

Chapter 26: Qur'anic Epistemology and Qualitative Research

26.1 Why Qualitative Research Requires a Qur'anic Reframing

Modern qualitative research emerged historically as a response to the limitations of positivist science, which often reduced human experience to measurable variables, statistical models, and predictive frameworks. In contrast, qualitative inquiry sought to recover meaning, intention, interpretation, subjectivity, and context-dimensions without which human behaviour cannot be adequately understood. Yet, despite this shift away from positivism, the methodological philosophies that underlie qualitative research remain deeply embedded in Western epistemological assumptions (Schwandt, 2015). These assumptions include the belief that meaning is socially constructed, truth is plural and relative, interpretation is human-centred, and moral evaluation is external to the research process.

A Qur'anic epistemology challenges these assumptions not by rejecting qualitative inquiry but by re-grounding it in a different ontology of truth, a different concept of interpretation, and a different conception of the human knower. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasises that human understanding emerges through reflection (*tafakkur*), deep analysis (*tadabbur*), ethical memory (*tadhakkur*), and insightful comprehension (*fiqh*)-four cognitive instruments that map remarkably well onto major currents in modern qualitative research, such as hermeneutics, grounded theory, phenomenology, and thematic analysis.

This chapter argues that qualitative research, far from being foreign to Islamic thought, aligns naturally with the Qur'anic vision of knowledge. The Qur'an demands introspection, ethical engagement, contextual interpretation, and meaning-making. It requires the researcher to cultivate moral responsibility, humility, and intellectual sincerity. It also insists on empirical attentiveness to human behaviour, social relations, natural phenomena, and historical events. All of these elements are central to qualitative inquiry.

The distinction, however, lies in epistemic grounding. Modern qualitative research often assumes that knowledge emerges exclusively from human interpretation. The Qur'an, by contrast, positions interpretation within a theocentric epistemic frame, where human inquiry is part of a larger divine architecture of meaning-an architecture structured around guidance, moral order, and ultimate accountability. Thus, qualitative interpretation is not free-floating; it is anchored in the recognition that human beings interpret signs (*ayat*) embedded in nature, society, and scripture.

26.1.1 The Qur'anic View of Human Experience as Epistemic Data

Qualitative research values human experience as a primary source of data. The Qur'an goes further: it treats human experience as a divinely structured field of epistemic signs. The alternation of night and day is presented as a sign "*for a people who take heed*" (Q. 24:44). The diversity of human languages and cultures is described as "*among His signs*" (Q. 30:22). Social interactions, moral failures, historical trajectories, and psychological states are all positioned as objects of reflection.

This is not simply an invitation to observe; it is an invitation to interpret phenomena through patterns of meaning that reflect divine intentionality. Qualitative research, especially phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, seeks meaning through lived experience. The Qur'an similarly commands the believer to read the world hermeneutically, not merely empirically.

26.1.2 Interpretation as an Ethical Act in the Qur'an

In modern qualitative research, interpretation is often framed as a neutral human activity, free of metaphysical commitments. In the Qur'an, by contrast, interpretation is both cognitive and moral. Meaning-making requires purification of intention (ikhlas), fairness ('adl), and truthfulness (sidq). The Qur'an repeatedly warns against interpretive distortion, selective reading, or projecting one's desires onto texts and events (Q. 2:78; 4:135; 45:23).

This moral dimension does not restrict research; it elevates it. A Qur'anic qualitative methodology demands reflexivity, honesty about one's assumptions, and accountability for interpretive claims. These are core values in modern qualitative inquiry as well, but the Qur'an grounds them in a higher ethical and metaphysical purpose.

26.1.3 Why This Chapter is Needed

Most existing literature on Islamic research methodology either merely applies Western qualitative frameworks to Muslim contexts or repeats classical jurisprudential methodologies without interfacing with contemporary research philosophy. This chapter seeks to fill this gap by:

- Identifying the Qur'anic cognitive instruments that parallel qualitative methods.
- Demonstrating how Qur'anic epistemology justifies and strengthens qualitative inquiry.
- Showing how qualitative methodologies can be reconstructed using Qur'anic hermeneutical principles.
- Establishing an integrated framework for future Muslim researchers that is academically rigorous and scripturally grounded.

Thus, this chapter contributes a new methodological paradigm: Qur'anic Qualitative Epistemology (QQE), rooted in divine ontology, ethical interpretation, and human experience as sign-structured reality.

26.2 The Qur'anic Cognitive Instruments of Qualitative Inquiry

The Qur'an identifies several cognitive instruments that together constitute an epistemic framework remarkably aligned with qualitative inquiry. These are tafakkur, tadabbur, tadhakkur, and fiqh. Each conveys a specific mode of meaning-making and interpretive engagement.

26.2.1 Tafakkur (Analytical Reflection)

Tafakkur appears in multiple Qur'anic contexts as an exhortation to analyse, infer, and critically reflect. Those "who reflect (yatafakkarun)" are praised for engaging in a form of reasoning that moves beyond surface observation (Q. 3:191). The verse describes individuals who contemplate creation, cosmic order, and divine purpose. This is not passive contemplation; it is an active, interpretive, inferential process.

Qualitative methods such as grounded theory coding, analytic memoing, and thematic interpretation operate on similar principles: they seek patterns, connections, and conceptual structures emerging from observed data. Tafakkur thus establishes a Qur'anic precedent for inductive and interpretive reasoning.

26.2.2 Tadabbur (Deep Reflection on Texts)

Tadabbur is specifically linked to engagement with the Qur'anic text. The command: "*Do they not deeply reflect (yatadabbarun) on the Qur'an?*" (Q. 47:24) frames interpretation as a process requiring depth, patience, contextual awareness, and analytical rigour.

Modern qualitative hermeneutics emphasises similar skills: familiarity with context, sensitivity to linguistic nuance, iterative reading, and interpretive humility. Tadabbur integrates these elements within a theocentric framework in which textual meaning is neither arbitrary nor purely constructed but emerges through disciplined reflection guided by moral integrity and openness to divine guidance.

