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Instructional Design for Meaningful Learning through Experience-Anchored Reflective Inquiry (EAR-I)

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Abstract: *This study aims to conceptualize and articulate the Experience-Anchored Reflective Inquiry (EAR-I) model as a structured pedagogical framework that repositions experience as an epistemic–reflective anchor. Employing a conceptual–theoretical design and analytical synthesis, Qur'anic principles related to experience, tadabbur, epistemic humility, and knowledge-seeking were thematically interpreted, mapped onto pedagogical functions, and synthesized into an ordered instructional structure. The study yields two conceptual outcomes: a procedural design framework for translating Qur'anic epistemic principles into instructional logic and the EAR-I model consisting of five interrelated stages. The findings indicate that anchoring reflection in lived experience stabilizes inquiry and supports coherent meaning construction, offering a replicable framework for meaningful learning across diverse educational contexts.*

Keywords: *meaningful learning; Islamic epistemology; reflective inquiry*

Introduction

Meaningful learning remains a persistent challenge in contemporary education, particularly when instructional practices prioritize procedural completion over deep understanding. Research on meaningful learning in higher education consistently shows that learning becomes superficial when learners merely follow instructions without engaging in reflective sense-making and epistemic awareness (Vargas-Hernández & Vargas-González, 2022). Although many instructional approaches incorporate experience, reflection, or inquiry, these elements are often implemented as isolated or sequential techniques rather than as an integrated epistemic process. As a result, learners may participate actively in tasks yet fail to construct enduring meaning or transferable understanding, a limitation widely noted in studies on reflective and inquiry-based learning (Mäeots et al., 2016; Feucht et al., 2017).

Within the Islamic epistemological worldview, experience is not understood merely as an event but as a meaningful sign that invites reflection, awareness, and the pursuit of knowledge. Islamic scholars emphasize that knowledge emerges through the integrated engagement of the senses, reason, and the heart, forming a holistic epistemic system distinct from purely rationalist or empiricist traditions (Munsoor & Sa'ari, 2017; Sawaluddin et al., 2019). The Qur'an repeatedly calls human beings to actively observe and contemplate phenomena in the natural and social world, framing experience as an entry point to understanding rather than an endpoint. This view aligns with broader Islamic pedagogical perspectives that position learning as a process of becoming, shaped by ethical intention, spiritual awareness, and reflective engagement with lived reality (Alkouatli, 2018; Tahir-ul-Qadri, 2007).

From this perspective, experience holds epistemic value only when it becomes an object of conscious reflection. Reflection in Islamic thought is not a passive cognitive exercise, but a deliberate meaning-making process that connects action, awareness, and moral responsibility (Sulaiman, 2021; Hanif, 2024). Contemporary philosophy of education similarly argues that reflection acquires epistemic value when it enables learners to reinterpret experience, examine assumptions, and situate knowledge within a broader framework of understanding (Ambardekar, 2024). Educational research further indicates that deeper levels of reflection are positively associated with improved inquiry outcomes and conceptual learning, provided that reflection is grounded in concrete experience (Mäeots et al., 2016; Greene & Bråten, 2016).

Despite these insights, many contemporary learning models fail to position experience as a stable reflective anchor that sustains meaning-making and systematically generates inquiry. Inquiry-based learning frequently begins with abstract questions detached from learners' lived experiences, while reflective practices often remain superficial due to the absence of concrete personal reference points. Studies on epistemic cognition suggest that when inquiry is not anchored in experience, learners may struggle to frame meaningful questions and sustain epistemic engagement (Greene & Bråten, 2016; Feucht et al., 2017). This condition reflects a broader epistemological tension identified in critiques of modern Western knowledge paradigms, which often privilege abstraction over experiential grounding (Chak, 2012).

In contrast, Islamic epistemology explicitly acknowledges human epistemic limitation and frames inquiry as a response to cognitive incompleteness rather than mastery. Scholars of Qur'anic epistemology highlight that awareness of limited knowledge fosters epistemic humility and motivates sustained inquiry grounded in reflection and ethical intention (Mahmudin et al., 2021; Mannan & Farhana, 2025). This orientation

resonates with contemporary discourse analysis and positioning theory, which emphasize that learning and identity are constructed through how learners are positioned in relation to knowledge, experience, and inquiry within social contexts (Gordon, 2015; Yamakawa et al., 2005).

