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How Practitioners Make Sense of Gratitude in Qur'an Journaling

ABSTRACT: Qur'an journaling provides a setting in which practitioners relate scriptural reflection to gratitude, but the meanings of this experience require differentiation from claims of psychological improvement. This study asks how three experienced members of The Qur'an Journal Indonesia community make sense of gratitude and how their accounts converge and differ. Interview transcripts were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; personal Qur'an journals supplied contextual material rather than an independently coded corpus. Four gratitude-related themes from a broader set of 13 cross-case themes inform the discussion. The accounts support three overlapping meanings: recognizing blessings, responding through responsibility and action, and sustaining praise during difficulty. The meanings are presented as overlapping interpretive groupings rather than validated psychological constructs. Praise during difficulty is explicit in P2 and P3, while continued negligence, sustained effort, and discomfort qualify a uniformly positive interpretation. The contribution is a situated account of gratitude as meaning-making and practice oriented toward Allah. Purposive selection of participants who already reported tranquility or gratitude and the retrospective design preclude causal or population-level conclusions.

Aisyah Amini[1*]
Evi Afifah Hurriyati[1]

[1]International Open University

*[1]*Corresponding email:*
aisyah.amini@student.iou.edu.gm

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A. INTRODUCTION

Qur'an journaling brings reflection on scripture into accounts of emotional difficulty, religious commitment, and everyday life. Its significance for gratitude concerns how practitioners recognize gifts, relate to Allah, and respond to hardship, rather than whether writing alone produces psychological improvement. Emotional difficulty provides a relevant context: Calista et al. (2023), for example, reported an association between maternal psychological stress and children's emotional and behavioral problems. That correlational finding does not establish the benefits of journaling; it underscores the need to distinguish accounts of coping from evidence of therapeutic effectiveness.

In Indonesia, Qur'an journaling has been documented as a practice in digital religious spaces. Farahdiba (2024) examined @aisharizqy's Instagram content in relation to tafsir learning and religious authority. This provides a context for examining practitioners' engagement with Qur'anic verses, but does not establish the prevalence or growth rate of the practice. The present study focuses on the meanings practitioners attach to gratitude within one community.

Research on writing provides a related, but distinct, psychological context. Coore (2022) examined journaling and attentional regulation in a small study involving exposure to artificial trauma; its findings do not establish general reductions in depression or anxiety. Mannesa and Nur (2025) reported improved self-regulation following journaling in a one-group pretest–posttest study of female participants, a design that limits causal inference. Reappraisal offers a conceptual account of how changing an interpretation can change emotional experience (Gross, 2014; Uusberg et al., 2019). It is used here as a point of comparison, not as a mechanism measured in the present study.

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In a Muslim context, Qur'an journaling involves written reflection on Qur'anic verses in relation to personal experience. Mufarrida (2023) examined this practice as lived reception of the Qur'an, including exegetical, aesthetic, and functional dimensions. Salma et al. (2026) reported increased self-acceptance scores after a Qur'an journaling program, while acknowledging the absence of a control group. These studies concern scriptural reception and psychological outcomes, respectively; neither answers how experienced practitioners make sense of gratitude in their own accounts.

Islamic scholarship situates gratitude within recognition of divine benefaction and the response it calls forth. Fatmawati et al. (2018) examine the semantics of shukr in the Qur'an, while Maya (2023) discusses its theological and social dimensions. Qur'an 14:7 connects thankfulness with an increase in divine favor, as discussed by Dewi et al. (2022). This scriptural context helps explain why practitioners might relate gratitude to Allah; it does not establish that every pleasant event is an empirically demonstrable reward for a particular act.

A complementary lens is the account of gratitude through knowledge (’ilm), inner state (hal), and action (’amal) attributed to Al-Ghazali (2022). These dimensions direct attention to recognition of blessings and their Giver, the orientation of the heart, and the expression of gratitude in deeds. They do not map one-to-one onto the three meanings: recognizing a blessing, praising Allah during hardship, and acting gratefully may each involve knowledge, feeling, and action.

