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Three Meanings of Gratitude in Qur'an Journaling: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

ABSTRACT: Emotion regulation is essential for coping with life experiences, and journaling is one tool for managing emotions. Qur'an journaling, a practice of reflecting on Qur'anic verses, has attracted growing interest and has been associated with experiences of gratitude among its practitioners. However, how gratitude develops through this practice remains underexplored. This study explores how gratitude is interpreted and develops through Qur'an journaling. Using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, data were collected through interviews with three members of The Qur'an Journal Indonesia (TQJI) community and through analysis of their Qur'an journals. The findings reveal three variations in the meaning of gratitude in Qur'an journaling: shukr, imtinaan, and hamid. These experiences of gratitude are diverse and oriented toward Allah. Thus, gratitude from an Islamic perspective is not fully represented by the general concept of gratitude.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Emotions are an essential part of life. Under certain conditions, however, they can become a problem when they arise with high intensity or at inappropriate times. Managing emotions is therefore important so that individuals can respond to emotional experiences more adaptively. This condition is common among women, including mothers and prospective mothers. In a study by Calista et al. (2023), 61.2% of mothers experienced mild stress and 12.1% experienced severe stress, and this condition affected children's behavior.

In recent years, Qur'an journaling has grown in popularity in Indonesia. Based on the authors' search on Google Trends in September 2025, covering the previous 12 months, the terms "journaling" and "self healing" showed fluctuating search interest in Indonesia, and queries related to Qur'an journaling also appeared among the rising queries. Farahdiba (2024) observed the practice of Qur'an journaling on the Instagram account @aisharizqy, including the use of hashtags and posts related to the practice. Although the observation period of the reported figures is not described in detail, this study shows that Qur'an journaling has become part of religious practice in digital spaces. These data indicate the presence of interest in journaling in digital spaces.

Journaling helps people analyze their emotions consciously, which may enhance self-awareness and reduce depression and anxiety. In expressive journaling, individuals freely write about their experiences and process their emotions, which can shift attention from negative matters toward more neutral and positive ones (Coore, 2022). Journaling has also been linked to improved self-regulation among female adolescents (Mannesa & Nur, 2025). This shift of attention can be understood as reappraisal, an emotion regulation technique in which people modify their thoughts by changing the meaning of a situation and thereby influence their emotional condition (Gross, 2014; Uusberg et al., 2019). However, reappraisal does not always succeed when cognitive functioning is suboptimal, and it may lead to rumination.

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In a Muslim context, journaling can take the form of Qur'an journaling, in which Qur'anic verses serve as a source of reflection and meaning-making about emotional experiences. This practice involves self-reflection, meaning-making, and an inner connection with Allah, which may enhance mental health (Muffarida, 2023). Other research notes that Qur'an journaling applies expressive writing and can improve self-acceptance among individuals who previously felt rejected or worthless (Salma et al., 2026).

In Islam, gratitude (syukur) linguistically means recognizing good things and making them known (Fatmawati et al., 2018). Terminologically, it refers to thankfulness for the blessings that individuals receive from Allah (Syarifah, 2023). Surah Ibrahim verse 7 (Qur'an 14:7) indicates that when individuals recognize a blessing and express gratitude, Allah will increase that blessing, whereas those who deny it will face punishment (Dewi et al., 2022). In terms of individual experience, awareness of blessings is therefore the basis of gratitude. For individuals who want their blessings to keep increasing, gratitude needs to be cultivated in all conditions, both in ease and in hardship.

Chalmers et al. (2023) explain that gratitude has several interrelated Arabic terms: shukr, imtinaan, and hamid. Shukr is an expression of thanks for blessings received from Allah and is closely associated with conditions of ease. Imtinaan is gratitude accompanied by a sense of moral responsibility for the blessings received from Allah. Hamid is praise to Allah in difficult situations or suffering. All of these forms of gratitude are expressed through the heart, the tongue, and actions.

These three variations are also supported by Imam Al-Ghazali's concept of gratitude, in which gratitude is formed when individuals perceive Allah's blessings, take joy in Allah in various conditions, even when no blessing is present, and realize gratitude through deeds in accordance with Allah's guidance, namely knowledge ('ilm), state (hal), and action (amal) (Al-Ghazali, 2022).

