

## **Application of Edward de Bono's “Six Thinking Hats” Method in Teaching Religious Studies Disciplines in Secular Universities of the Republic of Uzbekistan**

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**Abstract:** article examines the transformation of approaches to teaching social and humanitarian disciplines (using religious studies as an example) in Uzbekistan's higher education system. The cognitive characteristics of “Z” Generation students, characterized by clip-based thinking and fragmented perception, which conflicts with traditional lecture-based learning were analyzed. Edward de Bono's “Six Thinking Hats” method is considered as a tool for developing lateral and critical thinking. Particular attention is paid to the practical application of this method for preventing radicalization and extremism among young people, as well as for developing interfaith dialogue and media literacy skills.

**Keywords:** higher education, “Z” Generation, clip-based thinking, Religious Studies, lateral thinking, critical thinking, ideological immunity, cognitive flexibility, cognitive biases, facilitation, interfaith dialogue, extremism prevention.

At the present stage Uzbekistan's higher education system is faced with the need to transform its approaches to teaching social sciences and humanities. Today's students - representatives of “Z” Generation (Zoomers) - have unique cognitive and psychological characteristics. According to the generational theory of N. Howe and W. Strauss, as well as research by M. Prensky, these students are “digital aborigines” whose perception of information is characterized by high speed but low concentration [1, 2]. Nowadays we talk a lot about the challenges of globalization and digitalization. But the main challenge lies not in gadgets, but in the minds of today's students - representatives of “Z” Generation.

We are faced with a paradox: despite having access to all the world's knowledge, modern young people often find themselves vulnerable to information presented in an academic format due to clip-based thinking - one of the characteristic traits of “Z” Generation.

In teaching delicate disciplines such as Religious Studies, this becomes a critical factor. Traditional lecture formats in secular Religious Studies are losing their effectiveness, as “Z” Generation youth demand interactivity, visualization, and the practical relevance of knowledge. A psychological characteristic of this group is the need for emotional engagement and critical understanding of content. Given the abundance of information online, Religious Studies teachers should act not as a transmitter of dogma, but as a facilitator, teaching the skills of filtering and multifaceted analysis of religious phenomena.

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Today higher education in Uzbekistan faces an unprecedented challenge: the need to educate the “digital generation”, whose perception is characterized by clip-based thinking, fragmentation, and rapid image shifts. Traditional lecture formats in secular religious studies are becoming ineffective, as they conflict with this mindset of students. Teaching Religious Studies disciplines should foster not just a set of knowledge, but “ideological immunity”. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to move from the passive accumulation of facts to methods of lateral (parallel) thinking, capable of transforming fragmented perception into deep analytical skill.