Sagheer and Wazir (2024) examined Qur'anic verse reading and blessing journaling among university teachers and students. Their procedure differs from the sustained reflective practice considered here. Moreover, the reported student gratitude mean decreases from pretest to posttest despite the broader positive interpretation offered in the paper. The study is therefore used as a methodological comparator, not as unequivocal evidence that Qur'an-based journaling increases gratitude. An experiential investigation can instead ask what participants understand gratitude to mean without assuming a uniform improvement.

Gratitude also has historical, philosophical, and psychological dimensions. The volume edited by Emmons and McCullough (2004) brings together these perspectives. This broader context positions gratitude as both an experience and a practice, providing a point of dialogue for the accounts examined here.

Psychological scholarship distinguishes state-like gratitude from a more enduring grateful disposition (Bohlmeijer et al., 2022). This distinction concerns the temporal character of gratitude, whereas gratitude to God concerns its perceived recipient or orientation. These are different analytical questions: a God-oriented expression may be momentary or part of a sustained practice. The interviews in this study do not measure changes in either state or trait gratitude.

Research on gratitude to God (GTG) provides a direct point of comparison. Park et al. (2022) examine its distinctiveness from general gratitude and religiousness, while Van Cappellen et al. (2024) investigate its occurrence, eliciting situations, and expression. Watkins et al. (2022) examine its relationship with religious well-being over time. These studies show why orientation toward God warrants attention; they do not establish that religious gratitude must always arise through conscious reminders or that the experiences reported here are unique to Muslims.

Taken together, the literature leaves a specific interpretive question. Studies of Qur'an journaling address religious reception or changes in psychological outcomes, while gratitude scholarship distinguishes dimensions that need not map neatly onto practitioners' accounts. The gap addressed here is how recognition of blessings, responsibility toward Allah, and praise during difficulty are articulated and differentiated within sustained Qur'an journaling, including where participants' experiences complicate the conceptual framework.

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This study asks: how do three experienced members of The Qur'an Journal Indonesia community make sense of gratitude in relation to Qur'an journaling, and how do their accounts converge and differ? It uses IPA to examine the reported experiences and brings them into dialogue with Islamic and psychological scholarship. Its contribution is a situated interpretation of three overlapping meanings—recognizing blessings, responding through responsibility and action, and sustaining praise during difficulty—rather than the discovery or validation of three new psychological constructs.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how participants made sense of gratitude through Qur'an journaling. IPA examines individual experiential accounts before identifying patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2022; Noon, 2018).

Three members of The Qur'an Journal Indonesia (TQJI), an online community conducting activities through Telegram, were recruited purposively. Of 31 members, four met the eligibility criteria and three agreed to participate. Eligibility required at least two years of consistent Qur'an journaling, an initial intention of healing the soul, reported tranquility or gratitude during or after practice, willingness to be interviewed, and access to journals from the first and most recent 12 months of practice. Selecting participants who already reported tranquility or gratitude restricted the study's representation of contrasting experiences.

Data collection took place from October to December 2025, with online semi-structured interviews conducted in November and December. Interviews lasted 45–90 minutes and were recorded with consent. Verbatim transcripts constituted the IPA corpus. Personal journals informed contextual understanding and follow-up questions; quoted entries served as contextual illustrations rather than an independently coded corpus or evidence of longitudinal change. The interview guide drew on Al-Ghazali's dimensions of gratitude—knowledge ('ilm), inner state (hal), and action ('amal). Chalmiers et al.'s (2023) distinctions among shukr, imtinaan, and hamid informed early interpretation as background terms; they were not applied as final analytic categories or as a validated classification imposed on participants' accounts.

Analysis proceeded through repeated transcript reading, Exploratory Noting (EN), Experiential Statements (ES), and Personal Experiential Themes (PET) within each case. Cross-case comparison then generated Group Experiential Themes (GET), attending to similarities and differences among participants. Interview data and analytical records were subsequently entered into NVivo for organization and traceability. The Results section illustrates the analytical chain from excerpts to themes. Participants checked written interview summaries through WhatsApp for accuracy; this process did not validate the researchers' interpretations. The theoretically informed guide and purposive selection were recognized as limits on the range of experiences represented.