Sagheer and Wazir (2024) found that gratitude increased when participants listened to Qur'anic verses and then wrote gratitude journals. That study is relevant as a reference for Qur'an-based relationships with gratitude, although its procedure differs from the Qur'an journaling practice examined here. The relevance appears in the impressions of the three participants in this study, for whom reflection on Qur'anic verses was present in their experiences and in the meanings they gave to gratitude. According to Al-Ghazali (2022), gratitude arises as an effect of tranquility and spaciousness of the heart. Taken together, these findings suggest that the gratitude experienced during Qur'an journaling warrants further exploration.

Gratitude is also an important topic in positive psychology. Emmons and McCullough (2004) argue that virtue theories found in various religious teachings, as well as in the thinking of Greek philosophers such as Seneca and Aristotle, form the roots of the concept of gratitude. For Seneca, gratitude is a sincere and unburdened return of kindness as a form of respect, whereas Aristotle described gratitude as a reciprocal relationship.

Positive psychology distinguishes two dimensions of gratitude: state gratitude and trait gratitude. State gratitude arises when individuals receive kindness from others, whereas trait gratitude is a long-term, stable tendency to feel thankful across conditions.

Within the psychology of religion, which intersects with positive psychology, gratitude has a broader meaning. It is not limited to an individual's internal experience but also has a vertical relationship with God, known as gratitude to God (GTG). Park et al. (2022) argue that gratitude arises from an individual's emotional response when they perceive the presence of God. Van Cappellen et al. (2024) reinforce this view, noting that GTG does not arise spontaneously but emerges when individuals are reminded of God's presence and become aware of it. The concept

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Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

of GTG aligns with the Islamic understanding of gratitude, in which Allah is the center of gratitude. Qur'an journaling can therefore serve as a bridge between emotional experience and spiritual awareness of Allah's blessings that give rise to gratitude.

Taken together, Chalmers et al. (2023) provide a systematic review of gratitude in Islamic contexts, outlining three variations of gratitude and their psychological benefits. Sagheer and Wazir (2024) show that activities involving Qur'anic verses and gratitude journals can increase gratitude. Both studies provide a foundation for understanding the relationship among gratitude, religion, and reflective activity. However, further exploration is needed of individuals' subjective experiences in encountering and making meaning of the variations of gratitude through Qur'an journaling.

This study differs from earlier research that examined the concept of gratitude or measured its increase. It specifically explores individuals' experiences and meaning-making of the variations of gratitude (shukr, imtinaan, and hamid) during Qur'an journaling. Accordingly, the study asks how gratitude is interpreted and develops through Qur'an journaling. The article first describes the method, then presents the findings and their discussion, and concludes with the study's contribution, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is suited to understanding individuals' experiences in depth from their own perspectives (Smith et al., 2022), and it has been considered an appropriate methodology for educational research (Noon, 2018). This approach allows the exploration of how participants experience and make meaning of the variations of gratitude through Qur'an journaling.

Three members of The Qur'an Journal Indonesia (TQJI) community were selected through purposive sampling. Of 31 community members, four were identified as potential participants because they met the criteria, but only three agreed to take part. The criteria were: (1) having practiced Qur'an journaling consistently for at least two years; (2) having started the practice with the aim of healing the soul; (3) feeling tranquility or gratitude during or after Qur'an journaling; (4) being willing to be interviewed; and (5) giving the researchers access to Qur'an journals written during the first 12 months and the last 12 months of practice. The tranquility-or-gratitude criterion was set so that the meaning of these experiences could be explored in depth. However, it also limits the range of experiences that can emerge, because individuals who do not report tranquility or gratitude are not represented in this study.

The study was conducted within the TQJI community, which was founded in 2019 and actively holds online Qur'an journaling activities through the Telegram platform in which the participants took part.

Primary data were obtained through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that explored participants' experiences, reflections, and meaning-making of the variations of gratitude. Interview transcripts were the main data source for the IPA analysis.

Supporting data consisted of participants' Qur'an journal records. These documents helped the researchers understand the context of participants' practice and experiences before the interviews and prepare follow-up questions. The journal records were not used directly as a basis for the IPA analysis. Secondary data included the Qur'an and Ibn Kathir's tafsir as references for

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ISSN 1411-4976
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Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

understanding the verses that participants used for reflection. The researchers examined verses related to gratitude with reference to Ibn Kathir's tafsir by identifying each verse and its translation, studying the tafsir explanations, and then formulating the researchers' interpretations and indicators relevant to the study's objectives. These results served as the conceptual basis for the semi-structured interview guide. The examination of verses and tafsir functioned as conceptual context and did not replace the analysis of participants' experiences. Other secondary data included scientific literature on gratitude from positive psychology and from Islamic literature, including Islamic psychology.

