thematic analysis, conceptual mapping, and comparative interpretation, enabling the alignment of psychological constructs with Islamic reflective disciplines while preserving theological primacy. This method allows the study to avoid reductionism either by psychologising Islamic concepts or by dismissing contemporary cognitive insights while offering a principled synthesis relevant to both Islamic studies and interdisciplinary scholarship.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study is intentionally delimited as a conceptual and normative inquiry situated at the intersection of Islamic intellectual studies and contemporary psychological discourse. It does not seek to empirically measure metacognitive processes, validate psychometric instruments, or conduct experimental testing of cognitive awareness. Instead, its scope is confined to theoretical clarification, epistemological analysis, and conceptual integration, with the aim of articulating an Islamic framework of reflective consciousness grounded in the Qur’an, Prophetic tradition, and classical ethical scholarship.

The paper engages contemporary psychological literature on metacognition and mindfulness selectively and critically. These frameworks are employed as descriptive and analytical tools, rather than as epistemic authorities capable of defining the nature, purpose, or ethical orientation of human cognition. Consequently, the study does not attempt to Islamise Western psychological constructs retrospectively, nor does it translate Islamic concepts into secular cognitive terminology. Such an approach would risk reducing normatively rich Islamic disciplines such as *tafakkur*, *muḥāsabah*, and *murāqabah* to functionally neutral mental techniques.

Furthermore, this study does not claim to represent all historical or contemporary expressions of Islamic spirituality or cognition. Its analysis is primarily situated within mainstream Sunni intellectual tradition, drawing upon Qur’anic anthropology and classical

ethical discourse as normative reference points. While implications for education, moral development, and intellectual renewal are discussed, these remain illustrative rather than prescriptive, and no policy-level recommendations are advanced.

These delimitations are adopted to ensure conceptual coherence, methodological integrity, and epistemological discipline. By clearly defining its scope, the study avoids methodological overreach while preserving the integrity of Islamic reflective consciousness as an ethically grounded mode of metacognitive awareness.

Findings

Metacognition in Contemporary Psychological Theory

The term metacognition was first introduced by John Flavell, who defined it as knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and the active regulation of those processes in learning and problem-solving contexts. According to Flavell, metacognition encompasses both metacognitive knowledge, what individuals know about their thinking and metacognitive experiences or regulatory mechanisms that guide planning, monitoring, and evaluation of cognition (Flavell, 1979).

This foundational framing established metacognition as a higher-order mental capacity, concerned not merely with acquiring information, but with reflective awareness of how knowledge is formed, assessed, and controlled. Subsequent developments in educational psychology and cognitive science have built upon this framework, positioning metacognition as central to self-regulated learning, decision-making, and adaptive reasoning (Terneusen et al., 2024).

Within educational psychology, metacognition is associated with improved academic performance, adaptive problem-solving, and transfer of learning across contexts (Fleming & Lau, 2014). Neuroscientific research further links metacognitive monitoring to prefrontal cortical regions involved in executive control, self-evaluation, and decision-making (Toneatto, 2002).

Despite these advances, contemporary psychological discourse remains largely epistemologically neutral. Metacognition is treated as a tool for optimisation enhancing efficiency, accuracy, and performance rather than as a morally oriented practice. Questions concerning why one should regulate one's thinking, toward what ends, and under whose authority remain largely unaddressed.

Critiques of value-neutral psychological frameworks have long been raised within Islamic scholarship, which emphasises that therapeutic and cognitive practices cannot be divorced from ethical and spiritual accountability (Badri, 2014). From an Islamic perspective, this neutrality represents a critical limitation. Cognitive power divorced from ethical orientation risks becoming instrumentally effective yet morally directionless, a condition the Qur'an repeatedly warns against.

Human Cognition in Islamic Epistemology

Islamic epistemology does not locate understanding solely within abstract reasoning. The Qur'an repeatedly associates comprehension with the *qalb* (heart), indicating that cognition

is inseparable from moral and spiritual states, “Indeed, it is not the eyes that become blind, but the hearts within the chests” (Al-Qur’ān 22:46)

This framing establishes a fundamental principle: awareness and understanding are ethically conditioned. Classical scholars such as Ibn Qayyim emphasised that ignorance of one’s inner states leads to self-deception, while self-knowledge is a prerequisite for moral refinement. Reflection (*tafakkur*) was therefore understood not merely as intellectual contemplation, but as a means of discerning truth, correcting intention, and reforming conduct (Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, 1996).