The study received ethical approval from the International Open University Board of Research and Publications (IOUBRP), which approved it on 26 January 2025. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was protected through the identifiers P1–P3. Interview excerpts were translated from Indonesian into English by the authors.

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C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

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 the 13 GETs reported in the broader cross-case analysis. For the present question, the article examines GET 10 (feeling gratitude for Allah's blessings), GET 4 (experiencing Allah's presence), GET 7 (praising Allah in various conditions), and GET 5 (gratitude drives good deeds). The other nine GETs are retained to make the broader analytical context visible. The four selected themes are organized by relevance to gratitude, not as successive developmental stages. The three conceptual meanings discussed below are interpretive groupings across these themes, not three additional GETs.

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	Praising Allah 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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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 analyzed 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 "alḥamdulillāh": "Alhamdulillah, three months later I was pregnant again" (P1, p. 10).

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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 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: Praising Allah in various conditions. Two participants, P2 and P3, described alḥamdulillāh 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-Fātiḥah. 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 alḥamdulillāh: "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).

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P3 likewise realized, through Qur'an journaling, that she should begin with alḥamdulillāh in every condition, which was accompanied by the experience of receiving 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).

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. 3).

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 the four selected themes, the participants connected gratitude with recognizing blessings and responding through worship or everyday action. Their accounts also contained differences that resist a uniformly positive narrative: P1 acknowledged continuing negligence despite feeling watched by Allah; P2 described gratitude as requiring sustained effort; and P3 interpreted the relation between worship and life events through divine watchfulness. Praise in difficult circumstances was explicit in P2 and P3. These differences provide the basis for the interpretation that follows.

D. DISCUSSION

The four experiential themes support three overlapping meanings of gratitude: recognition of blessings, responsibility expressed through action, and praise amid difficulty. The discussion relates these meanings to the Islamic and psychological literature while distinguishing the participants' accounts from the researchers' conceptual interpretation. The contribution is not that a prior taxonomy has been confirmed, but that these accounts show where the literature's distinctions illuminate experience and where they remain incomplete. In particular, closeness to Allah and feeling watched are not, on their own, sufficient evidence of gratitude or indebtedness.

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Recognizing blessings. GET 10 contains different objects of gratitude: P1's pregnancy after bereavement, P2's renewed access to the Qur'an, and P3's everyday support and marital continuity. The common feature is the participants' appraisal of these experiences as gifts from Allah. This resembles the benefit-recognition aspect of state-like gratitude described by Bohlmeijer et al. (2022). However, these interviews establish neither the intensity of a gratitude state nor a change in a stable disposition. Their analytical value lies in showing what is recognized as a blessing in each life context.

The case differences matter. P1's account locates gratitude alongside loss rather than demonstrating that loss has been resolved. P2 understands access to the Qur'an itself as the gift, so the object of gratitude is partly the reflective practice through which she makes sense of experience. P3 emphasizes continuity and available support. These interpretations suggest that recognition concerns the perceived significance of an event, not simply whether an event is pleasant. Yu et al. (2023) examine beliefs about emotion and the initiation and outcomes of gratitude journaling; this offers a comparator for reflective practice, but cannot establish the cause of changes described in these interviews.

Regan et al. (2023) found differences between narrative and list-based expressions of gratitude. That experimental comparison helps distinguish writing formats, whereas the present study examines the meaning of writing anchored in scripture. It cannot determine whether narrative length, verse reflection, or another feature accounts for participants' experiences. The relevant distinction is between a reported meaning and a tested mechanism.

Recognizing an experience as a blessing from Allah can be interpreted through shukr. It also resonates with the knowledge dimension in the Al-Ghazali framework used to guide the interviews. The correspondence is partial: the excerpts show recognition of a perceived gift and its Giver, but do not justify assigning each participant a fixed level of spiritual knowledge or claiming that this dimension invariably precedes the others.

Recognition therefore provides one meaning of gratitude, without exhausting it. In GET 5, participants also ask what they should do in response. The relationship between recognizing a gift and taking responsibility is central to the next interpretation, but should not be presented as a developmental sequence established by longitudinal observation.