The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed from Al-Ghazali's concept of gratitude, particularly its dimensions of knowledge ('ilm), state (hal), and action (amal). These dimensions guided the exploration of participants' recognition of blessings and of the Giver of blessings (knowledge), their inner states related to Allah (state), and the realization of gratitude in deeds (action). Chalmers et al.'s (2023) framework of shukr, imtinaan, and hamid was used to help interpret participants' experiences.

Data were collected from October to December 2025. Participants sent their Qur'an journal documents to the researchers by post for analysis. Interview data were collected in November and December 2025 in three stages: pre-interview, interview, and member checking, all conducted online. The pre-interview, held via WhatsApp, covered introductions, the study orientation, the interview agreement, informed consent, and an agreement on how participants would submit their journals. Interviews lasted 45 to 90 minutes, were guided by the semi-structured interview guide, and were recorded with participants' consent. The researchers then conducted member checking by sending written summaries of participants' experiences via WhatsApp to confirm that the wording matched what they had said. This step checked the accuracy of the summaries and did not include validation of the phenomenological interpretations or themes constructed by the researchers. The primary data comprised verbatim interview transcripts, participants' Qur'an journal documents, and the researchers' observation notes on those documents.

Data were analyzed using the IPA procedure, beginning with repeated reading of the transcripts to understand the context of participants' emotional and spiritual experiences. This was followed by Exploratory Noting (EN) and the formulation of Experiential Statements (ES) based on each participant's narrative. The ES of each participant were examined to identify relationships of meaning and grouped into Personal Experiential Themes (PET) for each participant. After the individual analyses were complete, the researchers conducted a cross-case analysis by comparing similarities and differences in participants' experiences. This process produced Group Experiential Themes (GET) while preserving the distinctiveness of each participant's experience. The researchers then entered the interview data and analysis results manually into NVivo so that they could be documented and traced. An example of tracing theme formation from interview to GET is presented in the Results section. The validity of the data was maintained through member checking, which ensured that the data reflected participants' experiences. Participants' Qur'an journal records served as supporting data to understand the context of their experiences.

This study received ethical approval from the International Open University Board of Research and Publications (IOUBRP), Ref. No. ETHIC 54/01-26. All participants provided informed

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ISSN 1411-4976
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Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

consent before the study began. Participants' confidentiality was protected by using the codes P1, P2, and P3. Interview excerpts originally in Indonesian were translated into English by the authors.

C. RESULT

Cross-case analysis using IPA produced 13 Group Experiential Themes (GET). Each GET describes experiences with similar meaning across participants. Unique experiences that belonged to only one participant were still considered in the individual analysis, even though they were not fully represented in the cross-case themes. This article focuses on the GETs related to the experience and meaning-making of the variations of gratitude through Qur'an journaling. Direct quotations come from the semi-structured interview transcripts. Codes P1, P2, and P3 conceal participants' identities, and page numbers indicate the location of each quotation in the respective transcript.

Table 1 lists all 13 GETs. This article discusses three variations of gratitude, namely shukr, hamid, and imtinaan. Therefore, the discussion focuses on four GETs relevant to this focus: GET 10 (feeling gratitude for Allah's blessings), GET 4 (experiencing Allah's presence), GET 7 (saying hamdalah in various conditions), and GET 5 (gratitude drives good deeds). The remaining nine GETs remain part of the overall cross-case analysis but fall outside the scope of this article. The four GETs are presented according to their relevance to the research focus rather than the order in which themes emerged during analysis.

Table 1
List of Group Experiential Themes (GET) from Cross-Case Analysis

No.	Group Experiential Theme (GET)	Subtheme(s)
1	Qur'an journaling brings positive emotions	1A. Calm arises through Qur'an journaling; 1B. Emotions feel better
2	Community as a driver of consistency in Qur'an journaling	—
3	Qur'an journaling as a means of self-reflection	—
4	Experiencing the presence of Allah	4A. Feeling connected with Allah; 4B. Feeling watched by Allah
5	Gratitude drives good deeds	—
6	Qur'an journaling shapes how one thinks about a problem	6A. Qur'an journaling builds awareness in thinking; 6B. Trials understood as the best destiny
7	Saying hamdalah in various conditions	—
8	Environment as a support system in making sense of life's dynamics	—
9	Experiencing Allah's help	—
10	Feeling gratitude for Allah's blessings	—
11	Qur'an journaling triggers emotional change	—
12	Changes in response to problems	12A. Restraining oneself in uncomfortable situations; 12B. Choosing journaling when emotions arise
13	Attitudes in interacting with others	—

Source: Cross-case analysis results.