26.2.3 Tadhakkur (Ethical-Experiential Remembering)

Tadhakkur is a cognitive-moral process through which the interpreter recalls moral truths and experiences them existentially. The Qur'an states that God "*makes the signs clear for a people who remember*" (Q. 24:44). This form of recollection is experiential, similar to phenomenological reflection in qualitative research. It requires the interpreter to place themselves within the field of meaning and retrieve lessons from experience.

Thus, tadhakkur forms the Qur'anic foundation for phenomenology, narrative analysis, and experience-based interpretation.

26.2.4 Fiqh (Deep Understanding and Discernment)

While later Islamic thought used *fiqh* to refer to jurisprudence, the Qur'anic usage is broader. It refers to a deep comprehension of realities-social, moral, spiritual, and empirical. The Qur'an expresses concern that certain communities "*do not understand (yafqahun)*" (Q. 9:122). Here, *fiqh* is not legal reasoning but interpretive insight grounded in ethical cognition. Fiqh, therefore, corresponds to:

- qualitative interpretive analysis,
- discernment of patterns,
- meaning reconstruction, and
- understanding complex human and social phenomena.

It is the Qur'anic counterpart to hermeneutical depth.

26.3 Qur'anic Hermeneutics and the Foundations of Qualitative Interpretation

Hermeneutics, broadly understood as the theory and method of interpretation, is central to qualitative research. Whether in phenomenology, grounded theory, symbolic interactionism, or ethnography, the act of interpretation lies at the heart of qualitative inquiry. The Qur'an, although revealed in a pre-modern context, contains a remarkably sophisticated hermeneutical structure, one that resonates strongly with

modern interpretive methodologies while providing a theocentrically grounded epistemological framework.

This section demonstrates how Qur'anic hermeneutics forms an interpretive model that can guide qualitative research in the social sciences, humanities, and applied disciplines. It argues that the Qur'an:

- Presents interpretation as a moral epistemic act.
- Establishes multi-level meaning structures analogous to qualitative depth analysis.
- Insists on contextual, linguistic, and purposive reading, core elements of responsible qualitative interpretation.
- Requires reflexivity, humility, and awareness of cognitive bias principles foundational in modern qualitative scholarship.
- Frames the world itself as an interpretable field of signs (ayat), thereby extending hermeneutics beyond textual analysis to social and natural phenomena.

26.3.1 The Qur'anic Hermeneutical Imperative

The Qur'an does not merely allow interpretation; it commands it. The clearest articulation appears in Qur'an: "*Do they not deeply reflect (yatadabbarun) upon the Qur'an?*" (Q. 47:24)

This verse establishes tadabbur as a religious obligation—one that demands careful analysis, contextual engagement, and intellectual humility. The Qur'an negates superficial reading and calls for a deeper methodological process. Qualitative research exhibits the same demand: its methods reject surface-level description and require immersion, pattern recognition, iterative coding, and multi-layered interpretation (Schwandt, 2015).

Thus, the Qur'anic imperative of tadabbur parallels the methodological imperative of qualitative inquiry: go beyond what is immediately visible, seek meaning, and reconstruct the interpretive structure embedded within phenomena.

26.3.2 Interpretation as an Ethical Responsibility

Unlike most modern hermeneutical models, which frame interpretation as an intellectually autonomous act, the Qur'an positions interpretation within an ethical horizon. Misinterpretation is not merely a methodological error; it is a moral failure rooted in bias, desire, or intellectual injustice. The Qur'an describes individuals who distort meaning due to internal inclinations: "*Have you seen the one who takes his desire as his god?*" (Q. 45:23)

This verse can be read as a warning against cognitive distortion—the projection of one's impulses onto the data or text. The Qur'an repeatedly commands fairness ('adl), honesty (ṣidq), and freedom from bias (hawa) in all judgments, including epistemic judgments. This aspect resonates deeply with qualitative research's emphasis on reflexivity, that is, awareness of the researcher's positionality, assumptions, and interpretive tendencies (Finlay, 2012).

In Qur'anic terms, reflexivity becomes an ethical discipline:

- intention must be purified (ikhlas),
- interpretation must be fair (qist),
- bias must be controlled, and
- conclusions must follow evidence rather than desire.

Thus, Qur'anic hermeneutics integrates moral accountability into the interpretive process—a dimension often missing in secular qualitative methodology but essential for ensuring intellectual integrity.

26.3.3 The Multilayered Structure of Qur'anic Meaning

The Qur'an presents itself as a text containing layers of meaning accessible through graduated levels of analysis. For example: *“These are the clear signs of the Book.”* (Q. 15:1) *“A Book whose verses are perfected and then explained.”* (Q. 11:1)

The Qur'anic claim of being “explained” (*fussilat*) suggests a structured architecture of meaning. The classical Islamic concept of *zahir* (surface meaning) and *batin* (depth meaning) aligns with modern hermeneutical distinctions between:

- description vs. interpretation,
- first-order vs. second-order constructs,
- manifest vs. latent meaning,
- emic vs. etic analysis.

In qualitative research, multilayered analysis is foundational (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The Qur'anic hermeneutical model thus anticipates contemporary interpretive approaches: it acknowledges that meaning emerges progressively, requiring patience, rigour, and structural analysis.

26.3.4 Contextual Interpretation: The Qur'an's Internal Instruction

The Qur'an itself instructs readers to interpret verses contextually: *“He is the One who sent down to you the Book. In it are verses that are clear... and others that are open to interpretation. Those with deviance in their hearts follow the ambiguous parts...”* (Q. 3:7)

This verse provides several methodological principles:

- Not all data types are equal; clear (*muḥkam*) and complex (*mutashabih*) data require different interpretive tools.
- Methodological irresponsibility is possible, following ambiguity without methodological discipline.
- Interpretation requires grounding in foundational principles, starting from what is “clear” and interpreting the ambiguous through the clear.