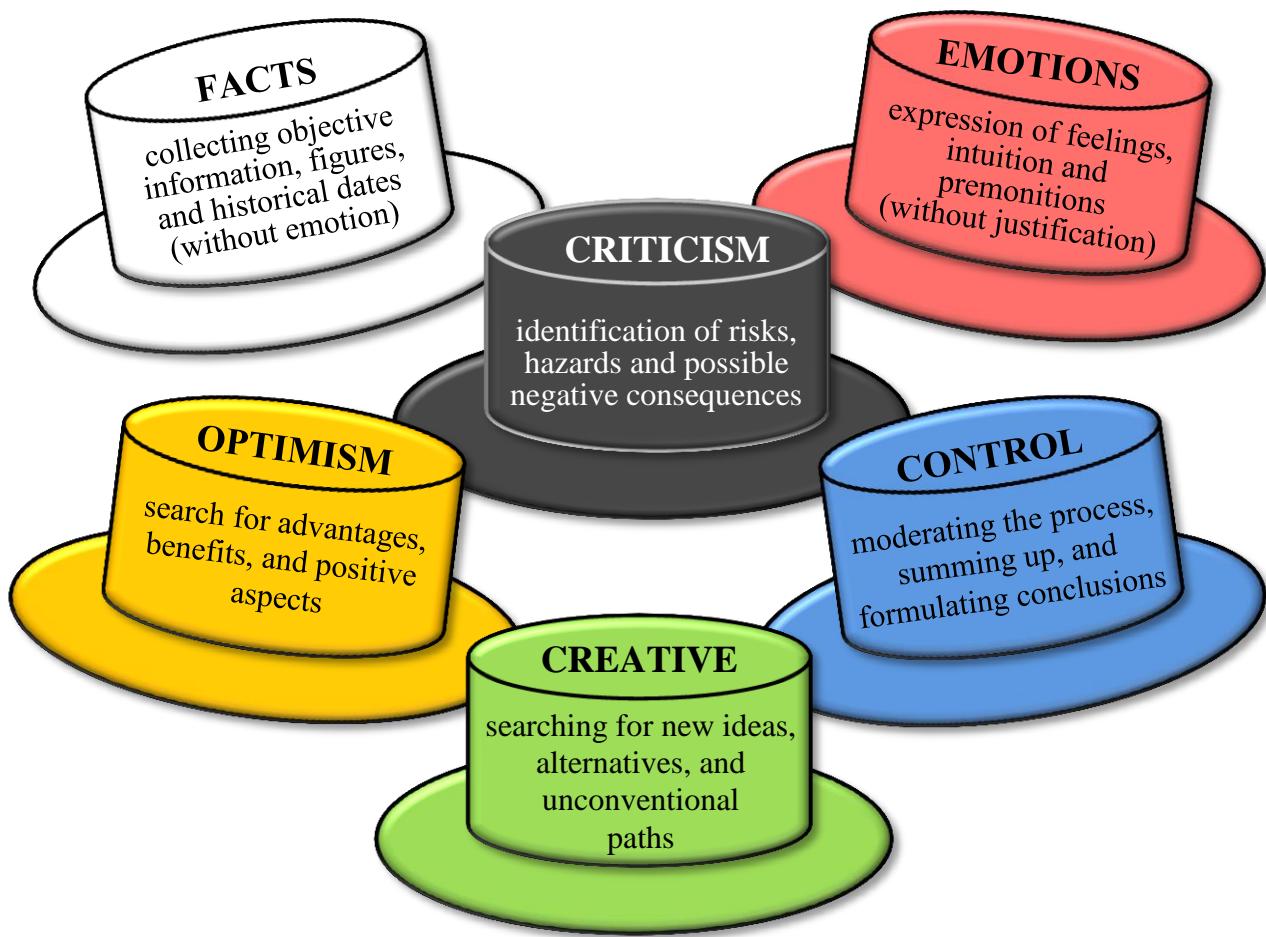
One of the main difficulties in studying religious phenomena is students' susceptibility to cognitive biases. Nobel laureate D. Kahneman (2011) argues that the human brain defaults to “System 1” - quick, intuitive, and often stereotypical reactions [3]. In matters of religion, this manifests itself in the instant acceptance or rejection of information based on biases. Edward de Bono's “Six Thinking Hats” method serves as a tool for deconstructing these automatisms. According to D. Kahneman, this method allows for the cognitive process to shift to “System 2” slow, deliberate, and disciplined thinking. In religious studies, this helps students - avoid reacting to “foreign” dogmas emotionally (“System 1”), but analyze them structurally (“System 2”). This is critically important in a multi-confessional environment, where, according to G.U. Soldatova (2000), it is necessary to reduce ethnocentrism by shifting perspectives [4]. To understand the mechanics of de Bono's method, it is necessary to classify the following types of thinking in the context of teaching religious studies:

1. Logical thinking: the process of using clear, sequential steps to reach a conclusion (example: analyzing the structure of a sacred text).
2. Abstract thinking: the ability to think in categories that have no physical embodiment (example: the concept of Nirvana or the Absolute).
3. Critical thinking: analyzing facts to form a judgment (example: identifying historical inaccuracies in religious traditions).
4. Creative thinking: generating new ideas (example: designing a modern center for the study of religions).
5. Clip-based thinking: the process of reflecting on a multitude of diverse properties of objects without considering the connections between them, characterized by a fragmented information flow, vivid images, and rapid turnover (example: a student learns about Buddhism through a 15-second TikTok video, capturing the image of a statue but not understanding the philosophical system).
6. Lateral thinking: a method of unconventional thinking proposed by E. de Bono, which involves finding solutions to problems by shifting perspectives and departing from traditional logical paths (example: when studying religious

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conflicts, lateral thinking helps find solutions not through arguing over dogma, but through exploring the common socioeconomic interests of the parties).