Ibn al-Qayyim conceptualises *murāqabah* as a sustained state of reflective consciousness rooted in certainty of divine observation, defining it as “the servant’s continuous awareness and certainty that Allah observes his outward actions and inward states.” He further distinguishes *murāqabah* into two interrelated levels: *murāqabah al-‘ilm* (awareness grounded in knowledge of divine omniscience) and *murāqabah al-ḥāl* (embodied vigilance manifesting in disciplined intention and conduct). The former corresponds to cognitive recognition knowing that one’s thoughts, intentions, and actions are fully perceived by Allah SWT while the latter represents the internalisation of this awareness into ongoing self-regulation.

This structure closely parallels contemporary distinctions between metacognitive knowledge (awareness of one’s cognitive states) and metacognitive regulation (monitoring and controlling those states), while also encompassing what modern psychology terms mindfulness, understood as present-centred awareness of internal processes. However, Ibn al-Qayyim’s framework diverges fundamentally from secular mindfulness by anchoring awareness not in neutral attention, but in ethical accountability and teleological purpose. *Murāqabah* thus functions as a spiritually grounded form of metacognitive vigilance: attentiveness to thought, intention, and behaviour, continuously evaluated under divine gaze. In this sense, Islamic reflective consciousness does not merely observe cognition but disciplines it, transforming awareness into moral agency and intentional self-correction rather than passive observation.

The Qur’an further affirms the human capacity for self-observation as it said “Rather, the human being is a witness against himself” (Al-Qur’ān 75:14). This verse articulates a core metacognitive reality: the human being possesses an innate capacity to observe, evaluate, and testify regarding their own inner life and actions an ability that carries moral weight.

Contemporary Islamic scholarship has further highlighted that spiritual and intellectual education in Islam aims at cultivating reflective consciousness, where self-awareness, moral responsibility, and inner discipline are developed simultaneously rather than treated as separate domains (Shamshiri et al., 2020).

Tafakkur, *Muḥāsabah*, and *Murāqabah* as Metacognitive Disciplines

Islamic intellectual tradition articulates reflective self-awareness through interrelated disciplines that together constitute a comprehensive framework of metacognitive consciousness. *Tafakkur* refers to deliberate reflection upon signs, experiences, and consequences, directing the intellect beyond surface perception toward deeper

understanding. *Muḥāsabah* denotes systematic self-accountability, whereby individuals evaluate their thoughts, intentions, and actions in light of moral responsibility. *Murāqabah* represents sustained vigilance of the self-grounded in the awareness of Allah's constant observation, anchoring cognition within God-consciousness.

These disciplines do not operate independently. Rather, they form a progressive structure of reflective awareness: *tafakkur* initiates cognitive engagement, *muḥāsabah* introduces evaluative self-regulation, and *murāqabah* integrates both within a theocentric orientation. In contrast to contemporary psychological models that treat metacognitive awareness as a functional skill, Islamic reflective disciplines frame awareness as a moral obligation and a means of spiritual refinement.

Empirical studies in Islamic educational contexts support this integrated understanding of reflective awareness. Research has shown that reflective cognitive styles are positively associated with metacognitive thinking and deep understanding of religious concepts, whereas impulsive styles limit the effectiveness of metacognitive regulation (Al-Qahtani & Al-Otaibi, 2025). Similarly, instructional models that integrate Islamic values into science and learning environments have been found to enhance students' metacognitive skills, demonstrating that value-oriented cognition strengthens reflective regulation rather than constraining it (Purwati et al., 2023). Developmental work on instructional materials further confirms that metacognition can be systematically cultivated alongside Islamic values and character formation without reducing reflection to procedural skill training (Suciati et al., 2022).

The Prophetic definition of intelligence reflects this orientation, "The intelligent one is he who holds himself accountable and works for what comes after death" (clarified as *Hadis Hassan* in *Sunan Al-Tirmidhī*) Here, intelligence is defined not by cognitive speed or efficiency, but by reflective self-governance oriented toward accountability beyond the immediate present. This integration of reflection and moral awareness is consistent with findings in Islamic value-based psychological research, which suggests that cognition contributes meaningfully to human well-being beyond material or hedonic considerations (Suciati et al., 2022).