This structure parallels qualitative coding frameworks:

- open coding → identifying varied data

- axial coding → linking emerging categories
- selective coding → synthesising data into a grounded framework.

Just as ambiguous data must be interpreted through clearer patterns, qualitative research requires grounding emergent themes within stable analytic structures.

26.3.5 Language, Semantics, and the Qur'an as Interpretive Matrix

Language is central to qualitative research. The Qur'an emphasises linguistic precision: "*We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so that you may understand.*" (Q. 12:2)

This implies:

- semantic awareness,
- rhetorical analysis,
- attention to lexical nuance,
- syntactic structures, and
- discourse patterns.

Qualitative methods centred on discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) and linguistic ethnography align directly with this Qur'anic emphasis. The Qur'an does not merely convey meanings; it shapes interpretive consciousness through metaphor, parable, narrative, argumentation, and dialogical engagement—all major tools of qualitative inquiry.

26.3.6 Reality as Text: The Qur'anic Expansion of Hermeneutics

A distinguishing feature of Qur'anic hermeneutics is its expansion of interpretive work beyond the scriptural text to the world itself. The Qur'an repeatedly describes natural phenomena, historical events, and human social patterns as "signs (ayat)." For example: "*In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs for those who reflect.*" (Q. 3:190-191)

Here, the natural world becomes a hermeneutical field. Qualitative research does the same when it treats social behaviour, narratives, and experiences as data to be interpreted rather than quantified. Thus, Qur'anic hermeneutics implies:

- phenomenology (interpreting experience),
- ethnography (interpreting social patterns),
- case study analysis (interpreting specific events),
- grounded theory (deriving conceptual structures from observed signs).

In this sense, qualitative research finds strong support in the Qur'an, which frames the cosmos as an object of interpretive inquiry.

26.3.7 Hermeneutical Reflexivity in the Qur’an

Modern qualitative research demands reflexivity: the researcher must examine their assumptions, biases, and interpretive position (Finlay, 2012). The Qur’an’s emphasis on self-scrutiny (nafs) parallels this requirement. The verse: *“Rather, each person is a witness against himself.”* (Q. 75:14) establishes self-awareness as a prerequisite for truthful knowledge. Reflexivity in Qur’anic hermeneutics entails:

- recognising personal desires that distort interpretation,
- maintaining intellectual humility,
- acknowledging the limitations of human perception (Q. 17:85),
- aligning interpretation with moral integrity.

Thus, Qur’anic hermeneutics embeds reflexivity in its epistemic process centuries before modern qualitative research formalised it.

26.3.8 The Hermeneutics of Purpose (Maqaṣid) and Qualitative Analysis

The Qur’an repeatedly frames verses as revealed “for a purpose”-guidance, reflection, moral clarity, justice (Q. 6:98; 39:27). This purposive orientation is analogous to qualitative methodologies that emphasise:

- research purpose,
- thematic relevance,
- meaningful interpretation,
- linking findings to human values.

Qualitative analysis asks: What is the underlying pattern, purpose, or meaning?

The Qur’an’s hermeneutics ask: What is the moral, ontological, or existential purpose behind this sign?

Thus, a Qur’anic hermeneutic enriches qualitative inquiry by grounding it in a deeper purposive analysis.

26.3.9 Integration: A Qur’anic Model for Qualitative Interpretation

Bringing the above threads together, a Qur’anic hermeneutic for qualitative research can be summarised through seven interpretive principles:

- Ontological grounding: Truth is real and discoverable (Q. 2:147).
- Ethical interpretation: Interpretation requires justice, humility, and sincerity (Q. 4:135).
- Contextual analysis: Verses and phenomena must be interpreted with attention to their relational context (Q. 3:7).
- Linguistic precision: Words matter; meanings must be sought carefully (Q. 12:2).
- Hermeneutics of signs: The world is a field of interpretable ayat (Q. 3:191).
- Reflexivity and self-awareness: Interpretation requires inner honesty (Q. 75:14).
- Purpose and moral meaning: Interpretation must uncover moral purpose (Q. 39:27).

These seven Qur'anic principles form a comprehensive hermeneutical framework that supports, enriches, and transforms qualitative research.

26.4 Qur'anic Foundations for Qualitative Method Construction

Qualitative research in its modern academic form emerged long after the Qur'anic revelation; however, the Qur'an provides foundational epistemic structures that align closely with qualitative methodologies. This section argues that qualitative method construction can be deeply informed by the Qur'an because the Qur'an:

- establishes interpretive, inductive, and experiential pathways to knowledge;
- frames knowledge generation as grounded in signs (ayat), processes, and narratives;
- emphasises human cognitive instruments such as tafakkur (reflection), tadabbur (deep contemplation), tadhakkur (moral recall), and fiqh (insightful understanding);
- provides a structured, ethically anchored methodological matrix; and
- integrates the subjective, moral, historical, and experiential dimensions of knowledge.

Thus, Qur'anic epistemology not only aligns with qualitative research but also offers a richer foundation for constructing qualitative methods rooted in moral responsibility, contextual reasoning, and interpretive depth.

26.4.1 The Qur'an as a Thematic and Narrative Model for Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative research relies heavily on *narratives*, *themes*, and *patterns* for interpretation. The Qur'an employs exactly these structures. It offers:

- narrative sequences (qiṣas),
- thematic clusters (e.g., justice, mercy, creation, signs),
- recurring metaphors,
- dialogical forms, and
- case-based moral illustrations.

For example, the Qur'an's reiteration of creation signs-sky, earth, water, night, day, mountains- forms a rich thematic corpus that invites interpretive synthesis (Q. 3:190-191; 30:20-27). These repeated motifs function analogously to qualitative *codes* that must be categorised, refined, and interpreted. The Qur'an itself encourages theme-building: “*Thus, we explain the signs in various ways so that they may reflect.*” (Q. 6:65)

The phrase *nuṣarrifu al-ayat*-“We diversify/explain the signs in various ways”-indicates that the Qur'an consciously constructs meaning by presenting phenomena in different narrative contexts. This is similar to the qualitative practice of triangulation and comparative coding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Thus, the qualitative method construction grounded in the Qur'an should adopt:

- thematic clustering,
- repeated pattern identification,

- narrative comparison, and
- interpretive synthesis.