Furthermore, studies on temporal anchoring suggest that learning becomes more meaningful when reflection and inquiry are connected to concrete temporal reference points derived from prior experience (Huang & Stolterman, 2014; Laca, 2014). Without such anchors, reflection risks becoming abstract and inquiry fragmented, limiting its transformative potential. This observation aligns with Islamic educational thought, which views experience as a divinely granted opportunity for reflection and growth rather than a neutral occurrence (Alwani, 2014; Maspul & Mubarak, 2025).

Responding to these epistemic and pedagogical gaps, this study proposes the Experience-Anchored Reflective Inquiry (EAR-I) model, a conceptual instructional framework that repositions learners' prior experiences as epistemic–reflective anchors. Grounded in Qur'anic principles of reflection, epistemic humility, and the recognition of knowledge as a trust that unfolds through engagement with lived reality, the model structures learning as a progression from experience to anchored reflection, followed by inquiry and conceptual development. This orientation aligns with contemporary discussions on epistemic sovereignty, which emphasize the importance of grounding knowledge production within coherent moral and epistemological frameworks rather than uncritically adopting fragmented external models (Lumbard, 2024). Furthermore, the model resonates with Islamic contemplative ethics, where humility is understood as a necessary condition for genuine reflection and responsible inquiry, shaping how learners approach knowledge, difference, and uncertainty (Khalil, 2020). In this sense, reflective anchoring not only stabilizes meaning-making but also cultivates an ethical disposition that recognizes diversity of perspectives as a source of intellectual and moral growth rather than fragmentation (Ashrof, 2024).

The main aim of this study is to conceptualize and articulate the EAR-I model as a coherent framework for meaningful learning. The principal contribution of this work lies in its theoretical repositioning of experience as an epistemic anchor and its systematic articulation of instructional stages that align reflective depth with inquiry and knowledge construction. By situating reflective inquiry within a paradigm of epistemic humility and ethical openness, this study argues that EAR-I offers a viable pathway for integrating reflective practice, inquiry, and conceptual development in a manner that is both pedagogically robust and epistemologically grounded within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Methodology

This study employs a conceptual–theoretical design aimed at developing and articulating a pedagogical model rather than empirically testing an instructional intervention. Such a design aligns with distinctions between theory, theoretical frameworks, and conceptual frameworks, where the primary goal is to clarify concepts and their relationships to guide understanding and future research rather than to generate empirical generalizations (Kivunja, 2018). Accordingly, the methodology is rooted in analytical synthesis, a qualitative approach that integrates and interprets concepts from multiple sources to construct a coherent conceptual model (Schick-Makaroff et al., 2016).

The development process involved three main procedures. First, relevant Qur'anic principles related to experience, reflection (*tadabbur*), inquiry, epistemic humility, and knowledge-seeking were identified and thematically analyzed. This stage focused on interpreting foundational epistemic concepts embedded in religious texts and understanding their pedagogical implications. Prior studies on Islamic reflective pedagogy emphasize that reflection functions not merely as a moral exercise but as a structured epistemic process that shapes character, awareness, and meaning-making when grounded in lived experience and guided contemplation (Muna et al., 2024; Aulia et al., 2025). These insights informed the identification of reflection as a central epistemic mechanism rather than an auxiliary learning activity.

Second, these principles were mapped onto pedagogical processes to examine how experiential engagement, reflective anchoring, and inquiry can be structured coherently within instructional practice. This mapping process was informed by existing inquiry-oriented instructional models that emphasize staged learning progression while allowing for conceptual adaptation rather than direct adoption (Hsiao et al., 2017). At this stage, reflective practices rooted in *tadabbur* were positioned as bridges between experience and inquiry, consistent with Islamic educational perspectives that view reflection as a transformative process connecting cognition, spirituality, and ethical orientation (Muna et al., 2024; Aulia et al., 2025).

Third, the analyzed and mapped concepts were synthesized into a five-stage instructional model designed to be conceptually explicit, pedagogically replicable, and adaptable across diverse learning contexts. The synthesis prioritizes reflection as an epistemic anchor that stabilizes inquiry and supports character and meaning formation, echoing contemporary discussions on reflective pedagogy within Islamic education while extending them into a structured instructional framework.

No empirical data, human participants, or experimental interventions were involved in this study. Consequently, no ethical approval was required. All conceptual materials used consist of publicly accessible religious texts and published scholarly literature. The resulting model and its instructional stages are presented transparently to enable educators and researchers to replicate, adapt, and further empirically examine the framework in future studies.

