

Semantic and Exegetical Analysis of Qur'anic Patience: Implications for Islamic Character Education

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the meaning of ṣabr in the Qur'an through a semantic approach and exegetical studies, as well as to identify its implications for the development of patience as a character trait in Islamic education. The research method employed is library research with qualitative analysis, utilizing classical and contemporary tafsir sources such as Tafsir al-Ṭabarī, Tafsir al-Qurṭubī, and Tafsir al-Mishbāḥ. Semantic analysis of the root ṣ-b-r and its derivations across various verses reveals that ṣabr encompasses steadfastness, self-control, perseverance in trials, and consistency in righteousness. The findings show that ṣabr in the Qur'an has three main dimensions: patience in obedience, patience in avoiding sins, and patience in facing hardships. The implications for Islamic education include integrating patience values into the curriculum, habituating patient behavior through teacher role models, and fostering character through experiential learning. This study emphasizes that developing patience should not only be cognitive but must also address the affective and psychomotor aspects of learners.

Keywords: Patience, Semantics, Exegesis, Islamic Education, Character

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna ṣabr dalam Al-Qur'an melalui pendekatan semantik dan studi tafsir, serta mengidentifikasi implikasinya bagi pengembangan kesabaran sebagai sifat karakter dalam pendidikan Islam. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah penelitian perpustakaan dengan analisis kualitatif, memanfaatkan sumber-sumber tafsir klasik dan kontemporer seperti Tafsir al-Ṭabarī, Tafsir al-Qurṭubī, dan Tafsir al-Mishbāḥ. Analisis semantik akar kata ṣ-b-r dan turunan-turunannya di berbagai ayat menunjukkan bahwa ṣabr mencakup keteguhan, pengendalian diri, ketekunan dalam cobaan, dan konsistensi dalam kebaikan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ṣabr dalam Al-Qur'an memiliki tiga dimensi utama: kesabaran dalam ketaatan, kesabaran dalam menghindari dosa, dan kesabaran dalam menghadapi kesulitan. Implikasi bagi pendidikan Islam meliputi integrasi nilai kesabaran ke dalam kurikulum, menanamkan perilaku sabar melalui teladan guru, dan mengembangkan karakter melalui pembelajaran pengalaman. Studi ini menekankan bahwa pengembangan kesabaran tidak hanya harus bersifat kognitif, tetapi juga harus mencakup aspek afektif dan psikomotorik peserta didik.

Kata Kunci: Kesabaran, Semantik, Tafsir, Pendidikan Islam, Karakter

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INTRODUCTION

Patience (*ṣabr*) is one of the fundamental moral values in Islam, playing a central role in shaping the personality of a Muslim. The Qur'an mentions the word *ṣabr* and its derivations more than 90 times in various contexts, underscoring its urgency in religious life. In Islamic education,

patience is not merely a passive attitude but rather an inner strength that sustains learning success, self-control, and steadfastness in upholding truth.

The concept of *ṣabr* is not only understood as the ability to restrain negative emotions but also as an inner power that cultivates steadfastness in facing life's trials. The Qur'an uses the term *ṣabr* in contexts such as enduring affliction, performing acts of worship, and struggling in the path of truth, highlighting its centrality in faith and practice (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 2001). For instance, in Qur'an 2:153, Allah declares: "O you who believe! Seek help through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient." This verse affirms that patience is both a means of attaining divine assistance and a key to spiritual success.

In the context of Islamic education, patience is not a passive disposition akin to waiting or surrendering, but an active strength sustaining the pursuit of knowledge and character formation. Al-Ghazālī, in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, describes patience as half of faith, since faith consists of patience and gratitude. This demonstrates its role as a moral foundation enabling students to persist in learning difficulties, maintain consistency in practicing knowledge, and restrain destructive impulses (al-Ghazālī, 1993). Thus, patience becomes a vital pillar of Islamic character education, forming individuals who are disciplined, resilient, and morally upright.

Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad Saw emphasized the importance of patience in a hadith narrated by Muslim: "How wonderful is the case of a believer! All of his affairs are good for him. If something favorable happens to him, he is grateful, and that is good for him. If adversity befalls him, he is patient, and that too is good for him" (Muslim, no. 2999). This hadith illustrates patience as a spiritual mechanism that makes a believer strong in both ease and hardship. In education, this positions patience as a psychological and spiritual asset that encourages persistence, resilience, and moral courage.

In contemporary education, the value of patience resonates with the modern psychological concept of resilience, the ability to endure, adapt, and recover from stress or adversity (Masten, 2001). Patience in Islam is not merely endurance but also nurtures a *growth mindset*, allowing learners to view challenges as valuable opportunities for growth. This aligns with Carol Dweck's (2006) framework, which underscores the role of patience in overcoming setbacks as a pathway to academic success. Thus, Islamic patience provides both spiritual and psychological grounding in shaping resilient learners with strong perseverance.