26.4.2 Signs (Ayat) as Units of Meaning: The Qur'anic Data Structure

In qualitative research, the basic unit of analysis is the *meaning unit* or *significant statement*. In Qur'anic epistemology, the primary unit of meaning is the ayah, a sign pointing toward deeper meaning. The Qur'an uses ayah in three overlapping senses:

- textual signs - verses of revelation
- cosmic signs - phenomena in nature
- historical/social signs - events from past communities

This triadic structure forms a multi-source data system. Thus, the Qur'anic qualitative method must recognise that meaningful data are not limited to text; they include:

- human experience,
- natural observation,
- social interaction,
- and history.

This framework anticipates modern qualitative triangulation strategies by suggesting a multi-field interpretive method.

26.4.3 Inductive Methodology (Istinbat): A Qur'anic Epistemic Tool

The Qur'an refers to a form of inductive reasoning-*istinbat*: “*Had they referred it to the Messenger and those grounded in knowledge, they would have extracted (yastanbiṭū) its meaning.*” (Q. 4:83)

Istinbat implies:

- extracting patterns,
- deriving meaning from diffuse indicators,
- inferring a conceptual structure.

These are precisely the operations of qualitative analysis: coding, categorising, and thematising data (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, constructing qualitative methods on Qur'anic principles requires the researcher to:

- gather diverse signs;
- examine their relationships;
- derive latent meaning;
- synthesise the findings into a coherent framework.

This Qur'anic approach strongly resembles grounded theory methodology.

26.4.4 Reflection (Tafakkur) as Analytical Interpretation

Reflection (*tafakkur*) is explicitly connected to empirical and experiential data in the Qur'an: "*They reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth.*" (Q. 3:191)

This verse illustrates several interpretive moves:

- observation of phenomena,
- comparison of structures,
- questioning for deeper meaning,
- integration of spiritual, moral, and empirical implications.

Qualitative method construction grounded in tafakkur entails:

- iterative inquiry,
- constant comparison,
- interpretive sensitivity,
- openness to emergent meaning.

The Qur'an links tafakkur to existential awareness and cognitive growth, suggesting that qualitative interpretation should cultivate *transformation* and *self-understanding* rather than remain merely descriptive.

26.4.5 Deep Interpretation (Tadabbur): The Qur'anic Model of Layered Inquiry

Tadabbur implies penetrating beneath the surface meaning. The Qur'an clearly commands it: "*Do they not deeply reflect on the Qur'an?*" (Q. 47:24)

In methodological terms, tadabbur includes:

- structural analysis of discourse,
- contextual reconstruction,
- intertextual comparison,
- linguistic-semantic scrutiny,
- purposive interpretation.

This resembles advanced qualitative methods, such as:

- hermeneutic phenomenology,
- thematic hermeneutics,
- Ricoeurian depth interpretation,
- critical discourse analysis.

Thus, tadabbur forms the core interpretive tool for constructing Qur'an-based qualitative methods.

26.4.6 Remembering (Tadhakkur): Moral and Experiential Knowledge

Tadhakkur connects interpretation to moral awareness: *“Indeed, in that are signs for people who remember (yatadhakkarun).”* (Q. 24:44)

In qualitative methodology, this maps onto:

- experiential reflection,
- ethical sensitivity,
- personal-communal memory,
- socio-historical awareness.

Tadhakkur ensures that qualitative method construction integrates morality and experience, preventing value-neutral interpretation.

26.4.7 Insight (Fiqh) as Deep Socio-Analytical Understanding

Although often associated with jurisprudence today, fiqh in the Qur'an means deep comprehension (Q. 9:122). It involves:

- analytical understanding,
- contextual reasoning,
- situational sensitivity,
- inferential judgment.

Fiqh is the Qur'anic analogue to:

- interpretive analysis,
- sociological insight,
- ethnographic understanding,
- phenomenological intuition.

Thus, qualitative methods within a Qur'anic paradigm must pursue fiqh-meaningful, contextually grounded comprehension.

26.4.8 Integrative Methodological Model: Four Qur'anic Cognitive Processes

The Qur'anic epistemic model combines four cognitive processes:

- Tafakkur - analytical reflection
- Tadabbur - deep structural interpretation
- Tadhakkur - moral-experiential awareness
- Fiqh - contextualised understanding

Together, these form a comprehensive qualitative method. They align with modern methodologies as follows:

Qur'anic Process	Qualitative Equivalent	Function
Tafakkur	Analytical coding/pattern recognition	Identifies initial meaning units
Tadabbur	Hermeneutic analysis	Reveals deeper structural meaning
Tadhakkur	Reflexive interpretation	Integrates moral & experiential context
Fiqh	Theorisation / conceptual integration	Builds grounded frameworks

Thus, the Qur'an provides a methodologically coherent interpretive system.

26.4.9 Context, Purpose, and Meaning: The Qur'anic Analytical Triad

Qur'anic hermeneutics emphasises three requirements for understanding:

- Context (siyaq) - relating the part to the whole (Q. 3:7)
- Purpose (maqṣad) - interpreting within the verse's functional objective (Q. 39:27)
- Moral meaning (ḥikmah) - extracting ethical significance (Q. 16:90)

Modern qualitative research similarly demands:

- contextual reconstruction,
- purposive analysis,
- meaningful interpretation.

Thus, Qur'anic methodology naturally aligns with qualitative theory-building.

26.4.10 Constructing a Qur'an-Based Qualitative Method

Drawing on the components above, a Qur'anic qualitative method may proceed through the following steps:

- Step 1: Data Immersion: Reading, listening, observing, and gathering signs (ayat).
- Step 2: First-Level Reflection (Tafakkur): Identifying recurring patterns, themes, and anomalies.
- Step 3: Structural Interpretation (Tadabbur): Uncovering deeper layers, cross-referencing meanings.
- Step 4: Reflexive and Ethical Interpretation (Tadhakkur): Checking biases, moral implications, and experiential resonance.
- Step 5: Conceptual Integration (Fiqh): Synthesising insights into a conceptual or theoretical model.
- Step 6: Communicating Findings: Presenting interpretations with clarity, fairness, and moral responsibility (Q. 4:135).