Results And Discussion

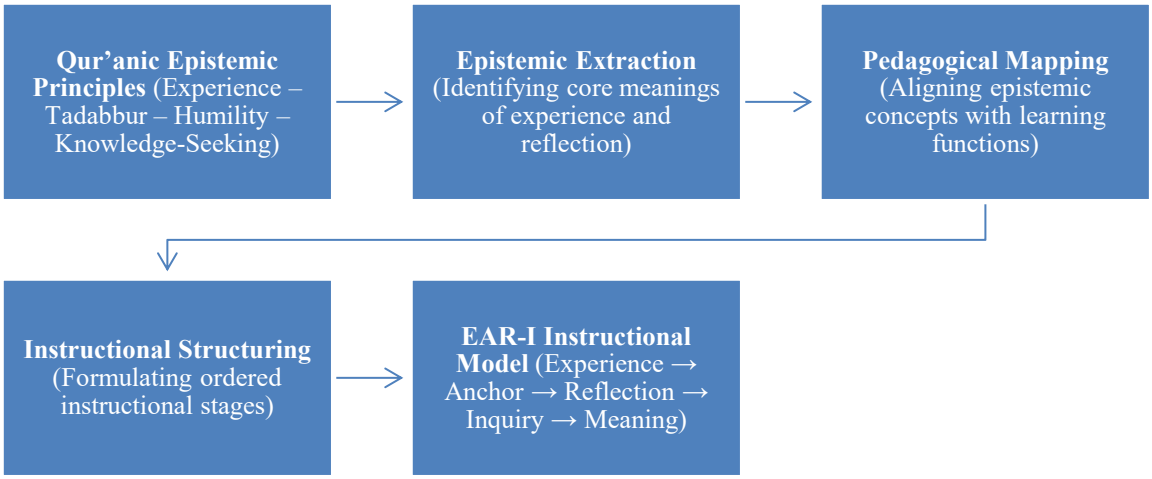
Results

This study yields two interrelated conceptual outcomes. The first is a procedural design framework that formalizes the translation of Qur'anic epistemic principles into instructional logic. The second is the Experience-Anchored Reflective Inquiry (EAR-I) instructional model, which represents a structured pedagogical instantiation of that framework.

1. Procedural Results of Model Development

The first result of this study is the articulation of a conceptual procedural framework that delineates how Qur'anic epistemic principles—specifically experience, *tadabbur* (deep reflection), epistemic humility, and knowledge-seeking—can be systematically transformed into instructional design logic. Rather than reiterating the analytical steps described in the methodology, this framework represents the epistemic structure produced by the development process and functions as a design-oriented outcome applicable to instructional modeling rather than as a classroom intervention.

Figure 1. Procedural Flow of EAR-I Model Development



As illustrated in Figure 1, the procedural framework is characterized by three interconnected design operations that together constitute a coherent epistemic logic for model development.

1.1 Epistemic Extraction. The framework identifies experience, reflection (*tadabbur*), epistemic humility, and inquiry as foundational epistemic elements. Within this structure, experience is positioned as an intentional encounter with reality that precedes both reflection and inquiry. Reflection is conceptualized as an act of meaning-seeking grounded in lived experience, while epistemic humility frames inquiry as a response to recognized cognitive limitation rather than as an assertion of mastery.

1.2 Pedagogical Mapping. The extracted epistemic elements are organized into functional pedagogical roles. Experience is formalized as a cognitive–reflective anchor that provides a stable reference point for learning, reflection functions to stabilize and deepen meaning, and inquiry emerges from perceived epistemic gaps rather than from abstract or externally imposed questioning. This mapping clarifies the functional transformation of epistemic principles into instructional mechanisms.

1.3 Instructional Structuring. The pedagogical functions are then synthesized into an ordered instructional structure that emphasizes conceptual coherence, pedagogical clarity, and adaptability across learning contexts. This operation yields a set of instructional components that can be systematically replicated, adapted, and extended in future instructional designs.

Taken together, this procedural result constitutes a conceptual design protocol for developing reflective–inquiry-oriented instruction grounded in experiential anchoring.