Moreover, patience directly connects to character education widely promoted in modern educational institutions. Lickona (1991) emphasizes that character education is not only about intellectual training but also about instilling moral virtues that shape holistic personality. In this light, patience is a primary virtue strengthening integrity, discipline, and empathy. This aligns with the Islamic ideal of forming *insān kāmil* (the complete person), where patience provides the foundation for balancing spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions.

Linguistically, the word *ṣabr* comes from the root *ṣ-b-r*, which means to restrain, control, or remain steadfast. In the *shar'ī* (legal-religious) context, patience (*ṣabr*) refers to steadfastness in obedience to Allah, refraining from His prohibitions, and willingly accepting His decrees.

In classical Arabic lexicons, the root *ṣ-b-r* is defined as restraining, controlling, or remaining firm in a certain condition (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 1993). This shows that patience is not merely passive endurance but rather a form of strength that enables one to master oneself amidst various pressures. From the *shar'ī* perspective, scholars define patience as steadfastness in obedience to Allah, refraining from what He has forbidden, and accepting with contentment whatever He decrees, whether blessings or trials (al-Rāghib al-Aṣṣḥānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān*, 2009). This definition highlights the multidimensional nature of *ṣabr*, encompassing theological, moral, and psychological aspects.

Al-Ghazālī, in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, explains that patience has three main forms: patience in obedience, patience in avoiding disobedience, and patience in facing life's trials (al-Ghazālī, 1993).

These three are closely interconnected, for one cannot remain consistent in worship without patience, cannot avoid prohibitions without self-control, and cannot endure hardships without inner steadfastness. Thus, patience serves as the foundation of a Muslim's spiritual life and a prerequisite for the development of noble character.

The discourse on patience is further reinforced by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in *‘Uddat al-Ṣābirīn*, who emphasizes that patience constitutes half of faith, while the other half is gratitude (Ibn Qayyim, 1997). This demonstrates the central position of patience within the edifice of faith, as it functions as the inner discipline that maintains balance between obedience, the control of desires, and acceptance of divine decree. This perspective is consistent with the Qur'an, which repeatedly links patience with spiritual success, as in QS Āl 'Imrān [3]:200, which commands the believers to be patient, strengthen their patience, and remain God-conscious in order to attain victory.

The semantic approach in Qur'anic studies refers to analyzing the meaning of words based on their root, derivational forms, contexts of use, and semantic relations with other terms. Toshihiko Izutsu (2002) emphasizes that Qur'anic semantics does not stop at lexical meanings but also explores semantic fields that shape the Islamic worldview.

In the case of *ṣabr*, semantic analysis shows that it originates from the root *ṣ-b-r*, meaning “to restrain” or “to remain steadfast.” From this root derive various forms such as *ṣābirīn* (those who are patient), *maṣbūr* (one who is restrained), and *ṣabr jamīl* (beautiful patience).

Moreover, patience in the Qur'an often appears in contexts of trials and steadfast faith, as reflected in QS al-Baqarah [2]:155–157, which states that those who are patient will receive blessings, mercy, and guidance from Allah. From a semantic perspective, the meaning of patience is not static but dynamic, always linked to the communicative context of revelation—whether in times of war, calamity, or self-restraint. Thus, the semantic approach helps map *ṣabr* across two major dimensions: conceptual, as a universal value, and contextual, as patience in specific circumstances faced by the believing community.

Classical and modern exegetes provide nuanced perspectives on the Qur'anic concept of patience. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 H) in *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān* emphasizes patience as an integral part of faith that is inseparable from piety, arguing that a Muslim cannot attain perfect faith without patience. For him, patience is identical with steadfastness in fulfilling Allah's commands, refraining from disobedience, and being content with His decrees (al-Ṭabarī, 2001).

On the other hand, modern exegetes such as M. Quraish Shihab highlight the psychological and social dimensions of patience. In his *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, Shihab (2002) explains that patience is not passive endurance but a mental and spiritual capacity that enables individuals to remain productive and constructive amid difficulties. He further stresses that patience has a social dimension, serving to maintain harmony and resilience within a community in times of crisis.

This difference in emphasis illustrates that classical exegesis tends to prioritize the theological and spiritual aspects of patience, while modern exegesis focuses more on its psychosocial relevance in contemporary human life. Together, these perspectives enrich our understanding of patience as both a spiritual virtue of faith and a social ethic.