Gratitude as a responsibility expressed through action. GET 4 shows relational language of nearness, dependence, and watchfulness. This is relevant to research distinguishing gratitude to God from general gratitude (Park et al., 2022), but a sense of divine presence is broader than thankfulness. It becomes relevant to gratitude here when read alongside explicit recognition of gifts in GET 10 and the participants' accounts of responding through deeds in GET 5. Orientation toward Allah is consequently a connection across the themes, not an additional gratitude type established by closeness alone.

The interviews also indicate why Qur'anic reflection matters to these accounts. P1 relates the Prophets' struggles to her own trials, while P2 describes al-Fātiḥah as prompting attention to what remains worthy of praise. Scripture supplies a vocabulary and narrative setting through which experiences are interpreted. This is evidence of participants' reception of the Qur'an, not proof

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that their personal interpretations reproduce the meaning of a particular tafsir or that scripture independently caused the reported changes. The distinction preserves both the religious specificity of the practice and the empirical scope of the study.

The evidence for responsibility is clearest in P1's question about the action that should follow alḥamdulillāh, P2's effort to align heart, speech, and obedience, and P3's question about further charity and assistance within her limitations. These accounts connect receiving with responding. They support an interpretation of gratitude as moral practice, but do not demonstrate a uniform experience of debt, repayment, or effortless obligation. P1's continuing negligence and P2's description of sustained effort qualify any claim that awareness automatically produces action. Additional interview examples connect this responsibility to relationships: P1 said, "I'm used to studying the Qur'an, alhamdulillah; I like sharing with my friends" (P1, p. 10), while P2 described becoming more appreciative in teaching: "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 are reported practices, not independently observed behavioral outcomes.

P3's account requires a further distinction. She relates delayed worship to trials and punctual worship to ease. This is her interpretation of events, rather than evidence that a particular lapse caused divine punishment. The same theme includes P1's admission of negligence despite awareness of divine watchfulness, showing that awareness and conduct need not coincide. Read together, the cases make visible a tension between gratitude as an aspiration and gratitude as enacted practice. Neither account establishes whether watchfulness was consistently comforting, burdensome, or both.

Nelson et al. (2023) introduce transcendent indebtedness to God, and Nelson et al. (2024) examine its prosocial consequences. These provide conceptual comparisons for the link between receiving and responding, but do not validate an equivalent construct in this sample. The present study did not measure secure attachment, indebtedness, or prosocial outcomes. Nor can research in other religious settings establish that these participants' worship was free from burden. The comparison is limited to the possible meaning of an obligation to respond to perceived divine gifts.

Thus, the second meaning, gratitude as a responsibility expressed through action, concerns worship and ordinary acts toward others. It may be read alongside 'amal in the Al-Ghazali framework, but action also presupposes recognition and an affective orientation. These dimensions overlap rather than mapping neatly onto separate categories. The evidence supports an interpretive connection between gifts and response, not a universal progression from recognition through responsibility.

Praise amid difficulty. GET 7 is explicit in P2 and P3, whose accounts situate alḥamdulillāh amid difficulty. P2's question about what remains worthy of gratitude suggests an active reconsideration of experience; P3 emphasizes beginning with praise despite discomfort. The common expression does not establish an identical inner state. It may express felt gratitude, an effort to cultivate gratitude, or a religious commitment pursued while distress persists.

P2's account illustrates how reflection on the Qur'an entered her understanding of gratitude. In the interview, she associated her reflection on al-Fātiḥah with asking what she could still be grateful

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for in difficult circumstances (P2, p. 2). Her journal entry on Qur'an 14:7 gives a more concrete example of this practice. Addressing Allah, she thanked Him for reminding her through the verse and named several experiences she understood as gifts, including affection from her extended family and a renewed connection with the Qur'an. The interview shows how P2 described looking for what remained worthy of gratitude, while the journal entry illustrates what she identified as worthy of thanks on one occasion.

P3's account places greater emphasis on beginning with praise in difficult circumstances. In the interview, she described saying *alḥamdulillāh* as a response she felt she should make in any situation (P3, p. 15). Her journal entry records an expression of praise alongside dizziness and fever while fasting after surgery. The entry illustrates how praise could coexist with physical discomfort. Read together, the two accounts suggest different emphases within the same theme: P2 describes looking for something to be grateful for, while P3 describes beginning with praise even when difficulty persists.