Reflective Awareness

Discussions of reflective awareness in contemporary scholarship often present metacognition, mindfulness, and spiritual vigilance as distinct or competing constructs. From an Islamic epistemological perspective, however, these processes are best understood as interconnected layers of reflective awareness operating at different depths of human consciousness.

Metacognition, as articulated in cognitive psychology, functions at the cognitive level, enabling individuals to monitor, evaluate and regulate their thinking processes. Mindfulness operates at an attentional experiential level, cultivating sustained awareness of the present moment and inner states. Within Islamic practice, mindfulness is not value-neutral; it is oriented toward presence (*ḥuḍūr*) and remembrance (*dhikr*). Allah SWT said "Those who believe and whose hearts find tranquillity in the remembrance of Allah. Indeed, it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find tranquillity" (Al-Qur'ān 13:28).

Muraqabah represents the most comprehensive layer of reflective awareness, integrating cognitive monitoring and mindful presence within a theocentric framework of intention (*niyyah*) and accountability to Allah. Rather than negating metacognition or mindfulness, *murāqabah* encompasses and elevates them, transforming awareness into an act of ethical vigilance and worship.

Contemporary psychological literature increasingly recognises the overlap between metacognitive regulation and mindful awareness, particularly in relation to rumination, attentional control, and emotional regulation (Razavizadeh Tabadkan & Mohammadi Poor, 2016). Clinical and theoretical models have further demonstrated how spiritual traditions, such as Buddhist mindfulness, have been translated into metacognitive therapeutic frameworks, illustrating that reflective awareness often emerges from disciplined attentional practice (Toneatto, 2002). Neuroscientific accounts likewise conceptualise self-awareness as layered and emergent, supporting the view that reflective consciousness operates across cognitive, experiential, and evaluative dimensions rather than as a single faculty (Mograb et al., 2024).

Table 1

Alignment of Metacognition, Mindfulness, and Murāqabah as Layers of Reflective Awareness

Dimension	Metacognition (Psychology)	Mindfulness (Psychology & Islamic Practice)	Murāqabah (Islamic Epistemology)
Level of operation	Cognitive (thinking about thinking)	Attentional–experiential (present awareness)	Spiritual ethical (God-conscious vigilance)
Core function	Monitoring, evaluating, and regulating thought processes	Sustained awareness of thoughts, emotions, and the present moment	Awareness of thoughts, intentions, and actions under Allah’s observation
Object of awareness	Cognitive strategies, errors, understanding	Inner states and external experience	Inner states, intentions (<i>niyyah</i>), and moral standing
Role of evaluation	Strategic and functional	Gentle or minimal evaluation	Central moral and spiritual evaluation
Role of intention (<i>niyyah</i>)	Implicit or absent	Secondary	Foundational
Accountability	To self and task goals	Primarily therapeutic/self-oriented	Accountability to Allah
Relationship to ethics	Indirect	Supportive but non-binding	Integral and inseparable
Temporal orientation	Task- and performance-based	Present-moment focused	Worldly life and Hereafter
Ultimate aim	Effective learning and decision-making	Emotional regulation and inner presence	<i>Iḥsān</i> , self-rectification (<i>iṣlāḥ al-naḥs</i>), nearness to Allah
Status in Islam	Descriptive cognitive overlap	Accepted as disciplined presence	Indigenous Islamic discipline and highest form

Contemporary cognitive science has refined the measurement of metacognition by distinguishing between confidence accuracy, monitoring ability, and task performance

(Fleming & Lau, 2014). In “How to Measure Metacognition” article, metacognition is defined as the capacity to evaluate one’s own cognitive success, typically assessed through the correspondence between trial-by-trial accuracy and subjective confidence. The study critically demonstrates that commonly used correlational measures (e.g., Pearson’s r) are vulnerable to response biases and instead advances signal detection theory-based indices that differentiate metacognitive bias, metacognitive sensitivity (the ability to discriminate correct from incorrect judgments), and metacognitive efficiency (sensitivity relative to task performance).

