

## **The Concept of Reason in al-Farabi's Thought and Its Relevance to Modern Islamic Education**

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### **Abstract**

This study is motivated by the urgency of presenting a concept of Islamic education that is capable of responding to the challenges of the modern era, which is marked by a literacy crisis, weak critical thinking skills, and the erosion of students' moral values. These conditions call for a reconstruction of the Islamic education paradigm that not only focuses on cognitive aspects but also emphasizes the formation of reason, character, and ethics as formulated by al-Farabi. This study aims to analyze the concept of reason in al-Farabi's thought, explain the process of human intellectual perfection through the hierarchy of reason, and examine its relevance to the development of modern Islamic education. Using qualitative research methods with a literature study approach, this study examines al-Farabi's primary works, particularly *Risalah fi al-'Aql* and *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, as well as a number of relevant secondary literature. The results show that al-Farabi's theory of reason, which includes potential reason, actual reason, acquired reason, and active reason, provides a strong philosophical foundation for the development of Islamic education that emphasizes the development of thinking skills, the formation of virtue, and the integration of intellectuality and morality. These findings indicate that al-Farabi's concept of reason has significant relevance in constructing a rational, humanistic, critical, and comprehensive paradigm of Islamic education oriented towards human perfection.

**Keywords:** al-farabi, reason, hierarchy of reason, Islamic education

### **Introduction**

The context of Islamic education in the modern era faces complex and urgent challenges. The 21st century is characterized by a rapid flow of information, but ironically, it is also accompanied by a literacy crisis, a weakening of critical thinking skills, and the erosion of moral values among students. This situation creates a sharp dichotomy: on the one hand, the demand to adapt to technological advances and modern rationality; on the other hand, the fundamental need to maintain and nurture character and ethics rooted in Islamic tradition (Khobir et al., 2021).

The fundamental problem lies in the paradigm of Islamic education, which tends to be fragmented, often focusing only on cognitive-ritualistic aspects without placing sufficient emphasis on the integrated development of reason (*'aql*), character, and ethics. In fact, the noble goal of Islamic education is to achieve complete human perfection (*al-kamāl al-insānī*).

Responding to this urgency requires a philosophical reconstruction that is capable of reweaving the common thread between classical Islamic scientific tradition and contemporary educational needs (Nur Hasanah & Kristiyah, 2023).

The thinking of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950 AD), a prominent Muslim philosopher, offers a strong philosophical foundation. Known as the Second Teacher (al-Mu'allim al-Thānī) after Aristotle, al-Farabi presented a comprehensive concept of reason, particularly in his works *Risālah fī al-'Aql* and *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. His thoughts on the hierarchy of reason not only discuss intellectual functions, but also view it as the main path to virtue (faḍīlah) and human perfection. Therefore, this study is motivated to explore the depth of the concept of reason in al-Farabi's thought and measure the extent of its relevance in formulating a rational, humanistic, critical, and comprehensive Islamic educational framework amid the challenges of the times.

Through a qualitative approach using library research methods, this study will review al-Farabi's primary works and relevant secondary literature. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide a solid philosophical foundation for policymakers and education practitioners in developing curricula and teaching methods that not only stimulate cognitive development but also mature students' intellectual and moral capacities in an integrated manner, as envisioned by al-Farabi.

### **Methods**

This study uses an interpretive and analytical qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of the subject matter. This approach was strategically chosen because its main focus is to interpret (hermeneutics) and analyze the philosophical and abstract concept of reason ('aql) in al-Farabi's thinking, as well as to examine its relevance in formulating a modern Islamic education paradigm. To support this objective, the type of research used is library research. This method does not involve data collection in the field, but rather focuses all research efforts on a comprehensive review of written documents. This process includes the collection, classification, reduction, and analysis of relevant primary sources (al-Farabi's original works such as *Risālah fī al-'Aql*) and secondary sources (supporting scientific literature) in order to construct a strong and coherent framework of argumentation regarding the function of reason as the foundation for intellectual and moral perfection in the context of education.