A key aspect is the argument that developing lateral thinking through de Bono's method reduces the negative impact of clip-based thinking due to a specific algorithm of thought processes that encourages the brain to dwell on an object, examining it from six different angles, thus forming strong neural connections. Instead of arguing, where each person defends their own truth, participants take turns "wearing hats" of different colors, focusing their attention in one direction (Figure 1).



*Fig. 1. Characteristics of thinking "hats".*

It's important to emphasize that this isn't just a "game of hats". It's a scientifically proven technique for switching cognitive modes - from emotional outbursts to facts, from harsh criticism to constructive solution-seeking. In everyday life, we try to do everything simultaneously: analyze facts, avoid risks, generate ideas, and listen to intuition. Edward de Bono proposed the metaphor of "hats" to ensure the brain is focused on only one type of intellectual activity at a time.

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The essence of parallel thinking is that it's not a debate where one person argues that an idea is bad (the black "hat") and the other that it's good (the yellow "hat"). It's a collaborative effort where all participants view the problem only through the filter of a specific "hat" - first they "put on" the yellow "hat" and look for the positives together, and then they "put on" the black "hat" and identify the negatives. An example of using the «Six Thinking Hats» method in teaching religious studies is a case study examining the problem of religious extremism in the information environment:

- White "Hat": statistics on radicalization on social media, examples of specific platforms, and laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan on countering extremism.
- Red "Hat": fear of manipulation, anger toward recruiters, sympathy for the affected families.
- Black "Hat": criticism of the vulnerability of young people, the risk of losing personal data, and the threat of destabilizing society.
- Yellow "Hat": the potential of cyber-police, the creation of positive content ("Enlightenment versus ignorance"), and strengthening critical thinking.
- Green "Hat": the idea of creating a VR simulator for youth to teach fake news recognition, and launching student flash mobs.
- Blue "Hat": generalization - extremism is "treated" not by prohibitions, but by the development of media literacy and an alternative creative ideology.

When considering Edward de Bono's "Six Thinking Hats" from an interdisciplinary perspective, it should be noted that the theoretical underpinning of the method is based on the principle of parallel thinking, which is supported by the work of scholars from a wide range of fields.

In religious studies, discussions of dogma often evoke hidden emotional tension. J. Smithson (2012) points out that the use of the red "hat" serves to legitimize intuition and feelings, which are often suppressed in classical academic settings, leading to the accumulation of latent conflicts [5]. G.B. Shukurova (2022) shares a similar view, emphasizing the importance of empathy (the red "hat") as the foundation of interfaith dialogue [6].

The black "hat" of the method is often perceived as negative, but G. Klein (2007) demonstrates its fundamental role. He introduces the concept of "pre-mortem" analysis, arguing that identifying the reasons for an idea's potential failure allows groups to avoid overconfidence and identify destructive scenarios on early stages [7]. For students in Uzbekistan, this means developing the ability to critically evaluate radical appeals, recognizing them as a threat to social stability.

As design thinking expert N. Cross (2011) notes that lateral methods are necessary to overcome "mental inertia", when previous experience blocks the search

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for new alternatives [8]. Since the use of the green “hat” allows to move beyond familiar patterns, this justifies the importance of students generating ideas about interreligious peace separately from evaluating them. In the context of higher education in Uzbekistan, this is consistent with the ideas of E.E. Gaziev (2020) on the need to cultivate flexible thinking as the foundation for the intellectual development of young people [9].

Analyzing the role of metacognition in the educational process, it becomes clear that the culmination of the method’s application is the blue “hat”, which is responsible for process management. R. Paul (2019) defines it as a tool for “disciplined metacognition” - the individual’s ability to control their own cognitive activity [10]. For a secular university professor, this means a shift in role: from “source of truth” to “facilitator”. According to T. Pettigrew’s (2011) intergroup contact theory and K. Rogers’s (1985) humanistic approach, only the creation of a safe, structured environment (which the blue “hat” provides) allows participants with different beliefs to achieve genuine mutual understanding [11].