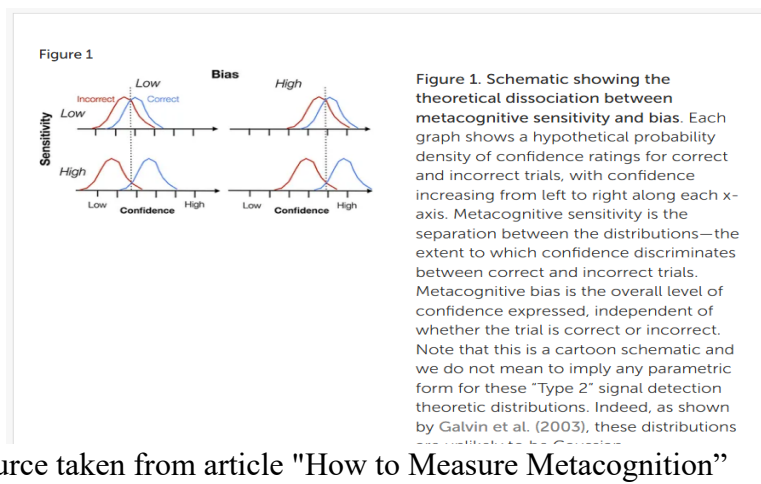


Figure 2: Source taken from article "How to Measure Metacognition"

Complementing this framework, “The Many Facets of Metacognition: Comparing Multiple Measures of Metacognition in Healthy Individuals” article empirically confirms that metacognition is a multidimensional construct comprising metacognitive knowledge and online awareness (monitoring and self-regulation) (Terneusen et al., 2024). Its findings show that metacognitive sensitivity is predicted by online, trial-based confidence measures rather than by self-reported metacognitive knowledge, reinforcing the view that reflective awareness is an active, moment-to-moment cognitive discipline rather than a static trait.

Together, these findings support the conceptual argument of this paper that Islamic practices such as *tafakkur*, *muḥāsabah*, and *murāqabah* function as structured forms of online metacognitive monitoring and regulation, aligning closely with contemporary distinctions between sensitivity, bias, and efficiency in reflective awareness rather than with simplistic notions of introspection or self-report.

Islamic approaches to awareness and self-regulation have also been explored empirically in educational and developmental contexts, demonstrating that Qur’an-based frameworks can be meaningfully operationalised without reducing religious consciousness to secular psychological metrics (Mabrouk, 2013).

Murāqabah as Ethical Metacognitive Efficiency

Within contemporary psychological literature, metacognition is increasingly analysed through the distinction between metacognitive sensitivity, bias, and efficiency. Metacognitive efficiency, in particular, refers to the extent to which individuals accurately monitor and regulate their cognition relative to their actual task performance. While this construct offers

valuable insight into cognitive self-regulation, it remains constrained by a performance-oriented epistemology that prioritises accuracy, confidence calibration, and task success.

From an Islamic perspective, *murāqabah* represents a qualitatively different and ethically elevated form of metacognitive efficiency. Rather than calibrating confidence against performance outcomes, *murāqabah* orients reflective awareness toward accountability before Allah, transforming self-monitoring into an act of moral vigilance (*ihsān*). The Prophet ﷺ defined *ihsān* as “to worship Allah as though you see Him, and if you do not see Him, then know that He sees you.” This definition encapsulates the essence of *murāqabah* as continuous awareness under divine observation.

Unlike secular models in which attentional awareness is value-neutral, *murāqabah* embeds metacognitive regulation within a teleological framework directed toward ethical self-rectification. Thought is not merely monitored for correctness or efficiency, but evaluated in terms of intention (*niyyah*), moral consequence, and alignment with divine guidance. In this sense, *murāqabah* may be understood as the culmination of Islamic metacognitive development, integrating awareness, evaluation, and regulation within a coherent moral horizon.

This reconceptualisation addresses a critical limitation in contemporary metacognitive theory: the absence of normative grounding. By situating cognitive self-regulation within a theocentric framework, *murāqabah* transforms metacognition from a functional skill into an ethically charged discipline, capable of resisting cognitive heedlessness (*ghaflah*) and impulsive reactivity.