### **Research Design**

#### **1. Heuristic Stage (Data Collection and Discovery)**

The initial stage of this research is Heuristic, which focuses on collecting and discovering relevant literature data. The central activity at this stage is to inventory and classify all sources, both primary and secondary. Primary sources include the original works of al-Farabi, particularly *Risālah fī al-'Aql*, which outlines the theory of reason, and *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, which contains ethical-political contexts. Meanwhile, secondary sources include journals, books, and theses discussing the philosophy of reason and contemporary Islamic education issues. The result of this stage is the compilation of a solid body of literature, which serves as the main database for further analysis.

#### **2. Verification Stage (Validity and Authenticity of Sources)**

Once the data has been collected, the research moves on to the Verification Stage, which aims to ensure the validity and authenticity of the data sources, especially in the context of interpreting classical works. Verification is carried out through source criticism, which covers two aspects: External Criticism, to ensure the authenticity of the text and its original writing; and Internal Criticism, to assess the consistency, credibility, and accuracy of the meaning contained in the text. This process is crucial to prevent distortion of interpretation of profound philosophical thoughts. The result of this verification is credible and validated data, ready to be processed in the next stage.

### 3. Interpretation Stage (Philosophical Conceptual Analysis)

The Interpretation Stage is the core of this research, in which the philosophical meaning of al-Farabi's concept of reason is elaborated and explained in depth. The analysis is carried out using two approaches: First, Content Analysis to elaborate the categories of reason (potential, actual, acquired, and active) and their functions in al-Farabi's system of thought. Second, Hermeneutic Analysis to interpret the ethical-political objectives of the hierarchy of reason as a process of achieving human perfection (*al-kamāl al-insānī*). Through this interpretation, a comprehensive interpretation of the structure and function of reason within the framework of al-Farabi's thinking is obtained.

### 4. Historiography and Relevance Stage (Conclusion Drawing)

The final stage is Historiography and Relevance, which focuses on writing findings and drawing conclusions. At this stage, Comparative Analysis is carried out to bridge al-Farabi's concept of reason with crucial challenges in modern education, such as the crisis of critical thinking, ethics, and humanism. Finally, a Synthesis is conducted to formulate the philosophical and practical implications of these concepts of reason. The goal is to offer a framework for reconstructing the Islamic education paradigm oriented towards human perfection. The final result of this research is a journal report presenting conceptual findings and recommendations for philosophical curriculum design.

### **Participants**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review (library research) type of study, where the main focus of the study is not directed at collecting empirical data from human participants. Instead, the main subjects of this study are written documents that serve as primary and secondary data. All analyses focus on textual analysis and conceptual study of the relevant literature corpus, making these documents the main focus of analysis to reveal and interpret the philosophical concepts under investigation.

### **Research Procedures**

This research procedure was carried out through four integrated methodological stages to ensure comprehensive analysis and validity of philosophical interpretation. The process begins with the Heuristic Stage, in which data is collected systematically, starting with the identification of keywords and extensive searches of primary sources (*Risālah fī al-'Aql and al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*) and secondary sources from academic databases. Once the data has been collected, it is followed by the Verification Stage through External Criticism to ensure the authenticity of the text,

and Internal Criticism to assess the consistency of the arguments, followed by the recording of critical summaries. The core of the research lies in the Interpretation Stage (Conceptual Analysis), which involves close reading and Content Analysis to describe al-Farabi's classification of reason (from 'aql bi al-quwwah to 'aql fa'āl), followed by Hermeneutic Analysis to interpret the role of 'aql mustafād in achieving human perfection (al-kamāl al-insānī). The final stage is Historiography and Relevance, in which al-Farabi's reasoning findings are compared with modern educational challenges (the crisis of critical thinking) and an Argument Synthesis is carried out to formulate practical implications for the reconstruction of a rational and ethical Islamic educational paradigm. This entire process ensures a complete transition from the authentication of classical texts to the formulation of contemporary recommendations.