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Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

Table 2 illustrates how interview data from two participants were developed into personal experiential themes and then into a cross-case theme. As shown in Table 2, the experiences of P1 and P3 were analysed individually and produced different PETs. For P1, the experience of being watched by Allah appeared alongside an awareness of still being negligent in worship, and was formulated as PET 6 (feeling watched by Allah). P3 linked the feeling of being watched by Allah to her experiences of worship, trials, and ease in life, and this was formulated as PET 9 (connectedness with Allah with a constant feeling of being watched). Both PETs were grouped into GET 4 under the subtheme "feeling Allah watching" because they share a similar meaning, although each participant emphasizes the experience differently.

Table 2

Example of IPA Analysis from Interview Excerpts: EN, ES, PET, and GET

Analysis stage	P1	P3
Interview excerpt	"Yes, I feel that Allah is All-Seeing, but I am still negligent." (P1, p. 14)	"Yes, I feel very much that I am watched. If my worship is delayed, Allah suddenly sends a test. When I am in a good state, I am met with gratitude, such as ease." (P3, p. 25)
Exploratory noting (EN)	Feeling watched by Allah but still negligent	- Feeling watched by Allah - Allah's watchfulness takes the form of trials when worship is neglected, and of ease and gratitude when worship goes well
Experiential statement (ES)	The participant feels that Allah watches over her, although she is occasionally still negligent in her deeds	The participant feels that Allah is always watching, and this watchfulness is directly felt when her worship is going well or when she is negligent
Personal experiential theme (PET)	PET 6. Feeling watched by Allah	PET 9. Connectedness with Allah with a constant feeling of being watched
Group experiential theme (GET)	GET 4. Experiencing Allah's presence, Subtheme 2: Feeling Allah watching	GET 4. Experiencing Allah's presence, Subtheme 2: Feeling Allah watching

Source: P1 interview transcript, p. 14; P3 interview transcript, p. 25; researchers' IPA analysis notes.

GET 10: Feeling gratitude for Allah's blessings. This theme describes participants' experiences of directly encountering and feeling blessings in various forms. These blessings evoked an inner response, namely gratitude. For P1, a pregnancy that occurred shortly after the loss of a child was recognized as a blessing that prompted gratitude, expressed spontaneously in the words "alhamdulillah": "Alhamdulillah, three months later I was pregnant again" (P1, p. 10).

P2 expressed gratitude when she was introduced to Qur'an journaling. The practice made her realize that connecting with the Qur'an was itself a blessing, especially because she had previously lived in a very desperate condition: "I was really grateful, because my situation had been that dire. But being introduced to QJ opened a path for me to reconnect with the Qur'an" (P2, p. 3). For P3, blessings were understood as ease in daily life and the rescue of her marriage: "Allah has given

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ISSN 1411-4976
E-ISSN 2356-1955
Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

me many conveniences, such as having a school and having a teacher. These are blessings, right? Now I immediately feel grateful and at ease" (P3, p. 25). She also said, "I feel grateful that my marriage has been saved like this. Alhamdulillah, I was able to endure without feeling that my husband was like that. Sometimes there is a feeling of 'why is this,' but now everything is communicated" (P3, p. 2).

GET 4: Experiencing Allah's presence. This theme describes participants' experiences of feeling Allah's presence in their lives. The experiences fall into two subthemes: feeling connected with Allah and feeling watched by Allah.