Character education in the Islamic perspective has a strong foundation in the Qur'an and Sunnah. One of its main pillars is *ṣabr* (patience), as it serves as the basis of noble character (*akhlāq karimah*). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) affirmed in a ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim that “patience is light,” indicating that patience functions as an illuminator for the life path of a Muslim. In the context of education, patience must be instilled from an early age so that students are able to face challenges, delay instant gratification, and maintain discipline in learning.

This aligns with the goals of Indonesia's National Education as stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes the importance of shaping students with faith, piety, and noble character. By placing patience as a fundamental value in character education, schools can nurture students who are resilient, possess integrity, and demonstrate a strong fighting spirit. Thomas Lickona (1991), in *Educating for Character*, also emphasizes that strong character is born from consistent practice of virtues, and patience is one of the moral virtues that must be cultivated. Therefore, patience is not only a spiritual value but also contributes practically to building a generation capable of facing global challenges.

While the concept of patience (ṣabr) has been extensively discussed in Islamic literature, a significant gap remains in understanding its deeper semantic dynamics amidst the currents of modernity... This approach is crucial for the contemporary understanding of ṣabr as it shifts the paradigm from a static trait to an active moral practice, bridging divine revelation (naql) and modern human experience ('aql).

The Concept of Patience (ṣabr) in Islam Linguistically, the word ṣabr comes from the root ṣ-b-r, which means to restrain, control, or remain steadfast.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. Primary data are drawn from Qur'anic verses containing the word ṣabr and its derivatives, as well as interpretations (tafsīr) by classical and contemporary scholars. Secondary data are obtained from Islamic education literature and semantic theory. Data analysis was conducted through:

1. Identifying verses on patience using Concordance of the Qur'an.
2. Semantic analysis of the root word ṣ-b-r to uncover its basic and relational meanings.
3. Tafsīr study to understand the context and interpretation of the verses.
4. Synthesizing the implications for developing patience as a character in Islamic education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Semantic Analysis of the Word Ṣabr

The analysis shows that the word ṣabr and its derivatives appear in the form of nouns (*ṣabr*), verbs (*ṣabara, yaṣbiru*), and adjectives (*ṣabir, ṣabbār*). In terms of meaning, it has three main dimensions:

1) Steadfastness in obedience (*ṣabr 'alā al-ṭā'ah*)

The first dimension of patience is steadfastness in carrying out obedience to Allah SWT. This includes consistency in performing ritual acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, zakat, and hajj, as well as social acts of worship such as being just, honest, and helping others. The Qur'an affirms in Surah Maryam [19]: 65: "*So worship Him and be steadfast in His worship.*" This verse shows that true worship requires patience, as humans are often faced with laziness, boredom, or worldly temptations that weaken spiritual commitment.

Al-Ghazālī, in *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, explains that patience in obedience is evidence of a servant's sincerity, as one continues to worship despite facing both internal and external obstacles (al-Ghazālī, 1993). From an educational perspective, this dimension is highly important as it teaches discipline and consistency, two key traits needed in the learning process. Thus, *ṣabr 'alā al-ṭā'ah* shapes a Muslim personality that is diligent, steadfast (*istiqāmah*), and oriented towards devotion.

2) Restraining oneself from sin (*ṣabr 'an al-maṣiyah*)

The second dimension is patience in restraining oneself from committing sin. This type of patience requires controlling one's desires and the ability to resist temptations forbidden by Allah. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, in *Uddat al-Ṣābirīn*, emphasizes that this form of patience is even

more difficult than patience in facing trials, because it demands active resistance against internal impulses (Ibn Qayyim, 1997).

The Qur'an refers to this dimension in Surah al-Nāzi'āt [79]: 40–41: *“But as for he who feared standing before his Lord and restrained himself from [his] desires, then indeed, Paradise will be his refuge.”* This verse highlights that patience in restraining from sin carries immense eschatological rewards. In a social context, this type of patience serves to safeguard a Muslim's moral integrity amid the currents of globalization, which are rife with temptations of hedonism and moral permissiveness. In character education, *ṣabr 'an al-ma'ṣiyah* forms the foundation of self-control, as explained by Baumeister & Vohs (2007) in modern psychological theory. The integration of Qur'anic values with contemporary psychological concepts demonstrates that patience in refraining from sin is not only of spiritual value but also contributes to personality strengthening and mental health.