Interpretive Clarification

From an Islamic perspective, metacognition and mindfulness are not rejected constructs; rather, they describe partial aspects of reflective consciousness that Islamic tradition has long addressed within a more comprehensive moral and metaphysical framework. Metacognition captures the cognitive mechanics of self-monitoring, mindfulness cultivates attentional presence, and *murāqabah* integrates both within a God-centred orientation of accountability and purpose. Consequently, *murāqabah* represents not an alternative to metacognition or mindfulness, but their ethical and spiritual culmination, orienting reflective awareness toward *ihsān* and responsibility before Allah. A hadith mentioned about *ihsān*, “That you worship Allah as though you see Him; and if you do not see Him, then indeed He sees you” (*Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*)

Ghaflah as Failure of Reflective Awareness

Islamic tradition identifies *ghaflah* (heedlessness) as a condition of diminished reflective awareness characterized by unexamined cognition, reactive behaviour, and failure to learn from moral experience. It is not merely a lapse in ethical conduct, but a deeper cognitive–spiritual disengagement that erodes self-monitoring and intentional regulation of thought. The Qur’an describes this condition as one in which human faculties remain intact yet unused: “They have hearts with which they do not understand, eyes with which they do not see, and ears with which they do not hear? It is they who are the heedless” (Al-Qur’ān 7:179).

The Quran establishes a direct relationship between loss of divine awareness and loss of self-awareness. “Do not be like those who forgot Allah, so He caused them to forget

themselves.”ⁱ This formulation suggests that reflective awareness is sustained through remembrance of Allah, and that heedlessness entails a collapse of both spiritual consciousness and metacognitive self-regulation. Ghafalah may therefore be understood as a failure of integrated reflective awareness, in which cognition is severed from moral accountability and intentional self-correction.

Contemporary studies on moral reasoning reinforce this perspective, demonstrating that ethical failure is often preceded by breakdowns in reflective self-monitoring rather than ignorance alone. Empirical work on moral awareness within Muslim societies similarly indicates that the absence of reflective self-regulation contributes to uncritical conformity and weakened ethical judgment, echoing the Qur’anic critique of heedlessness (Al-Qur’ān 59:19)

Cultivating Reflective Consciousness in Islam

Islamic pedagogy emphasises the gradual cultivation of reflective awareness through guidance, error, and return. Human fallibility is acknowledged, yet framed as an opportunity for moral recalibration rather than final failure. The Prophet ﷺ stated: “All children of Adam are prone to error, and the best of those who erred are those who repent” (*Sunan Al-Tirmidhī*) This pedagogical orientation aligns with contemporary insights into reflective learning, while grounding cognitive self-correction within ethical responsibility and divine mercy rather than performance optimisation alone.

Implications for Islamic Intellectual Renewal

The framework developed in this study carries significant implications for contemporary Islamic intellectual life. Muslim societies today face not only moral decline or informational overload, but a deeper crisis of reflective consciousness. Patterns of reactive thinking, ideological polarisation, and unexamined assumptions reflect a condition of cognitive heedlessness (*ghafalah*) that undermines ethical judgment and intellectual responsibility.

Reclaiming Islamic reflective disciplines as structured forms of metacognitive awareness offers a pathway toward intellectual renewal. In educational contexts, this framework supports pedagogies that prioritise reflective engagement, intentional learning, and ethical self-regulation over rote memorisation or performance-based metrics. In religious discourse, the integration of *murāqabah* counters expressions driven by emotional reactivity, social conformity, or ideological rigidity, fostering discernment, restraint, and sincerity. At a civilisational level, Islamic metacognitive disciplines provide resources for cultivating moral resilience amid complexity, restoring reflective awareness as a religious responsibility rather than an optional cognitive skill.