Feeling connected with Allah. The stories of the Prophets' struggles in the Qur'an made P1 realize that every trial and hardship is a means for her to draw closer to Allah: "If there is a sad or heavy test, I feel connected with Allah" (P1, p. 9). P2, who experienced a period of distress and illness, came to recognize that she could not manage everything on her own. She then felt Allah's presence arranging her life and felt her love for Allah growing: "I used to feel I could manage on my own, but in fact we have Allah. I am arranged by Allah, and the love keeps growing. I feel that I am a servant, and Allah is near" (P2, pp. 3, 7). Qur'an journaling also helped P3 become more aware of Allah's presence and feel connected to Him. She interpreted this as a blessing that keeps increasing, especially when she was sad and alone: "Connected to Allah in every activity. QJ makes us realize that we are only servants; every activity is made easy by Allah and reminded by Allah, and whispered in the heart. When I am sad and alone, QJ makes me feel that Allah is present in my life" (P3, p. 20).

Feeling watched by Allah. P1 described a sense that Allah is always watching her, even though she is still negligent in performing worship on time: "Yes, I feel that Allah is All-Seeing, but I am still negligent" (P1, p. 14). P3 also described feeling watched by Allah. She linked delays in worship to the arrival of trials, whereas punctual worship was associated with ease: "Yes, I feel it very much. If my worship is delayed, Allah suddenly sends a test. When I am in a good state, I am met with gratitude, such as ease" (P3, p. 25). Her account shows how she understood her relationship with Allah through both worship and everyday life.

GET 7: Saying hamdalah in various conditions. Two participants, P2 and P3, described hamdalah as an attitude that arises in many conditions of life. P2's inner experience emerged during Qur'an journaling, especially while she contemplated Surah Al-Fatihah. She realized that there will always be blessings to feel and be grateful for, even in difficult times, and that in every situation she should first say hamdalah: "When I say 'alhamdu,' it means praise and gratitude: praise without complaining. I now have a new perspective: however dark it is, I have something to be grateful for. I changed my mind. Okay, what is there to be grateful for first? That is my foundation of thinking. Alhamdulillah, alhamdulillah" (P2, p. 2).

P3 likewise realized, through Qur'an journaling, that she should begin with hamdalah in every condition, which was accompanied by the experience of receiving many ease from Allah: "In any circumstance we need to say Alhamdulillah, all praise is due to Allah who eases all of His affairs" (P3, p. 15).

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Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

GET 5: Gratitude drives good deeds. This theme describes participants' experiences of turning gratitude into concrete action. Qur'an journaling led P1 to understand that gratitude is not sufficient when only spoken; it must be realized through acts of worship as a form of reciprocity and thanks to Allah: "Maybe that is it, gratitude: thanking is not just alhamdulillah, but what is the action? Allah has given life and potential for worship, because Allah did not create humans except to worship" (P1, p. 14).

P2 understood gratitude as the unity of heart, tongue, and deeds, and she began to express it in the smallest and simplest acts: "Oh, it turns out gratitude has three meanings: heart, tongue, and deeds. Alhamdulillah, I have something, and I put it into practice through obedience. So the meaning of my gratitude is aligning with that. Now, in any condition, I try to hold positive thoughts and be obedient. I do many small habits like that" (P2). She also noted that this habit does not come easily and requires consistent effort over a long period: "Since 2023 at ILP, I have made a habit of smiling all the way, buying from sellers, including elderly ones, and talking with them. Now it has become normal. There is a program called 'make your day barakah'" (P2, p. 4).

P3 understood gratitude as goodness received from Allah that developed into ongoing good deeds in line with her life journey. Each event taught her more about gratitude, and she asked herself what else she should do, such as giving charity or helping others, within her limitations: "Alhamdulillah, without realizing it, I feel I am passing steps one by one. In the end I learned a lot from each event. I understand, and I ask, 'What else do I need to do?' (charity, helping others, and so on), with my limitations. Gratitude here means being given a great deal of goodness" (P3, p. 18).

Across these themes, all participants described experiences of gratitude arising from their Qur'an journaling practice. Their gratitude was not limited to feeling blessings. It was understood more broadly, encompassing connection with Allah, the sense that Allah is always watching, saying hamdalah in various conditions, and taking concrete action as an expression of gratitude in everyday life.

D. DISCUSSION

The findings show that gratitude in Qur'an journaling is understood not only as an emotional response to blessings, but also as a relational experience with Allah and as an expression of gratitude in various circumstances. To understand these variations within an Islamic context, this study uses the concepts of shukr, imtinaan, and hamid from Chalmers et al. (2023) as interpretive lenses for the experiences identified through IPA. These concepts are applied according to the characteristics of the experiences participants described, not on the assumption that every participant experienced all variations of gratitude. The three concepts thus deepen the understanding of participants' experiences while the distinctiveness of each individual experience remains the basis of interpretation.

