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Integration of *Muhasabah* Concept and Scaling Question Technique in Counselling

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Abstract

This research discusses about the integration of *muhasabah* concept and scaling question technique. The integration is made based on the integrative model combining Western and Islamic approaches. For Islamic approach, the concept of *muhasabah* is explained. *Muhasabah* is one of the concepts introduced in Al-Ghazali's *Tazkiyyah Annafs* approach. *Muhasabah* in this research is a process of self-evaluation that leads to client's actions. Two opinions about *muhasabah* is reviewed in this research; which are the opinions of Ibnu Qayyim and Al-Ghazali. From the Western approach, the technique of scaling question is elaborated. Scaling question technique is one of the questioning techniques in Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT). This technique explains about the importance of measuring method using numbers in the process of self-evaluation that leads to change. Next, the integration between *muhasabah* concept and scaling question technique are examined.

Keywords: integration, muhasabah, Tazkiyyah Annafs Al-Ghazali, solution focused brief therapy

Introduction

Islamic approaches in counselling have been widely applied by counsellors especially in Malaysia. Although initially, the religious elements were only implemented by Muslim counsellors within their formal and informal religious education that they have learned (Yusmini, 2011), however, the situation has changed. This progressive change is clearly demonstrated by a number of theories and modules developed, integrated and modified by researchers in Malaysia as well as in the West such as Addin Cognitive Psychology Theory (Othman, 2005) and the modified *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy* with Islamic Approach (Altaf and Hodge, 2016). In addition, Naziha (2016) had integrated the available counselling theory with Islamic approach in her research called *Islamic Cognitive Behavioural Therapy*. Furthermore, Ismail, Noriah and Noor Haslinda (2017) had also conducted a study by integrating a few theories that emphasised the affective, cognitive and behavioural with spiritual-religious aspects.

A study conducted by Norazlina and Noor Shakirah (2017) had classified Islamic counselling approaches into three models, namely: a) modification model; b) integrative model, and; c) traditional model. Modification model involves the application of counselling by absorbing religious elements as *salam* (greetings), *ta'aruf* (introductory), *solat* (prayer) and *zikir* (Yusmini, 2011). While, the integrative model combines western theories with Islamic approaches, such as iCBT (Naziha, 2016).

Traditional model refers to the introduction of Islamic approach in counselling practice through religious elements such as the research by Salasiah (2011) and Md Noor (2013) that focused on *tazkiyyah annafs* (soul purification) in counselling. Of the three models, this article referred to the integrative model by combining the construct of *muhasabah* and the scaling question technique in counselling practice. This is in accordance to Rassoll's (2017) opinion on the importance of integrating Islamic approach with the techniques in *Solution Focused Brief Therapy*. Since Al-Ghazali's approach of *tazkiyyah annafs* (JAKIM, 2013) does not contain a specific technique, combining the approaches fits Rassoll's (2017) suggestion. Besides, Amber, Fahad, Hooman and Abdallah (2016) also suggested that more studies concerning the integration of Western and Islamic theories in counselling approaches should be conducted.

Muhasabah

Muhasabah originates from the word *haasaba* that means calculate (Muhammad Soleh, 2013). Al-Ghazali (1988) described *muhasabah* as calculating or counting. Calculating in the context of *muhasabah* has been depicted as calculating the bad and shameful as well as despicable and commendable behaviours. If the calculated actions are commendable, they must be done continuously. On the other hand, if the actions are bad, they must be abolished through good deeds. Apart from that, *muhasabah* is also referred to as reasoning over desire, the overpowering of weaknesses by strengths in one's self (Muhammad Soleh, 2013).

In this article, *muhasabah* refers to one of the five constructs introduced in Al-Ghazali's *tazkiyyah annafs* approach (JAKIM, 2013). *Muhasabah* is very much emphasised in the religion (Islam) that is concerned with the evaluation of the self or self-evaluation (JAKIM, 2013) of every action (Jamaluddin, 2015). This refers to a verse in the Quran, Chapter Al-Hasyr, verse 18 that means:

“O you who believe! Have Taqwa of Allah and let every person look to what he has sent forth for tomorrow, and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what you do.”