2. Instructional Results: The EAR-I Model

The second result of the study is the formulation of the Experience-Anchored Reflective Inquiry (EAR-I) model, which operationalizes the procedural framework into a coherent instructional structure. The EAR-I model consists of five sequential yet interrelated stages that articulate how experience functions as an epistemic anchor for reflection, inquiry, and meaning construction. The instructional logic of the model is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Instructional Flow of the EAR-I Model

The five stages of the EAR-I model are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Stages of the EAR-I Instructional Model

Stage	Core Function	Pedagogical Focus
Experience Elicitation	Activating lived experience	Concrete engagement
Anchoring	Positioning experience as reference	Meaning stabilization
Guided Reflection	Structured tadabbur	Deep meaning-making
Inquiry Stimulation	Generating questions	Epistemic exploration
Meaning Expansion	Conceptual synthesis	Knowledge transformation

Across these stages, learning progresses from lived experience toward reflective stabilization, followed by inquiry-driven exploration and conceptual expansion. Experience does not terminate at participation but continues to function as a persistent epistemic anchor that supports reflective depth and inquiry generation throughout the learning process.

Taken together, the procedural framework and the EAR-I instructional model demonstrate a systematic repositioning of experience—from a contextual backdrop to a central epistemic anchor—thereby enabling meaningful learning that integrates reflection, inquiry, and knowledge construction within a coherent pedagogical trajectory.

Discussion

The results indicate that positioning experience as an epistemic–reflective anchor reshapes the internal logic of learning processes. As demonstrated by the procedural pathway and the EAR-I instructional stages, experience no longer functions as a preliminary activity but as a stabilizing reference that structures reflection and generates inquiry. This anchoring mechanism prevents reflection from becoming abstract and inquiry from being detached from learners' lived realities, thereby ensuring epistemic coherence across instructional stages.

The procedural results further clarify the role of guided reflection (tadabbur) as a disciplined meaning-making process. Anchored reflection enables learners to recognize cognitive tensions and epistemic limits, which operationalize humility as a functional condition for learning. Within this structure, inquiry emerges as a consequence of reflective awareness rather than as an externally imposed pedagogical trigger. This finding underscores inquiry as a response to perceived epistemic gaps, aligning reflection, humility, and knowledge-seeking within a unified learning trajectory.

From a practical standpoint, the EAR-I model offers a replicable instructional protocol derived from clearly articulated procedural steps. The model translates abstract epistemic principles into ordered instructional stages that educators can adapt across contexts. By framing inquiry as an outcome of reflective depth, the model addresses persistent challenges such as superficial reflection and procedural inquiry, supporting deeper engagement and meaningful knowledge transformation.

At a broader level, the findings demonstrate how Qur'anic epistemic principles can be systematically operationalized into pedagogical design. The EAR-I model contributes to educational discourse by presenting a structured alternative to fragmented experience-, reflection-, or inquiry-based approaches. It affirms that meaningful learning is constructed through reflective engagement with experience, guided by epistemic humility and oriented toward the pursuit of wisdom, rather than through information accumulation alone.

CONCLUSION

This study conceptualized and articulated the Experience-Anchored Reflective Inquiry (EAR-I) model as a structured framework for meaningful learning grounded in Qur'anic epistemic principles. By repositioning experience as an epistemic–reflective anchor, the model demonstrates how learning can progress coherently from lived experience to reflection, inquiry, and conceptual expansion.

The findings indicate that meaningful learning emerges when reflection is stabilized by concrete experience and guided by epistemic humility, allowing inquiry to arise naturally from recognized cognitive gaps. The procedural pathway developed in this study shows that Qur'anic concepts such as *tadabbur*, awareness of human limitation, and the pursuit of knowledge can be systematically translated into instructional design rather than remaining at a normative or philosophical level.

Practically, the EAR-I model provides educators with a replicable and adaptable instructional protocol that transforms learning activities into opportunities for deep meaning construction. By aligning experience, reflection, and inquiry within a unified epistemic trajectory, the model addresses common pedagogical challenges, including superficial reflection and procedural inquiry.

Theoretically, this study contributes to educational scholarship by offering a pedagogical framework rooted in Islamic epistemology while remaining accessible to broader educational discourse. Future research may advance this work through empirical testing of EAR-I across diverse educational levels, disciplines, and learning environments to examine its impact on depth of understanding, metacognitive development, inquiry disposition, and epistemic humility. Longitudinal and comparative studies with existing

reflective and inquiry-based models, as well as exploration of EAR-I in digital, hybrid, or interdisciplinary contexts, may further clarify its distinctive contributions. Practically, educators are encouraged to pilot the model through experience-rich tasks, guided reflective prompts, and structured inquiry scaffolds, supported by targeted professional development to ensure epistemic coherence and sustained depth of learning.

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