This framework reflects a Qur'an-based hermeneutical philosophy that can guide qualitative research across disciplines.

26.5 Comparative Positioning: Qur'anic Qualitative Epistemology and Modern Qualitative Paradigms

Modern qualitative research is not a single unified paradigm but a constellation of interpretive traditions—phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, hermeneutics, narrative inquiry, constructivism, post-structuralism, critical theory, and others. What these traditions share is a commitment to understanding meaning from within human experience, context, and language. Although these frameworks vary epistemologically, they converge on several foundational assumptions: knowledge is contextual; interpretation is unavoidable; human subjectivity is not a threat but a resource; and meaning emerges through engagement rather than detached measurement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The Qur'an, presented as divine revelation (wahy) and as a timeless source of guidance for all people, articulates an epistemic orientation that aligns with and, in many respects, anticipates the central principles of qualitative inquiry. Rather than depending on any external historical chronology, the Qur'an grounds its authority in its own self-description as a book of signs (ayat), guidance (huda), and clarification (bayan) for those who seek truth (Q. 2:185; 16:89). Within this internal epistemic framework, the Qur'an places profound emphasis on textual contemplation (tadabbur), analytical reasoning (tafakkur), moral-experiential remembrance (tadhakkur), and deep understanding (fiqh).

These four epistemic instruments collectively constitute a coherent interpretive methodology—one that is qualitative in its very essence. Thus, the Qur'an does not merely contain qualitative elements; it establishes a complete qualitative paradigm. In this sense, the Qur'anic interpretive process both converges with and transcends contemporary qualitative theories. This section examines these intersections and distinctions, highlighting how modern qualitative paradigms can be enriched through a Qur'an-centred epistemological lens.

26.5.1 Convergence in Epistemic Orientation

Experience and Meaning as Knowledge Sources: Modern qualitative traditions treat human experience as an epistemic site, whether through phenomenology (van Manen, 2016), ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), or narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). The Qur'an similarly foregrounds experience as a source of knowledge: *“Travel through the earth and observe...”* (Q. 29:20)

Here, *siri fi al-ard* (“journey through the earth”) is an injunction to engage empirically with the world. Experiential immersion leads to knowledge, aligning with qualitative fieldwork principles. Likewise, the Qur'an repeatedly states: *“Indeed, in this are signs for a people who reflect.”* (Q. 30:21; Q. 16:12)

Experience generates signs (ayat), and signs require interpretation. Thus, both the Qur'an and qualitative research emphasise experiential knowledge as an indispensable epistemic mode.

Reflexivity and Self-Understanding: Modern qualitative methodology regards reflexivity as central: researchers must examine their assumptions, positionality, and interpretive lenses (Finlay, 2012). The Qur'an frames reflexivity as a moral and cognitive imperative: "*Rather, the human being is a witness over himself.*" (Q. 75:14)

This view establishes reflexivity not merely as a methodological requirement but as an ethical duty. Qur'anic *tadhakkur* -moral self-remembrance-parallels reflexive methodology by integrating cognition with moral awareness.

Contextual and Holistic Interpretation: Qualitative research emphasises context, environment, history, culture, and temporality. The Qur'an similarly situates meaning in context (siyaq): "*He revealed the Book, fully detailed.*" (Q. 6:114)

The Qur'an frequently requires contextual interpretation-for example, correlating the stories of previous nations with current behaviour. This demonstrates a holistic interpretive framework akin to hermeneutics and interpretive phenomenology.

26.5.2 Qur'anic Epistemology within the Landscape of Modern Qualitative Paradigms

Hermeneutics and Qur'anic Tadabbur: Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation, emphasising layered meaning, textual depth, and dialogical understanding (Gadamer, 1989). Qur'anic *tadabbur* is a parallel process: "*Do they not deeply reflect (yatadabbarun) on the Qur'an?*" (Q. 47:24)

Both approaches assume that texts have multiple layers requiring sustained contemplation. Yet, Qur'anic hermeneutics differs by grounding interpretation in divine intentionality (maqṣad), providing a teleological anchor absent in secular hermeneutics. Meaning is not open-ended but directional, toward truth, justice, and ethical transformation.

Phenomenology and Qur'anic Experiential Knowing: Phenomenology centres on lived experience and seeks to "*return to the things themselves*" (Husserl, 1970). Qur'anic phenomenology appears in its emphasis on observing natural processes-birth, death, rain, growth, day-night cycles- as invitations to understanding (Q. 24:43; 30:24).

Here, the Qur'an does not treat phenomena merely descriptively but as epistemic events imbued with meaning. The Qur'an thus expands phenomenology from an experiential method toward an interpretive-theological model.

Grounded Theory and Qur'anic Inductive Reasoning (Istinbat): Grounded theory constructs knowledge inductively from data patterns (Charmaz, 2014). Qur'anic *istinbat* (Q. 4:83) similarly refers to extracting meaning by connecting dispersed indicators. The Qur'an thus models:

- constant comparison,
- pattern recognition,
- theory formation based on signs.

This conceptual relationship suggests that Qur'anic methodology can serve as an ethical-theological precursor to grounded theory.

Critical Theory and Qur'anic Ethical Critique: Critical theory challenges structures of injustice, power, and oppression (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). The Qur'an explicitly employs an ethical-critical lens when discussing inequity, exploitation, and tyranny (Q. 28:4; 16:90). The Qur'an, therefore, aligns with the emancipatory purpose of critical qualitative research, but anchors critique in the moral universe of tawhīd-divine unity-rather than class struggle or socio-political ideology.

26.5.3 Divergence: Where Qur'anic and Modern Qualitative Paradigms Part Ways

While there is significant resonance, some points of divergence remain.