Gratitude as a response to blessings. The Qur'an journaling practice shows that participants developed a heightened inner sensitivity to identifying blessings. As GET 10 illustrates, all participants recognized their experiences as blessings from Allah and responded with gratitude. This finding is consistent with the concept of state gratitude in studies by Bohlmeijer et al. (2022)

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Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

and Watkins et al. (2022), in which gratitude is a cognitive and emotional response when individuals receive benefits they regard as good. However, this study shows a more varied context for state gratitude, because gratitude arose not only from physical or material blessings but also from spiritual experiences.

In the interviews, participants described changes in how they interpreted circumstances that had previously felt difficult. Reflection on Qur'anic verses within Qur'an journaling was part of this experience, as participants began to recognize blessings and find things to be grateful for amid present difficulties. This experience relates to participants' initial aim of healing their souls. The finding converges with Yu et al. (2023), who examined journaling in relation to emotion regulation and affective experience. However, because Yu et al. (2023) did not examine Qur'an journaling, the present finding is interpreted as a change that participants experienced and made sense of, rather than as a test of effectiveness. The distinctive feature of this study lies in reflection that is anchored in Allah through Qur'anic verses, so that the reflective process frames gratitude in accordance with the guidance that Allah establishes in the Qur'an.

The reflective writing in Qur'an journaling also resembles the gratitude writing format examined by Regan et al. (2023), who found that longer narrative gratitude writing increased gratitude and produced more positive effects than list formats.

From an Islamic perspective, awareness that blessings come from Allah is an essential part of the concept of gratitude. This awareness is reflected in GET 10, which has the characteristics of the shukr variation because participants recognized an experience as a blessing originating from Allah. For example, P2 felt grateful when she recognized Qur'an journaling as a blessing because it allowed her to reconnect with Allah. In other words, all participants showed characteristics of knowledge ('ilm) in Al-Ghazali's concept of gratitude.

Accordingly, all participants showed that gratitude begins with awareness of the blessings they experience and understand as gifts from Allah. This experience has aspects of state gratitude and is understood as a variation of shukr in the Islamic perspective, which in Al-Ghazali's concept corresponds to the characteristic of knowledge ('ilm). The findings also indicate that this gratitude does not stop at recognizing blessings from Allah. It develops into a more intimate experience when participants feel Allah's closeness and presence in their lives.

Gratitude centred on Allah. The experience of gratitude centred on Allah appears in GET 4, which concerns experiencing Allah's presence in life. Allah's presence was not merely an understanding that Allah exists; participants experienced a relational bond with Allah. They felt connected to Allah and close to Him. This experience aligns with the concept of gratitude to God (GTG), in which gratitude arises from an emotional response to experiencing God's goodness. Other studies describe GTG as gratitude related to closeness to God (Van Cappellen et al., 2024).

Gratitude centred on Allah was also expressed through reflection on Qur'anic verses. The verses served as a medium through which participants understood their life experiences by considering the experiences of earlier people, including the Prophets and righteous people. Participants therefore viewed events in their lives as connected to Allah's presence. The experience of connection with Allah was also accompanied by self-awareness as a servant and a growing love

Volume 28, Number 2, 2028; pp. 112-126
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ISSN 1411-4976
E-ISSN 2356-1955
Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

for Allah. This corresponds to the characteristic of state (hal) in Al-Ghazali's concept of gratitude, in which hal is a state of love for the Giver of blessings, namely Allah.

On the basis of these experiences, the findings go beyond recognizing blessings to a profound relational experience with Allah that shapes participants' moral responsibility in worship. This is understood as an aspect of imtinaan: gratitude accompanied by an awareness of the need to repay goodness (grateful obligation), a sense of indebtedness for goodness received, and an inner condition that is moved to do good because one recognizes one's position as a recipient. P1 and P3, for example, felt Allah's presence in the form of watchfulness across their daily activities. This experience made them aware that they are servants. Like a servant to a master, they felt the need to perform acts of worship as repayment for the blessings given by Allah. As P3 experienced it, Allah's watchfulness appeared as a test when she neglected worship and as ease when her worship went well. This experience was positive and did not burden her worship, because worship itself became an expression of gratitude. Participants also expressed gratitude through other positive activities, not only through daily worship. P1 often shared her Qur'an journaling experiences with friends: "I'm used to studying the Qur'an, alhamdulillah; I like sharing with my friends" (P1, p. 10). P2 felt able to communicate more warmly and appreciatively: "In 2022 I started teaching again, and I applied this to the children, to be more appreciative. Before, I was very selective, you know? It felt exclusive" (P2, p. 4).