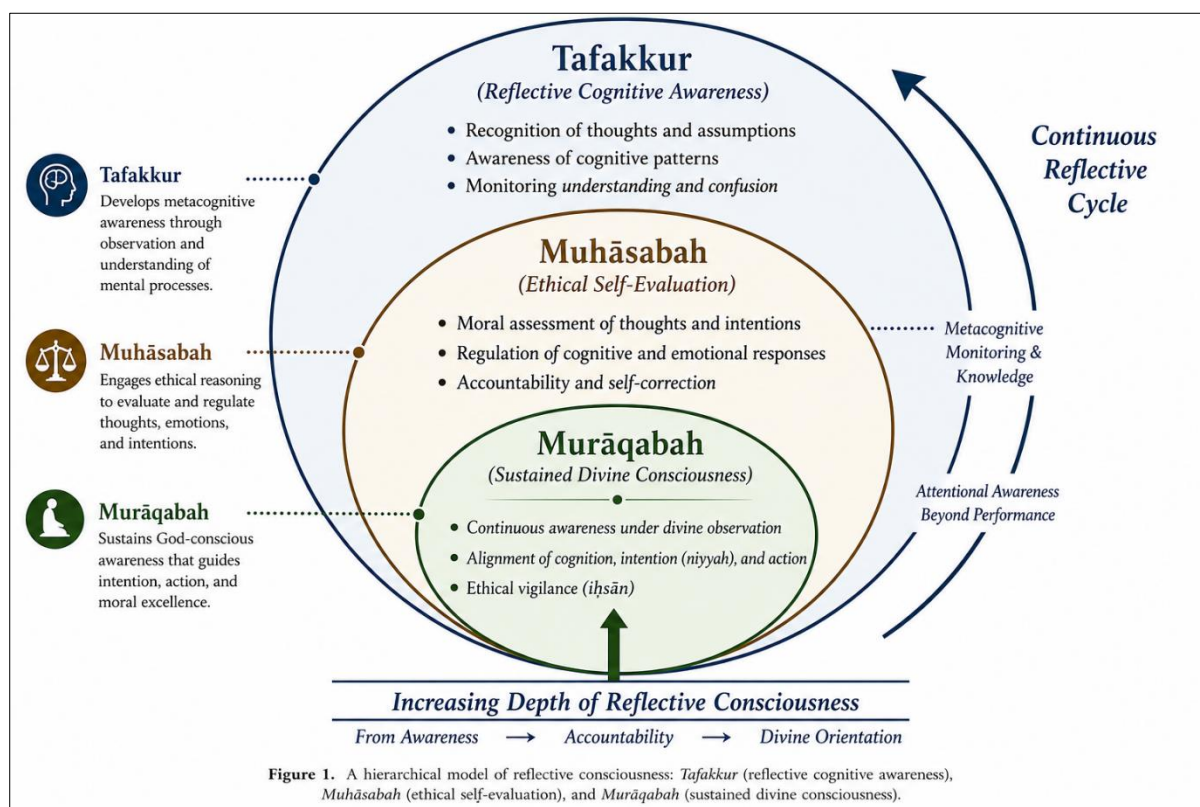


Figure 3: Author's Conceptual Framework of Islamic Reflective Consciousness

This figure illustrates the integrative conceptual framework proposed in this study, situating metacognition, *tafakkur*, *muhāsabah*, and *murāqabah* within a unified model of Islamic reflective consciousness. The framework depicts a progressive hierarchy through which reflective awareness develops from cognitive recognition to ethical self-regulation, culminating in sustained consciousness of divine accountability.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine metacognition beyond its prevailing treatment as a value-neutral cognitive skill by situating it within an Islamic epistemological and ethical framework. Drawing upon the Qur'an, classical Islamic scholarship, and contemporary psychological literature, the paper has argued that reflective awareness is neither a modern innovation nor a morally indifferent mental function. Rather, the essential features attributed to metacognition in contemporary psychology monitoring, evaluation, and regulation of thought are deeply embedded within the Islamic intellectual tradition through the interrelated disciplines of *tafakkur* (deliberate reflection), *muhāsabah* (self-accountability), and

murāqabah (continuous awareness of divine observation). Together, these practices constitute a comprehensive model of reflective consciousness that integrates cognition, morality, and spiritual accountability.

The analysis has demonstrated that while modern psychological research provides valuable descriptive insights into how individuals monitor confidence, regulate attention, and evaluate cognitive performance, it often brackets questions of intention, ethical orientation, and ultimate purpose. By contrast, Islamic reflective disciplines operate within a theocentric framework in which awareness of thought is inseparable from moral responsibility and accountability before Allah. In this sense, Islamic reflective consciousness does not merely parallel metacognition but extends it, transforming cognitive monitoring into an ethically charged and spiritually meaningful practice.