Referring to the translation by Ibnu Katsir (Ibnu Katsir, 2006), the above verse (Chapter Al-Hasyr, verse 18) stressed on the importance for all Muslims to conduct *muhasabah* on themselves before the actual *muhasabah* is imposed on every human beings on the day of judgement. *Muhasabah* is performed with the aim to improve own shortcomings and weaknesses so that one is able to return to the right path as commanded in Islam.

Ibnu Qayyim (2004) and Ahmad Farid (2014), classified *muhasabah* into two categories, which are: a) pre-action *muhasabah* and; b) post-action *muhasabah* (refer to Figure 1).

Pre-action *muhasabah* refers to thinking before action is actually committed to deter one from rushing into making decisions. The decision made is not only on the basis of wants and needs but also based on the individual's capability in executing an action. Decision-making process refers to two situations: a) if the individual is not capable, the execution of actions pertaining to the wants or needs should not proceed and, b) if the individual feels that he/she has the capability to take the needed action, the individual will first think of two situations; a) the benefit of abandoning the action if the action's effect is worse; and b) the benefit of proceeding with the action if the action's effect is better. These considerations are particularly emphasised in Islam for the purpose of gaining Allah's blessing.

In the context of post-action *muhasabah*, Ibnu Qayyim (2004) and Ahmad Farid (2014) clarified three approaches of *muhasabah* which are: a) evaluation on obedience, whether it is in accordance to what is required by Allah SWT or not. For instance, the evaluation on sincere deeds done for the sake of Allah and following the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (saw); b) after an action is taken, considerations on whether it is better to abandon or to continue with the action, solely for the sake of Allah SWT and; c) evaluation of permissible actions or behaviour, whether they are for obtaining the blessings of Allah SWT or merely to fulfil worldly desires.

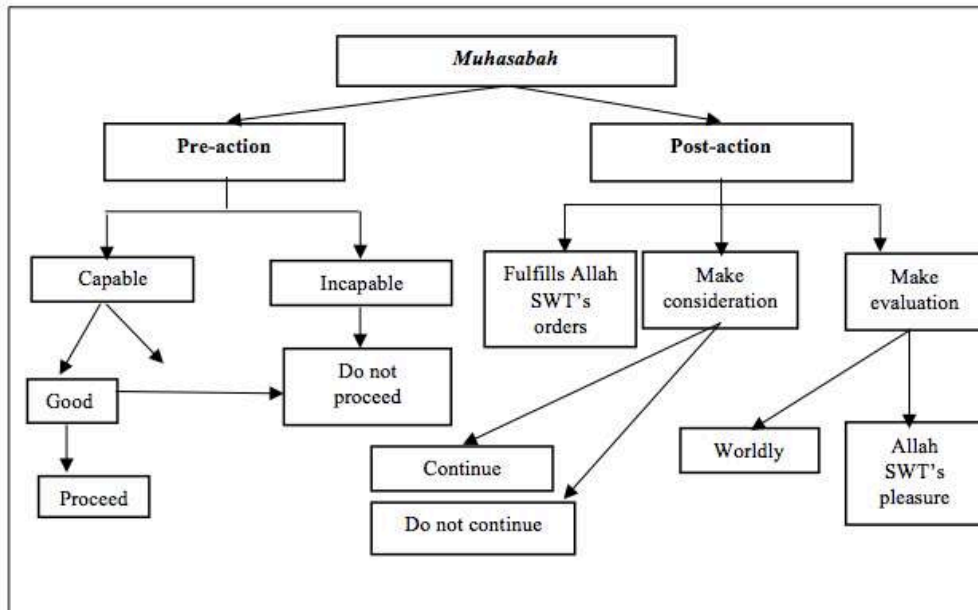


Figure 1: Classification of *Muhasabah* Pre- and Post-action
 Adapted from: *Ibnu Qayyim (2004) and Ahmad Farid (2014)*