Integrating the “Six Hats” method into the educational process at Uzbek universities allows for the merging of national educational traditions with advanced Western cognitive technologies. This synthesis transforms religious studies from a theoretical discipline into a living laboratory for the development of critical thinking, empathy, and conflict-free communication skills.

An analysis of the application of the “Six Thinking Hats” method in teaching Religious Studies at secular universities in the Republic of Uzbekistan suggests its high relevance to contemporary educational challenges. In an era of clip-based thinking dominance, characterized by fragmentation and superficiality, de Bono’s lateral techniques act as an effective “cognitive filter”.

Integrating the insights of scientist such as D. Kahneman, G. Klein, and Sh. Barotov confirms that the method successfully neutralizes automatic biases (“System 1”) and activates analytical reflection (“System 2”) [3, 7, 12].

A comparative analysis with traditional teaching methods showed that parallel thinking not only reduces the time spent seeking consensus in student groups but also creates a safe psychological environment for discussing sensitive religious issues (Table 1).

Table 1.

**The «Six Thinking Hats” Method vs. Traditional Methods  
(Comparative Analysis)**

Comparison parameter	Traditional training (lecture/seminar)	The “Six Thinking Hats” Method
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<i>character of thinking</i>	critical/reactive (argument, error-finding)	lateral/parallel (creation, addition)
<i>emotional background</i>	often suppressed ("emotions interfere with science")	legalized and structured (red "hat")
<i>role of a student</i>	object of influence (passive listener)	subject of the process (active thinker)
<i>reduction in the proportion of clip-based thinking</i>	weak (the lecture often fails to hold attention)	high (changing "hats" every 5-10 minutes maintains focus)
<i>result of the discussion</i>	victory of one opinion over another (conflict)	multidimensional map of the problem (synthesis)

Thus, the use of the "Six Thinking Hats" method transforms the study of religion from a passive assimilation of dogma into an active practice of developing ideological immunity and critical thinking, which is a priority for Uzbekistan's youth policy in 2025. The method's effectiveness is substantiated by three arguments:

1. Reducing cognitive load: traditional debate forces the brain to simultaneously analyze facts, defend the Ego, seek out risks, and generate ideas. De Bono suggests doing these in turn, which increases thinking efficiency by 40-50%.

2. The ability to use the "Role Mask" effect: students can express risky or unpopular ideas without fear of condemnation, as they speak from the perspective of the black "hat" rather than their own. This is critically important in religious studies for discussing sensitive topics.

3. Enabling the transition from "Ego" to "Subject": in traditional debate, people defend their position. In the de Bono method, the entire group wears the same "hat" simultaneously, transforming opponents into partners exploring the object.

For effective implementation of the "Six Thinking Hats" method in the educational process of Uzbek universities, it is recommended to pay attention to the following aspects:

- Modularity: introduce the "Six Thinking Hats" method as a mandatory element of practical classes.
- Visualization: mandatory use of colored markers or hat cards to record the transition between modes.
- Facilitation: train teachers in the role of the blue "hat" - a neutral arbiter managing time and regulations.

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- Synthesis with the case method: analyze real historical and contemporary events (e.g., the “Shanghai Declaration”) through the lens of the “Six Thinking Hats” method.
- Digital adaptation: use interactive whiteboards (Miro, Padlet) for online group work in “hats”.
- Emphasis on the white “hat”: strict separation of facts from interpretations to combat religious fakes.
- Reflective pause: ending each lesson with the blue “hat” to capture the student’s personal cognitive growth.

The application of the “Six Thinking Hats” method in secular universities in Uzbekistan helps overcome the main problem of modern education - the conflict between the fragmented (clip-based) perceptions of young people and the systemic nature of science. Analysis shows that the method not only increases interest in religious studies but also develops cognitive flexibility skills, which is critical for preventing radicalization. Based on the above, it is recommended:

1. Include de Bono’s method in the teaching guidelines for the disciplines Religious Studies and Psychology of Religion.
2. Conduct seminars in the “Parallel Thinking” format instead of traditional debates.
3. Train instructors in facilitation skills (the role of the blue “hat”).
4. Use the red “hat” to legitimize students’ emotions, which reduces the risk of latent aggression.
5. Evaluate not only knowledge of dates (white “hat”), but also the depth of risk analysis (black “hat”) and benefit analysis (yellow “hat”).

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