### **Data Collection Technique(s)**

Qualitative research literature study (library research), the main data collection technique applied is Documentation (Documentation Technique). This technique fundamentally focuses on the systematic collection, recording, and review of written documents and scientific publications, consisting of primary and secondary data sources. The operational procedures of this documentation technique are carried out through structured steps: First, a Document Inventory is conducted to identify and record all relevant literature sources, ensuring that al-Farabi's primary works (especially *Risālah fī al-'Aql*) and secondary literature on modern education issues are included. Second, a Critical Reading (Close Reading) is carried out in depth and in detail for each document, with an emphasis on sections containing key concepts, such as the classification of 'aql and the process of human perfection. Finally, data recording was carried out through information extraction by selectively noting, summarizing, and quoting important points, which were then grouped according to research thematic categories (e.g., the definition of 'aql mustafād, the ethical implications of reason, and educational challenges). Thus, this documentation technique ensures that all philosophical and contextual information necessary for analysis is gathered in a valid, structured manner and is ready for the interpretation stage.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The data that has been collected and verified through documentation is then analyzed using a combination of rigorous qualitative techniques. The analysis process was designed in stages, beginning with Content Analysis, which focused on textual examination to objectively identify and describe al-Farabi's classifications of reason ('aql bi al-quwwah to 'aql fa'āl). Next, Hermeneutic Analysis/Philosophical Interpretation was conducted to reveal deeper meanings, interpret the ethical and teleological purposes of reason in the context of human perfection (al-kamāl al-insānī), and construct a conceptual model of reason as an integrator between intellectuality and morality. The final stage is Comparative Analysis and Relevance Synthesis, in which the classical model of reason is tested against the challenges of modern education (the crisis of critical thinking and ethics) in order to formulate concrete philosophical and practical implications. Thus, this combination of techniques ensures that the data is processed in depth, producing applicable conclusions for the reconstruction of a rational and humanistic educational paradigm.

## Results

### **Analysis of the Concept of Reason (*Al-'Aql*) in Al-Farabi's Thought**

The first paragraph will focus on Al-Farabi's conceptual description of reason:

The main finding of this study confirms that the concept of reason (*al-'Aql*) in Al-Farabi's thought, as described in *Risālah fī al-'Aql*, is a systematic epistemological foundation, not merely the ability to think. Al-Farabi divides reason into four hierarchical categories: Potential Reason ('*aql bi al-quwwah*), Actual Reason ('*aql bi al-fi'l*'), Acquired Reason ('*aql mustafād*'), and Active Reason ('*aql fa'āl*'). Potential Reason is an empty capacity ready to receive rational forms, while Actual Reason is reason that has received the first knowledge (*al-ma'qūlāt al-ūlā*). The peak of human reason is reached in Acquired Reason ('*aql mustafād*'), which becomes a vessel for all knowledge that has been thought, while also bridging humans with the substance of Active Reason ('*aql fa'āl*'), which is eternal and divine in nature. This description provides a strong philosophical foundation that the development of reason is a gradual process towards true consciousness and knowledge.

### **The Hierarchy of Reason and the Process of Human Perfection**

The second paragraph will focus on the ethical implications and purpose of reason:

Al-Farabi's hierarchy of reason does not stop at mere intellectual description, but is a roadmap to human perfection (*al-kamāl al-insānī*) and true happiness. The process of movement from Potential Reason to Acquired Reason is articulated as an effort to free the soul from material imperfection and achieve virtue (*faḍīlah*). This is supported by the study of *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, in which the development of perfect reason ('*aql mustafād*') is a prerequisite for the formation of a strong ethical and moral character. Thus, reason functions not only as a cognitive tool, but also as a fundamental integrator between intellectuality and morality. This model explicitly rejects the dichotomy between rational thinking and ethical behavior, affirming reason as the primary instrument for directing human actions toward universal goodness.