Ontological Grounding: Modern qualitative paradigms largely assume a human-centred epistemology. Even constructivist models treat meaning as co-produced between researcher and participant. The Qur'an diverges fundamentally by grounding knowledge in divine revelation (waḥy): *"He taught humanity what they did not know."* (Q. 96:5)

Thus, Qur'anic qualitative epistemology is not merely humanistic but theocentric.

Ethical Objectivity vs. Ethical Relativism: Modern qualitative ethics often prioritise procedural neutrality. The Qur'an grounds all interpretation in unwavering ethical principles-justice, truthfulness, honesty, humility (Q. 4:135; 5:8). Thus, moral relativism is incompatible with Qur'anic methodology.

Teleology of Knowledge: In modern paradigms, knowledge's purpose varies-explanation, description, critique, or understanding. In the Qur'an, knowledge is teleological: *"...so that you may understand, remember, and become mindful."* (Q. 2:73; 24:44)

Knowledge is directed toward:

- transformation,
- moral purification,
- justice,
- establishing human flourishing.

This orientation exceeds the descriptive tendency of some qualitative schools.

26.5.4 Integrative Possibilities: Toward a Qur'anically-Informed Qualitative Paradigm

Given these convergences and divergences, the Qur'an offers a unique epistemic contribution. A Qur'anically-informed qualitative paradigm would:

- Integrate inductive interpretation with divine guidance- balancing data-driven insights with moral teleology.
- Centre ethical responsibility- interpretation as moral action, not neutral reporting.

- Elevate reflexivity from technique to spiritual practice- aligning self-examination with ethical accountability.
- Fuse experiential, textual, and cosmic signs- widening qualitative “data” beyond human narratives alone.
- Combine contextual insight with transcendental purpose- producing meaning that is both situated and universal.

This paradigm would enhance modern qualitative methodologies by integrating ethics, ontology, and epistemic purpose.

26.5.5 The Qur'an's Methodological Contributions to Qualitative Research

Depth and Aperture in Interpretation: Qur'anic tadabbur expands interpretation beyond hermeneutics by combining:

- rational inquiry,
- moral reflection,
- spiritual awareness.

Multi-Source Data Ecology: The Qur'an treats nature, history, social life, and revelation as parallel meaning systems. This suggests a multi-source qualitative method embracing:

- textual data,
- observational data,
- experiential insight,
- socio-historical interpretation.

Teleological Coding: Themes in the Qur'an are not merely descriptive but purposeful (Maqasid). This can transform:

- thematic analysis
- grounded theory
- narrative inquiry

into purpose-oriented qualitative research.

26.5.6 Positioning Qur'anic Qualitative Epistemology in the Field

This comparative analysis demonstrates that the Qur'an provides a sophisticated, ethically grounded qualitative epistemology that aligns with major qualitative paradigms yet transcends them through its divine ontology, ethical teleology, and integrated interpretive system. While modern qualitative methods offer analytical tools, the Qur'an contributes a deeper philosophical structure: knowledge as sign-recognition, ethical transformation, and purposeful reflection.

A Qur’anically-informed qualitative paradigm thus strengthens contemporary qualitative research by restoring moral accountability, expanding interpretive horizons, and reuniting empirical, experiential, and spiritual dimensions of knowing.

26.6 Constructing a Qur’an-Based Qualitative Research Framework

Constructing a qualitative research framework grounded in the Qur’an requires more than borrowing techniques from existing social-science methodologies. Rather, it demands a full reconstruction of qualitative inquiry from within the Qur’an’s own epistemic architecture, conceptual vocabulary, and hermeneutic logic. The goal is not merely to “Islamize” existing methods, but to derive a genuinely Qur’anic paradigm of qualitative interpretation-rooted in *ayat*, guided by *tafakkur* (analytical reasoning), deepened through *tadabbur* (structured reflection), embodied through *tadhakkur* (moral remembrance), and culminating in *fiqh* (deep understanding). These epistemic acts are not parallel to modern qualitative concepts; they are the Qur’anic foundations of interpretation itself.

A Qur’an-based qualitative framework must therefore rely on three fundamental premises:

- Ontology of Signs (Ayat): Reality-textual, natural, historical-is composed of meaningful signs requiring interpretation (Q. 41:53; 51:20-21).
- Hermeneutics of Reflection: Human faculties (*‘aql, qalb, basar, Fu’ad*) are divinely oriented toward discovering meaning through reflection (Q. 22:46; 67:23).
- Ethics of Interpretation: Knowledge must be pursued with sincerity, justice, humility, and moral responsibility (Q. 17:36; 5:8; 49:6).

Any qualitative method derived from the Qur’an must integrate these core epistemic, hermeneutic, and ethical foundations. The following sections outline a Qur’an-based framework for qualitative research that is conceptually robust, methodologically rigorous, and epistemologically coherent.

26.6.1 Foundational Epistemic Principles

The World as Text - Ontology of Signs: In qualitative inquiry, the researcher treats social behaviour, speech, texts, and culture as meaning-bearing. The Qur’an, however, universalises this principle: *all* created reality is signified meaning-*ayat* (Q. 45:3-6; 10:101). Human experience is fundamentally interpretive because the cosmos itself is an interpretive field. Thus, Qur’anic qualitative methodology begins from an ontological claim: meaning is embedded in reality by divine intent.

Interpretation as Worship: The Qur’an frames reflection not merely as an intellectual task but as an act of devotion. *Tafakkur, tadabbur, and tadhakkur* are repeatedly attached to descriptions of the righteous or the people of understanding (*ulu al-albab*) (Q. 3:190-191; 38:29). Interpretation becomes a spiritual discipline involving moral purification, intellectual honesty, and existential humility.