The concept of *murāqabah*, in particular, represents the highest form of reflective awareness, wherein self-monitoring is continuously oriented toward divine consciousness (*ihsān*) rather than limited to task performance or psychological well-being. A key contribution of this paper lies in its clarification of the relationship between metacognition, mindfulness, and Islamic reflective disciplines. While contemporary mindfulness practices emphasize present-moment awareness and non-reactive attention, their secularized forms often detach attentional discipline from moral evaluation.

The Islamic framework articulated in this study demonstrates that attentional awareness, when grounded in *murāqabah*, is neither passive nor morally neutral; it is an active form of vigilance that shapes intention, restrains impulsivity, and cultivates ethical self-regulation. This alignment helps resolve conceptual ambiguities in existing literature by showing that Islamic reflective practices naturally integrate the monitoring and regulatory dimensions emphasized in psychological metacognition while anchoring them within a coherent moral and theological worldview.

The paper has also highlighted the relevance of Islamic metacognitive disciplines for addressing contemporary conditions of cognitive heedlessness (*ghaflah*), reactive thinking, and moral automation. In increasingly distracted and accelerated environments, individuals are often guided by unexamined assumptions, emotional reactivity, and habitual responses. From an Islamic perspective, such conditions represent not merely moral lapses but failures of reflective awareness. By restoring *tafakkur*, *muḥāsabah*, and *murāqabah* as disciplined cognitive ethical practices, Islamic intellectual tradition offers a framework for cultivating intellectual integrity, ethical discernment, and moral resilience. This has direct implications for the renewal of Muslim intellectual life, where the challenge is not the absence of knowledge but the erosion of reflective engagement with knowledge.

Methodologically, this study contributes by demonstrating the legitimacy and necessity of conceptual–analytical inquiry within interdisciplinary Islamic scholarship. Rather than attempting empirical measurement or psychometric validation, the paper has clarified foundational concepts, interrogated epistemological assumptions, and constructed an integrative theoretical model. This approach avoids the twin risks of reductionism: psychologising Islamic concepts on the one hand, and dismissing contemporary cognitive science on the other. By maintaining a principled hierarchy of knowledge in which Islamic

epistemology remains normative, the study models a disciplined mode of engagement with modern psychology that is neither apologetic nor dismissive.

The implications of this work extend to multiple domains. In Islamic education, the framework developed here supports pedagogical approaches that emphasise reflective learning, intentionality, and ethical self-regulation rather than rote performance. In spiritual development, it re-centres *murāqabah* as a cognitive ethical discipline essential for cultivating sincerity, vigilance, and accountability. More broadly, for interdisciplinary scholarship, the study demonstrates how Islamic intellectual tradition can contribute original conceptual resources to ongoing debates about cognition, consciousness, and self-regulation without epistemic subordination.

In sum, this paper has argued that metacognition, when viewed through an Islamic lens, cannot be adequately understood as a purely functional cognitive mechanism. Instead, reflective awareness in Islam constitutes a holistic mode of consciousness oriented toward truth, moral responsibility, and accountability before Allah SWT. By articulating this framework and situating it in dialogue with contemporary psychological theory, the study offers a meaningful contribution to Islamic intellectual discourse and provides a foundation for future theoretical, educational, and applied work aimed at fostering reflective, ethical, and spiritually grounded cognition within the ummah.

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to Islamic scholarship in three principal ways. Conceptually, it articulates an integrative framework that situates Islamic reflective disciplines as a morally grounded form of metacognitive awareness. Epistemologically, it demonstrates how contemporary psychological theories may be engaged without displacing Islamic normative foundations. Interdisciplinarity, it offers a model for disciplined dialogue between Islamic intellectual tradition and modern cognitive science that avoids both reductionism and epistemic subordination.

Directions for Future Research

Future research may extend this framework through qualitative studies examining how *tafakkur*, *muḥāsabah*, and *murāqabah* are cultivated in educational and spiritual settings. Curriculum development grounded in Islamic reflective consciousness also warrants exploration. Importantly, any future empirical engagement should preserve Islamic epistemological primacy rather than translating reflective disciplines into purely secular measurement tools.

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