### **The Relevance of Al-Farabi's Concept of Reason to Modern Islamic Education**

The third paragraph will focus on contemporary relevance:

Al-Farabi's concept of reason has significant and urgent relevance for the reconstruction of the modern Islamic education paradigm. Amidst the literacy crisis, weak critical thinking skills, and moral erosion faced by students today, Al-Farabi's theory offers a solution to develop a process-oriented curriculum, not just content. The emphasis on the development of Potential Reasoning to Acquired Reasoning implies that education must prioritize the development of analytical and rational thinking skills as a prerequisite for character building. Therefore, the Islamic education paradigm needs to shift from merely transmitting dogmatic knowledge to a system that encourages rationality, humanism, and critical thinking, integrating cognitive and affective aspects. The application of al-Farabi's model has great potential to produce graduates who are not only intellectually intelligent but also wise and noble in character.

### **Analysis of the Concept of Reason (*Al-'Aql*) in Al-Farabi's Thought**

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the ability to think. Al-Farabi divides reason into four hierarchical categories: Potential Reason (*'aql bi al-quwwah*), Actual Reason (*'aql bi al-fi'l*), Acquired Reason (*'aql mustafād*), and Active Reason (*'aql fa'āl*). Potential Reason is an empty capacity ready to receive rational forms, while Actual Reason is reason that has received the first knowledge (*al-ma'qūlāt al-ūlā*). The peak of human reason is reached in Acquired Reason (*'aql mustafād*), which becomes a vessel for all knowledge that has been thought, while also bridging humans with the substance of Active Reason (*'aql fa'āl*), which is eternal and divine in nature. This description provides a strong philosophical foundation that the development of reason is a gradual process towards true consciousness and knowledge.

### **The Hierarchy of Reason and the Process of Human Perfection**

Al-Farabi's hierarchy of reason does not stop at intellectual description alone, but is a roadmap to human perfection (*al-kamāl al-insānī*) and true happiness. The process of reason moving from Potential Reason to Acquired Reason (*'aql mustafād*) is articulated as an effort to free the soul from material imperfection and achieve virtue (*faḍīlah*). This is reinforced by the study of *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, in which the development of perfect reason is a prerequisite for the formation of a strong ethical and moral character in an ideal society. Thus, reason functions not only as a cognitive tool, but also as a fundamental integrator between intellectuality and morality. This model explicitly rejects the dichotomy between rational thinking and ethical behavior, affirming reason as the primary instrument for directing human actions toward universal goodness, which is the ultimate goal of philosophical education.

### **Discussion**

This discussion aims to place the findings on al-Farabi's concept of reason (al-'Aql) in a broader philosophical context and analyze its significant implications for the reconstruction of the modern Islamic education paradigm.

### **Conclusion**

This study definitively concludes that the concept of reason (*al-'Aql*) in al-Farabi's thought is a strong and comprehensive philosophical foundation that is relevant to the development of a modern Islamic educational paradigm. The main finding confirms that al-Farabi's theory of reason, which is divided into a hierarchy of four levels (*from 'aql bi al-quwwah to 'aql fa'āl*), describes a gradual process towards intellectual perfection. The essence of this finding is that Acquired Reason (*'aql mustafād*) functions as a central point that integrates intellectuality and morality, where the attainment of the highest reason is inseparable from the embodiment of virtue (*faḍīlah*) and human perfection (*al-kamāl al-insānī*), in accordance with the vision of *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. A significant implication of this concept is the need to reconstruct the paradigm of Islamic education to overcome the crisis of critical thinking and the erosion of contemporary ethics. The proposed reconstruction emphasizes that education should no longer focus solely on cognitive-ritualistic aspects, but must place analytical and rational reasoning training as a fundamental prerequisite for character building. By adopting al-Farabi's framework, Islamic education can be transformed into a rational, humanistic, and critical system, aims to produce individuals with mature intellect and

strong morals, making al-Farabi's philosophical legacy a contextual solution for achieving true happiness and ethical contributions amid the complexities of the times.

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### **Conflict of interests**

This research is a philosophical-conceptual study based entirely on text analysis and literature sources, and has not received funding from any organization or third party that could influence the interpretation of the results. All views and conclusions presented are purely based on the author's critical analysis of Al-Farabi's texts and related literature.

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