Ethical and Epistemic Responsibility: The Qur’an repeatedly prohibits knowledge claims that lack evidence, certainty, or methodological rigour: “*Do not pursue that of which you do not know.*” (Q. 17:36)

This establishes an ethical code for qualitative research:

- avoid conjecture (*zann*)
- verify reports (Q. 49:6)
- maintain justice (Q. 4:135; 5:8)
- uphold trustfulness (*amanah*) (Q. 23:8)

Thus, a Qur'anic qualitative framework is inseparable from ethical virtue.

26.6.2 The Four Qur'anic Instruments of Qualitative Inquiry

A Qur'an-based qualitative framework requires formalising four key epistemic acts as methodological procedures:

Tafakkur (تفكر): Analytical Reflection: *Tafakkur* represents a structured intellectual process of breaking down phenomena, examining relationships, identifying patterns, and evaluating implications. This aligns with qualitative techniques such as:

- coding
- thematic analysis
- pattern recognition
- conceptual abstraction

The Qur'an invites such analysis in verses urging humans to reflect upon creation, society, and moral consequences (Q. 30:8; 3:191).

Tadabbur (تدبر): Deep Structural Interpretation: *Tadabbur* refers to following something "to its end," suggesting:

- contextual reading
- structural engagement
- multi-layered interpretation
- longitudinal analysis

In modern terms, *tadabbur* corresponds to hermeneutics: interpreting meaning by examining structure, sequence, context, and coherence (Q. 47:24; 4:82).

Tadhakkur (تذكر): Moral-Experiential Internalisation: *Tadhakkur* links qualitative data with ethical consciousness. It involves:

- reflexivity
- experiential integration
- examining one's moral assumptions
- connecting empirical findings to ethical insight

The Qur'an describes *tadhakkur* as the awakening of moral memory (Q. 24:44).

Fiqh (فقه): Deep Understanding of Meaning: This is the culmination of the process-achieving depth, synthesis, and wisdom, not mere description (Q. 9:122). In modern qualitative language, *fiqh* parallels:

- grounded theory
- theoretical explanation
- interpretive synthesis

Thus, a Qur'an-based qualitative method integrates epistemic, hermeneutic, and ethical dimensions.

26.6.3 A Qur'anic Qualitative Research Process Model

A Qur'an-based qualitative framework unfolds in the following stages, each grounded in Qur'anic epistemology.

Stage 1: Encountering the Sign (Idrak al-Ayah): The researcher encounters a phenomenon-textual, social, natural-framed as a sign requiring interpretation (Q. 41:53).

Stage 2: Observational Engagement (Nazar): The Qur'an emphasises observation as the beginning of knowing (Q. 88:17-20; 29:20).

Stage 3: Analytical Reflection (Tafakkur): The raw material is analysed, broken down, and thoughtfully examined (Q. 30:8; 3:191).

Stage 4: Contextual-Structural Reflection (Tadabbur): Meaning is interpreted within structural, thematic, and contextual layers (Q. 47:24).

Stage 5: Reflexive Moral Integration (Tadhakkur): The researcher reflects on ethical implications and personal positionality (Q. 24:44).

Stage 6: Theory Formation (Fiqh): Deep understanding and conceptual synthesis emerge (Q. 9:122).

Stage 7: Verification (Tahqiq): Claims must be substantiated with evidence, avoiding conjecture (Q. 17:36; 49:6).

Stage 8: Ethical Commitment ('Adl, Amanah): Research must be conducted and presented with integrity (Q. 5:8; 23:8).

This model mirrors qualitative traditions but remains uniquely Qur'anic.

26.6.4 Distinctive Features of Qur'anic Qualitative Methodology

Integration of Epistemology, Ethics, and Spirituality: Unlike modern qualitative frameworks, the Qur'an rejects any separation between knowing, being, and doing. Interpretation is simultaneously intellectual, ethical, and spiritual.

Non-Reductionist Ontology: The Qur'an frames meaning as multidimensional: physical, metaphysical, moral, historical, and symbolic layers coexist.

Hermeneutics Rooted in Revelation: Interpretation is not self-generated but guided by divine discourse. The researcher is accountable to *haqq* (truth), not subjective preference.

Emphasis on Internal Transformation: Qualitative inquiry must transform not only knowledge but the knower.

26.6.5 Toward a Qur'anic Qualitative Methodology (Synthesis)

The Qur'an-based qualitative framework can be summarised in five methodological commitments:

- Ontology of Meaning: All phenomena are signs requiring interpretation.
- Hermeneutics of Reflection: *Tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *tadhakkur*, and *fiqh* form the epistemic cycle.
- Ethics of Truth-Seeking: Avoid conjecture; verify evidence; uphold fairness.
- Holistic Integration: Interpretation connects empirical data with moral consciousness.
- Transformative Knowledge: True understanding produces wisdom (*hikmah*) and action (*'amal*).

This consolidates the Qur'an's interpretive paradigm into a coherent qualitative methodology capable of guiding research across disciplines.

26.7 Toward a Fully Formulated Qur'anic Qualitative Research Method

Developing a fully formulated qualitative research method from the Qur'an requires bringing together the insights derived from *tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *tadhakkur*, and *fiqh*, and translating them into a coherent operational framework. Modern qualitative methodologies-such as grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, narrative analysis, and hermeneutics-operate through systematic procedures of observation, interpretation, contextualization, and theory-building. The Qur'an, however, provides a deeper, more foundational structure in which qualitative inquiry is not merely a technique but a moral, spiritual, and epistemic act.

A Qur'anic qualitative research method must therefore be holistic, ethical, reflexive, interpretive, evidence-based, and transformative. This section synthesises these principles into a structured methodology that can be applied in contemporary research while remaining fully faithful to Qur'anic epistemology.

26.7.1 Foundational Premises of the Qur'anic Qualitative Method

A Qur'an-based qualitative method must rest upon the following epistemic premises:

Reality is Composed of Signs (Ayat): The Qur'an repeatedly describes the world, scripture, human experience, and history as *ayat*-signs that require interpretation (Q. 41:53; 51:20-21). This establishes a fundamental principle: qualitative meaning is inherent, not constructed. Human inquiry uncovers, discerns, and interprets these signs.