Al-Ghazali (1988) in his masterpiece *Ihya' Ulumuddin* focused on *muhasabah* in the post-action aspect. Al-Ghazali (1988) mentioned that *muhasabah* is a process that refers to the aspect of benefit and loss in life. The benefit and loss aspects focus on the advantages and disadvantages gathered from the actions done. If an individual receives beneficial results from the actions done, the individual should be thankful and should carry on doing them. On the other hand, if the actions result in negativity, the individual should take responsibility for the actions and improve for the better (refer Figure 2). Al-Ghazali (1988) also stressed that if the aspect of *muhasabah* is left out from one's self, the individual's life will become a disappointment and lost as well as the life journey became damaging. This is due to the reason that *muhasabah* in Islam is associated with the easing of deeds calculation in the judgement day and to avoid regret if the post-action *muhasabah* is not done.

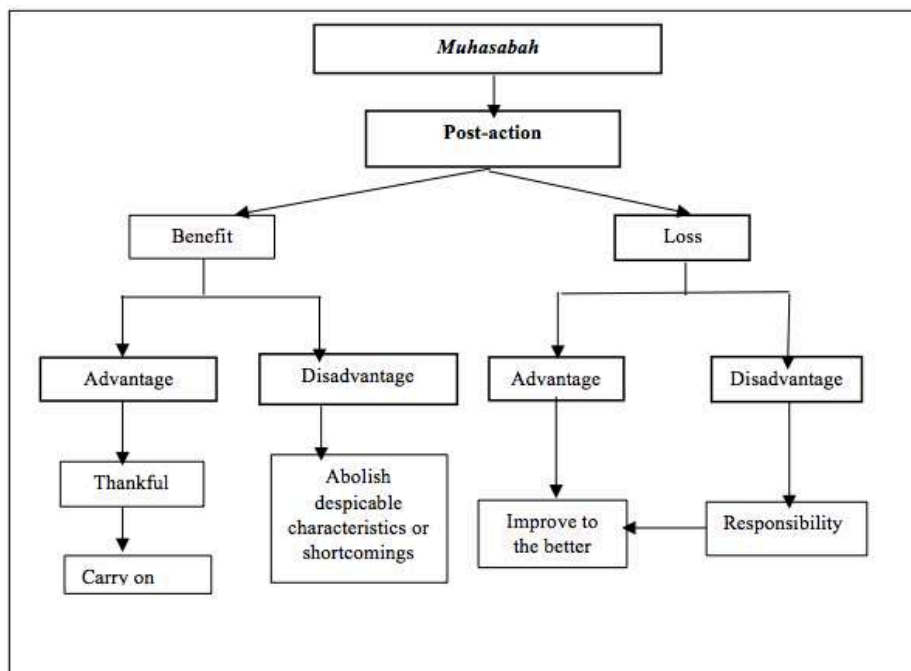


Figure 2: Classification of *Muhasabah* Post-action
 Adapted from: *Al-Ghazali (1988) and JAKIM (2013)*

JAKIM (2013) also emphasised the importance of *muhasabah* in reference to Al-Ghazali, particularly the *muhasabah* approach as highlighted in the *tazkiyyah annafs* (soul purification) process. The *muhasabah* concept underlined by JAKIM (2013) is to look into one's weaknesses and strengths through the process of self-evaluation. Individuals need to plan a strategy to eliminate despicable characteristics or shortcomings in the process of evaluating benefit and loss as mentioned by Al-Ghazali (1988) to be applied in life.

Sa'id Hawwa (2005), in summarising *Ihya' Ulumuddin* by Al-Ghazali who explained the purpose of conducting *muhasabah* after every deed to see whether the positive or the negative effects of the actions outweigh each other. It is due to human actions which are often the result of the soul's tendency to be more inclined towards the bad rather than the good.