These experiences are reinforced by GET 5, in which participants confirmed that gratitude can be expressed through the deeds of the heart, the tongue, and action. Qur'an journaling fostered this awareness and encouraged participants to turn gratitude into concrete deeds as a form of obedience and a way of repaying Allah's many blessings. P1's experience explicitly links the recognition of Allah's gifts with the urge to express gratitude through action (see GET 5). Her statement shows that she regards the life and potential given by Allah as something to be thankful for through concrete deeds. Her urge to do good is therefore understood not merely as positive behavior but also as a form of responsibility and reciprocity for Allah's gifts.

This experience is consistent with the concept of transcendent indebtedness to God, a sense of indebtedness for gifts received from God that is associated with secure attachment to God, religiosity, positive well-being, and positive action (Nelson et al., 2022). The good deeds participants performed were not limited to themselves but extended to others. P3, for example, considered various ways to do good for others, such as giving charity. This experience parallels Nelson et al. (2024), who examined the prosocial consequences of transcendent indebtedness. Individuals perform acts of kindness toward others as positive actions without burden, supported by a secure relationship with God.

Participants' experiences in this subsection therefore moved from recognizing blessings toward a deeper relationship with Allah, which generated a sense of attachment as recipients of blessings and an expression of gratitude in positive action. This reflects the imtinaan variation and aligns with Al-Ghazali's concept of gratitude as action ('amal).

Gratitude in various conditions. Gratitude in various conditions is shown in GET 7, saying hamdalah in various conditions. This experience was explicitly described by P2 and P3, who both understood hamdalah as a response that should be pursued in various circumstances, not only when

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E-ISSN 2356-1955
Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

receiving pleasant blessings. P2 described how reflecting on Surah Al-Fatihah helped her see that there were still things to be grateful for even in very difficult circumstances. P3 understood hamdalah as a response to be pursued in many circumstances of life.

P2's Qur'an journal documents show how her reflections on Qur'anic verses were expressed through various expressions of gratitude. When reflecting on Surah Ibrahim verse 7, P2 wrote: "O Allah, thank You for reminding me through this verse. Alhamdulillah, because Allah separated me from forbidden attachments. Alhamdulillah, I receive affection from my extended family. Alhamdulillah, I was awakened to become humble. Alhamdulillah, a path opened for me to connect with the Qur'an. Nothing that happens to us is a coincidence." In the interview, P2 also described a new perspective: "however dark it may be, I have something to be grateful for" (P2, p. 2). She described a shift in her orientation from focusing on what she lacked to focusing on gratitude as the foundation of her thinking. The alignment between her journal entries and her interview data shows how she expresses and makes meaning of gratitude through Qur'an journaling.

P3's experience shows a different emphasis. In her Qur'an journal entry on Surah Taha verse 131, P3 wrote: "Alhamdulillah, after surgery, fasting left me dizzy and feverish." In the interview, she said: "In any circumstance we need to say Alhamdulillah, all praise is due to Allah who eases all of His affairs" (P3, p. 15). For P3, saying hamdalah or expressing gratitude in every circumstance is connected to the belief that when something begins with gratitude, Allah grants ease. Both data sources show that P3 expressed gratitude while her physical condition was uncomfortable, and that she understood saying hamdalah as a response to be pursued in every circumstance.

This experience can be interpreted through the concept of hamid discussed by Chalmers et al. (2023), particularly in understanding gratitude in relation to difficult situations or suffering. In this context, hamid helps interpret how P2 and P3 understood and pursued expressions of gratitude in difficult conditions. However, the data do not provide explicit evidence of similar experiences for P1. These findings therefore do not claim that all participants followed the same pattern of meaning-making.

These findings relate to research on gratitude practices in psychology. Yu et al. (2023) state that gratitude journaling is associated with a shift toward more positive feelings, and Stone et al. (2022) examined gratitude letters and the modification of positive attention bias. Layous et al. (2023) also found that gratitude conditions are associated with lower negative affect and higher positive affect. Kirca et al. (2023) examined, through a meta-analysis, the effects of gratitude interventions on psychological well-being. This literature provides context for discussing the relationships among gratitude practice, attention, and affective experience. This study, however, did not test changes in attentional bias, reductions in negative affect, or the effectiveness of Qur'an journaling as an intervention. The findings are therefore best understood as a description of the gratitude experiences and meanings that participants reported within Qur'an journaling practice.

Theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the findings show that gratitude in Qur'an journaling is not a single psychological experience but appears in diverse forms of meaning-making: shukr, imtinaan, and hamid. Shukr is reflected when participants recognize blessings and their Giver. Imtinaan is reflected when participants experience a connection with Allah that drives

Volume 28, Number 2, 2028; pp. 112-126
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ISSN 1411-4976
E-ISSN 2356-1955
Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

moral responsibility to act positively as an expression of thanks. Hamid is reflected when participants strive to say hamdalah in various conditions, including during difficulties.

The findings offer a perspective on the diversity of gratitude experiences in Qur'an journaling through Islamic concepts of gratitude. In psychological literature, gratitude has been studied as a momentary emotional experience (state gratitude), a dispositional tendency (trait gratitude), and gratitude directed specifically toward God (gratitude to God). Studies of gratitude to God show that God-oriented gratitude is related to individuals' relationship with God. This study suggests that this orientation toward Allah may take different forms for each individual. The findings complement these studies by describing variations of God-oriented gratitude through the concepts of shukr, imtinaan, and hamid in the context of Qur'an journaling.

This study therefore contributes theoretically by showing that shukr, imtinaan, and hamid are not only terms with distinct meanings in Islamic literature but can also be used to understand the diversity of gratitude experiences among Qur'an journaling participants. The findings highlight the importance of considering the Islamic context when studying gratitude, because the Islamic concept of gratitude encompasses more dimensions of meaning than a response to benefits received.

Practically, the study offers phenomenological insights for mental health practitioners and community facilitators seeking to understand gratitude experiences in Qur'an journaling. Facilitators can create space for individuals to recognize and make meaning of blessings, feel connected with Allah in ways that foster positive responsibility, and pursue expressions of gratitude in many conditions. Gratitude practice thus need not be limited to listing things one is grateful for; it can also make room for diverse experiences and meanings of gratitude. These implications reflect participants' experiences in this qualitative study and are not evidence that Qur'an journaling is effective as a clinical intervention.

E. CONCLUSION

This study shows that gratitude in Qur'an journaling has varied meanings that can be interpreted through the concepts of shukr, imtinaan, and hamid. Shukr is shown through experiences of recognizing blessings and acknowledging Allah as their Giver. Imtinaan is shown through experiences of connection with Allah accompanied by awareness of being a servant and by a moral responsibility to act positively. Hamid is shown through efforts to say hamdalah in various conditions, including difficult circumstances. Explicit experiences reflecting hamid were found in P2 and P3, so this variation cannot be stated as explicitly present in all participants.

These three concepts help explain the diversity of gratitude experiences among participants in Qur'an journaling. The findings suggest that God-oriented gratitude may carry different emphases for each individual. Islamic concepts of gratitude can therefore serve as an interpretive lens for understanding gratitude in Qur'an journaling without assuming that every participant experiences all variations of meaning.

This study has several limitations. First, the small number of participants from one Qur'an journaling community means the findings should be understood within the context of these participants' experiences and should not be generalized to all Qur'an journaling practitioners. Second, the limited empirical literature on imtinaan and hamid makes it difficult to compare and

Volume 28, Number 2, 2028; pp. 112-126
DOI: 10.22373/substantia.v28i2.21

ISSN 1411-4976
E-ISSN 2356-1955
Vol. 28. No. 2, October 2026, 112-126

strengthen the interpretation of the findings. Although Islamic literature provides conceptual distinctions among shukr, imtinaan, and hamid, empirical studies that specifically explore the psychological experiences of these three variations remain scarce. Future research could expand the study with larger and more diverse samples and longitudinal designs to produce more generalizable results. Quantitative studies are also needed to test and clarify the constructs of shukr, imtinaan, and hamid based on the characteristics of experiences identified in this study.

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Declaration of AI Usage

The authors used ChatGPT by OpenAI to assist with manuscript evaluation, argument refinement, drafting selected passages, translation, and language editing. AI-generated suggestions do not constitute research evidence. The authors retain full responsibility for verifying the sources, interpretations, and final content of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research or its publication.

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