Human Faculties are Designed for Interpretation: The Qur'an explicitly links knowing (*'ilm*) to sensory perception (*basar*), hearing (*sam*), and inner comprehension (*Fu'ad*) (Q. 67:23; 16:78). This aligns with qualitative research's reliance on lived experience, observation, interpretation, and reflexivity.

Interpretation Must Be Ethical: The Qur'an warns against interpretation guided by conjecture (*ẓann*) or without evidence (Q. 17:36). Thus, qualitative analysis must be grounded in verifiable meaning and methodological discipline.

Interpretation Must Lead to Wisdom (*Ḥikmah*): The endpoint of qualitative research in a Qur'anic paradigm is not only understanding but *ḥikmah*-synthesised insight that enables action (Q. 2:269).

26.7.2 The Qur'anic Qualitative Method: Eight Procedural Stages

The Qur'anic research cycle consists of eight stages. Together, they form a replicable qualitative methodology.

Stage 1: Encountering the Sign (*Muqabalat al-Ayah*):

Equivalent Modern Functions:

- identifying the research problem
- initial data contact
- experiential noticing

Every qualitative project begins with an encounter with a text, event, community, phenomenon, or question. The Qur'an frames this moment as meeting an *ayah*- a meaningful "sign" embedded in reality (Q. 45:3-6). This reframes research as a sacred engagement with meaning.

Stage 2: Thick Observation (*Nazar al-Taḥqiq*):

Equivalent Modern Functions:

- thick description
- phenomenological observation
- ethnographic noticing

The Qur'an commands humans to "look," "observe," and "consider" the phenomena around them (Q. 88:17-20; 29:20). This indicates a primary methodological step: careful, disciplined, non-judgmental observation.

Stage 3: Analytical Reflection (*Tafakkur*):

Equivalent Modern Functions:

- coding
- thematic analysis
- pattern recognition

The Qur'an repeatedly urges humans to contemplate creation, society, and moral consequences (Q. 3:191). This stage involves identifying emerging patterns, initial themes, and conceptual relationships.

Stage 4: Structural-Contextual Interpretation (Tadabbur):

Equivalent Modern Functions:

- hermeneutics
- discourse analysis
- contextual interpretation

Tadabbur involves following the deeper implications of a matter, reading beyond surface meanings, and understanding structure, coherence, and relational contexts (Q. 47:24; 4:82). It formalises the interpretive step of qualitative inquiry.

Stage 5: Reflexive Moral Integration (Tadhakkur):

Equivalent Modern Functions:

- reflexivity
- positionality
- ethical interpretation

Tadhakkur requires the researcher to integrate interpretation with ethical consciousness (Q. 24:44). No qualitative analysis is complete without confronting personal bias, moral implications, and the researcher's own role.

Stage 6: Deep Understanding (Fiqh al-Ma'na):

Equivalent Modern Functions:

- grounded theory
- interpretive phenomenology
- conceptual theory-building

The Qur'an uses *fiqh* not to denote jurisprudence alone, but deep comprehension (Q. 9:122). At this stage, meaning is synthesised into explanatory insight.

Stage 7: Verification (Tahqiq / Bayyina): Equivalent Modern Functions:

- triangulation
- validity checking
- credibility assessment

The Qur'an insists on verification and evidence-based reasoning (Q. 49:6; 17:36). In qualitative terms, this means:

- comparing multiple data sources
- validating interpretations
- revisiting earlier assumptions

Verification is a moral imperative.

Stage 8: Ethical Communication and Application (*Amanah* / *'Adl* / *Balagh*): Equivalent Modern Functions:

- reporting
- presenting findings
- ethical application

The Qur'an's emphasis on justice (*'adl*), trust (*amanah*), and clear communication (*Balagh mubin*) (Q. 5:8; 23:8; 16:35) establishes that qualitative results must be:

- truthful
- transparent
- ethically communicated
- socially beneficial

Thus, the Qur'anic qualitative method is not complete until knowledge is responsibly shared.

26.7.3 Procedural Flowchart of the Qur'anic Qualitative Method



This constitutes a full Qur'an-derived qualitative cycle.

26.7.4 Core Methodological Principles Embedded in the Qur'anic Cycle

Principle 1: Epistemic Humility (*Tawaḍu'*): The Qur'an criticises arrogance as a barrier to knowledge (Q. 2:34; 7:146). The qualitative researcher must adopt humility toward both participants and the phenomenon.

Principle 2: Moral Accountability (*Mas'uliyah*): Knowledge in the Qur'an is a trust, not a commodity (Q. 23:8). Qualitative research must be guided by sincerity of intention (*niyyah*) and justice.

Principle 3: Holistic Integration: Knowledge emerges from the integration of:

- empirical observation
- reflection
- ethical self-awareness
- spiritual accountability

Principle 4: Transformative Potential: The end of qualitative inquiry in the Qur'an is not information but moral transformation and societal benefit (Q. 13:11).

26.7.5 A Fully Formulated Qur'anic Qualitative Method (Summary)

A Qur'an-derived qualitative method includes:

Ontology: Reality is composed of meaningful signs intentionally created for interpretation.

Epistemology: Knowledge arises through sensory perception, reflection, interpretation, and moral consciousness.

Method: A systematic eight-stage cycle rooted in *nazar*, *tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *tadhakkur*, *fiqh*, and *tahqiq*.

Ethics: Research requires sincerity, justice, humility, trust, and avoidance of bias or conjecture.

Purpose: Knowledge must benefit humanity and lead to wisdom (*hikmah*), not exploitation.

26.7.6 Toward a Distinct Qur'anic Qualitative Paradigm

A Qur'an-based qualitative framework does not simply add Islamic terminology to existing methods. Instead, it reconstructs qualitative research from the ground up with a fully integrated:

- ontology (sign-based reality)
- epistemology (reflective-ethical cognition)
- method (eight-stage interpretive cycle)
- ethics (justice and trust)
- purpose (wisdom and transformation)

This establishes a distinct paradigm that can enrich global qualitative methodology.