In a nutshell, the significance of *muhasabah* is the basic drive of this article; the next part of the article describes the integration of *muhasabah* using the scaling question technique.

Scaling Question Technique

The scaling question technique is one of the important techniques in *Solution Focused Brief Therapy* (SFBT) approach (Cade, 2001). SFBT is a counselling theory that focuses on a solution developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg (McDonald, 2007). SFBT is known for its question-shaped technique such as the scaling question technique, pre-session change, exception and miracle questions that distinguishes it from other counselling theories. The number scale in SFBT is used for the purpose of assuming the change level as visualised by the client. This evaluation is made by the client his/herself on his/her own situational level of changes. However, it is only an assumption that does not necessarily indicate right or wrong. Another purpose is to assist the client to have a clearer view of the situations faced in order for further actions to be taken. The client is guided to further explain the scale stated to encourage the client towards change. Based on the scale, a client's progress on personal change can be seen and can facilitate different perspectives on specific issues (Cade, 2001).

Scaling question technique is one of the most impactful techniques in the counselling process that assists clients in evaluating their own feelings, identify progress, and monitor changes that happen within their own selves (Rassool, 2017). Therefore this article focuses on this technique in isolation from other techniques in SFBT. Shazer (1994, in Cade, 2001) said:

"As anyone who has played around with numbers knows, like words, numbers are magic." (de Shazer, 1994, p.92 in Cade, 2001)

An example of a scaling question posed to the client:

"Between 0 and 10, 0 being the worst situation while 10 is the best, where is the situation of progress for the problem you face?"

De Jong (2009) also explained the same about the scaling question technique. According to DeJong (2009), this technique can help clients to visualise about the experience they face and at the same time assist them to make a more conducive future plans. McDonald (2007) also mentioned that the scaling questions technique is one of the best techniques in SFBT. This technique is able to aid clients' life movements to be more organised. However, the scaling question technique can also be utilised through a different method, based on the scaling questions regarding faith on a particular goal setting.

According to Bavelas, De Jong, Franklin, Froerer, Gingerich, Kim, Korman, Langer, Lee, McCollum, Jordan, Trepper (2013), the scaling question technique can explain three conditions by which counselling is conducted: a) a measurement of the client's progress can be continuously accomplished by the counsellor and the client; b) an assessment by the client is more important than the counsellor's, and c) focussing on three aspects namely the client's condition being better, the same or worse.

Trepper, Mccollum, De Jong, Korman, Gingerich and Franklin (1997) explained that if the scale described by the client increases, then the counsellor gets clarification from the client about the change that takes place and about the client’s strength that directs him/her towards the change. Next, the counsellor continues to motivate the client to persevere with the efforts. However, if the scale described by the client does not indicate any change, the counsellor guides the client to pursue change towards a betterment of the situation. If the condition is getting worse, the counsellor will help the client not to let the problem worsen.

Situations visualised through this technique will enable counsellors to assist clients in looking at three aspects which are solution, exception and changes that need to be taken with regard to the problem faced (Bavelas et al., 2013). In accordance to the three aspects, the *muhasabah* approach is integrated with the scaling questions technique in this article to evaluate whether the actions taken should be to continued, abandoned or maintained in order to create a positive change according to Islam.