Praise during difficulty should not be equated with pleasure in suffering or the absence of distress. P2's account emphasizes a way of looking for something to appreciate; P3's account emphasizes a response she believes she should pursue. No equivalent explicit account is presented for P1. This uneven distribution is analytically important because it prevents the conceptual framework from determining what every participant must have experienced.

Psychological research provides comparisons without resolving these interpretive differences. Yu et al. (2023) examine journaling initiation and emotional outcomes; Stone et al. (2022) distinguish gratitude-letter effects from attention-bias training; Layous et al. (2023) compare gratitude with rumination and distraction; and Kirca et al. (2023) synthesize expressed-gratitude interventions. Such studies address outcomes under specified designs. Here, retrospective accounts support an interpretation of meaning-making, not a claim about attentional change, reduced symptoms, or intervention effectiveness. The possibility that gratitude coexists with discomfort remains part of the findings.

Theoretical implications. The three meanings concern different aspects of experience: what participants recognize as a gift, how they understand an appropriate response, and how they sustain praise when circumstances are difficult. They are overlapping meanings rather than exclusive psychological types. Allah is the perceived Giver across these meanings, so gratitude to God is an orientation that connects them rather than a separate category parallel to shukr. The analysis thereby specifies relationships among concepts without claiming to validate a new measurement model.

This interpretation complements studies of God-oriented gratitude, including the situations and expressions examined by Van Cappellen et al. (2024) and the temporal relationship with religious well-being studied by Watkins et al. (2022). Its additional contribution is the close reading of how recognition, accountability, and practice are articulated together in these Qur'an journaling accounts. It does not establish that these meanings are absent from other religious traditions or that general gratitude theories cannot accommodate them. Demonstrating either claim would require comparative evidence.

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The findings also complicate a purely positive account of gratitude. Recognition may coexist with unresolved loss, watchfulness with acknowledged negligence, and praise with physical or emotional discomfort. This does not establish harmful effects; it shows that expressions of gratitude cannot be treated as transparent measures of well-being. An idiographic reading preserves these tensions instead of treating every quotation as confirmation of a predetermined category. The contribution is therefore a bounded interpretive account of gratitude as recognition, responsibility, and practice within this community.

Practical implications. Community facilitators can use these distinctions to invite discussion of perceived gifts, chosen responses, and difficulties that coexist with praise. They should leave room for grief, uncertainty, and ambivalence rather than requiring participants to describe every hardship positively. The study offers questions for understanding practitioners' experiences, not a validated therapeutic protocol. Clinical recommendations would require evidence beyond these interviews.

E. CONCLUSION

This IPA study interprets three overlapping meanings of gratitude in accounts from three experienced Qur'an journaling practitioners: recognizing blessings, responding through responsibility and action, and sustaining praise during difficulty. The three meanings are interpretive groupings rather than independently validated findings. Recognition and action are illustrated across the cases; explicit accounts of praise amid difficulty are presented for P2 and P3. The cases differ in their objects of gratitude and in the tensions between awareness, feeling, and conduct.

The study contributes a situated account of how reflection on scripture enters meaning-making about gifts, responsibility toward Allah, and adversity. It suggests that gratitude can be pursued as a religious practice while difficulty remains. These interpretations do not establish a developmental sequence, a causal effect of Qur'an journaling, or a complete taxonomy of Islamic gratitude.

The findings are bounded by purposive selection of three established practitioners from one community who already reported tranquility or gratitude. Accounts from people who discontinued journaling or did not experience these states are not represented. Retrospective interviews and contextual journal excerpts cannot establish change over time or isolate journaling from other influences, including community participation. The theoretically informed interview guide may also have directed attention toward expected forms of gratitude. The displayed excerpts support interpretation of the cases but not generalization to all practitioners. Future research should examine contrasting and ambivalent cases, document verse-specific reflection more closely, and use prospective designs to investigate change. Any quantitative development of the proposed meanings first requires clarification of conceptual overlap and independent construct validation.

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

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