Integration of *Muhasabah* and the Scaling Question Technique

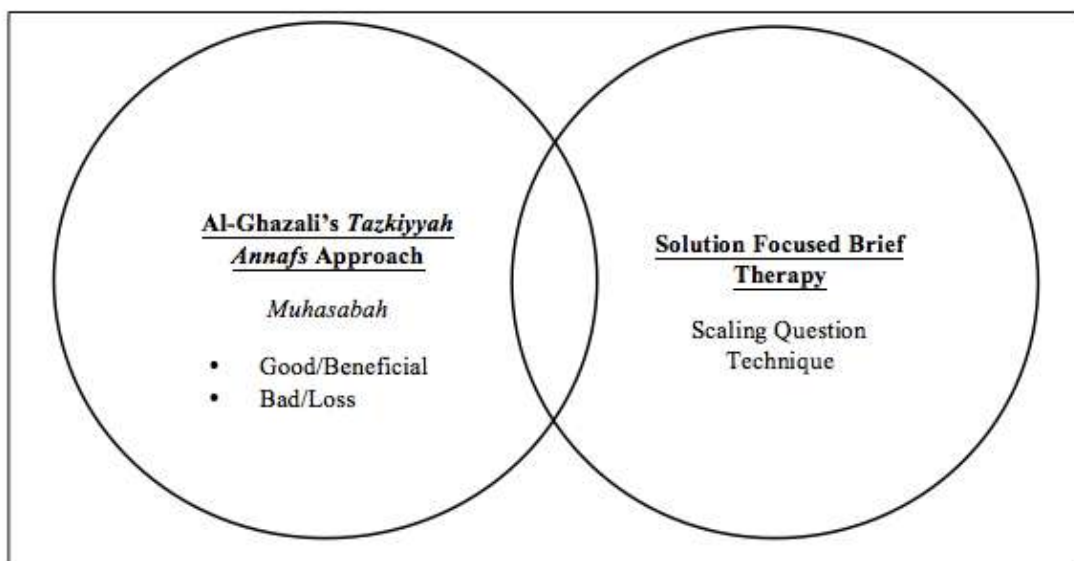


Figure 3: Integration of *Muhasabah* and Scaling Question Technique

The above elaborations show that the *muhasabah* construct and scaling questions technique can be merged (refer to Figure 3) and applied in the counselling practice that uses an Islamic approach. This can be associated with the fact that both approaches measure the actions or practices done. In the *muhasabah* approach, the effect of the benefit and loss that resulted in the good or bad is identified (Al-Ghazali, 1988). Meanwhile, the scaling question technique measure the effects of the change committed, whether it is progressing better or otherwise (Bavelas et al., 2013; Trepper et al., 1997). The merge between *muhasabah* and the scaling questions technique can be seen in the situation below:

After going through various phases of counselling, the client undergoes a stage known as *muhasabah* according to the approach of *tazkiyyah annafs* (JAKIM, 2013). The counsellor will assist the client to engage in *muhasabah* by reviewing the actions toward change that have been achieved before by using the scaling questions technique.

For example; “After you have gone through a number of sessions and have taken some actions toward change, could you explain the steps of change that you have taken from a scale of 0 which means no change at all to 10 which means too many changes?”

If the client says that there are many changes, nearing ten, the client will be asked to explain the changes that have taken place. The counsellor then motivates the client to continue with the actions if the effects are positive for the client's life. If the client gives a scale that is below five, the counsellor will help the client to discontinue the actions to avoid the effects of the actions from getting worse. For actions that have no change, the counsellor will assist the client to find other alternatives to work towards progress. In this situation, the counsellor will help the client to understand his/her strengths and weaknesses after measuring the changed scale with a counsellor (Trepper et al., 1997).

Muhasabah accomplished using the scaling questions technique will bring more direction to the counselling's process (Rahimi, 2006). This is supported by William (2013) who stated that SFBT's strength is the techniques of questions. The importance of *muhasabah* as emphasised in Islam (JAKIM, 2013; Ibnu Katsir, 2006), as well as the strength of the SFBT technique (William, 2013), should strengthen the counselling practices that integrate the Islamic approach.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, the integration of the construct of *muhasabah* and the scaling question technique can assist counsellors in facilitating the process of counselling through the Islamic approach. Among the initiatives that can be taken to further develop the Islamic approach to counselling is by continuing the efforts to integrate current theories and modules in counselling with religious elements or with other suitable approaches.

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