3) Perseverance in Facing Trials (*ṣabr 'alā al-balā'*)

The third dimension is patience in facing life's trials and tribulations. The Qur'an affirms that trials are an inevitability for every human being, as stated in Surah al-Baqarah [2]: 155: *“And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient.”*

In the exegetical tradition, al-Ṭabarī interprets this verse as evidence that patience is the pathway to attaining *basīrah* (inner insight) and the pleasure of Allah (al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Meanwhile, modern exegete M. Quraish Shihab (2002) emphasizes its psychological aspect, namely that patience helps human beings maintain emotional stability when dealing with trauma, crises, or suffering. This interpretation demonstrates that patience not only ensures theological submission but also serves as an inner strength to preserve one's psychological well-being. From an educational perspective, patience in facing trials can be equated with the concept of *resilience* in modern psychology, defined as the ability to recover from adversity (Masten, 2001). Students who are trained in patience are better prepared to cope with academic and social pressures, thereby growing into individuals who are strong, optimistic, and highly persistent. Thus, *ṣabr 'alā al-balā'* cultivates individuals who are not only steadfast in enduring hardship but also capable of extracting wisdom and personal growth from every event. This integrative understanding reveals that patience functions as both a theological virtue and a psychological resource that supports holistic human development.

2. Exegesis of Qur'anic Verses on Patience

Patience (*ṣabr*) is the attitude of restraining oneself from complaints, desires, or negative emotional reactions when facing various situations, whether personal or social. This value occupies a significant portion in the Qur'an, which mentions *ṣabr* and its derivatives more than ninety times in various forms and contexts, indicating its urgency in the life of a Muslim. One of the clearest directives on patience is found in Surah al-Baqarah [2]: 153: *“O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient.”* This verse demonstrates that patience, alongside prayer, functions as a spiritual mechanism for overcoming life's difficulties. Here, patience is not simply understood as passive endurance but as an inner strength that enables a person to remain firm, composed, and focused on solutions that are pleasing to Allah. Furthermore, Surah Āli 'Imrān [3]: 200 teaches the collective dimension of patience: *“O you who have believed, persevere and endure and remain stationed and fear Allah that you may be successful.”* This verse employs two imperatives, namely: verbs *iṣbirū* (be patient) and *ṣābirū* (strengthen your patience), which, from a semantic perspective, highlights different nuances of meaning: the first emphasizes individual patience, while the second underscores the reinforcement of patience in social interaction and collective struggle. Thus, the Qur'an teaches that patience is not merely an individual virtue but also a collective strength that undergirds the resilience of the Muslim community in facing shared challenges.

3. Semantic–Exegetical Synthesis of *Ṣabr*

Semantic and exegetical analyses of Qur’anic verses on *ṣabr* demonstrate that patience is not a singular or monolithic concept, but rather a multidimensional moral–spiritual virtue encompassing self-discipline, restraint of desire, and psychological resilience (Al-Ghazālī, 1993; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1997). The Qur’an presents *ṣabr* as an active and reflective moral stance rather than mere passive submission, integrating cognitive awareness, emotional regulation, and ethical commitment (Shihab, 2002).

From a semantic perspective, the varied usage of the term *ṣabr* in nominal, verbal, and adjectival forms indicates its dynamic and processual nature. *Ṣabr* is not a static character trait, but an ongoing moral practice manifested through continuous struggle against the lower self (*jihād al-naḥs*) in everyday conduct (Izutsu, 2002). The Qur’anic employment of imperative forms such as *iṣbir* (be patient) and *ṣābir* (strengthen patience) further underscores that patience requires intentional cultivation and reinforcement, both at the individual and collective levels (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001).

Exegetically, both classical and contemporary Qur’anic commentators converge on the view that *ṣabr* constitutes a foundational virtue that undergirds other ethical qualities. Al-Ghazālī situates patience as the spiritual driving force that sustains consistency in obedience and restrains moral deviation (Al-Ghazālī, 1993), while Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah emphasizes *ṣabr* as a decisive factor in achieving moral and spiritual steadfastness (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1997). Contemporary interpretations, such as those advanced by M. Quraish Shihab, highlight the psychological dimension of *ṣabr*, portraying it as a mechanism for emotional stabilization amid the crises and pressures of modern life (Shihab, 2002).

This synthesis indicates that *ṣabr* operates across three interrelated levels: the spiritual-theological level, as an expression of trust and submission to God; the ethical-behavioral level, as self-regulation and moral consistency; and the psychological level, as emotional resilience and adaptive coping capacity (Masten, 2001; Shihab, 2002). Consequently, *ṣabr* may be understood as a core value that bridges divine revelation (*naql*) and human experience (*‘aql*), rendering it highly relevant for contemporary Islamic education.

4. Implications for Islamic Education

The multidimensional conception of *ṣabr* carries significant implications for character education within Islamic educational institutions. Patience should not be reduced to mere normative moral instruction or abstract ethical discourse; rather, it must be internalized through pedagogical strategies that integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning (Lickona, 1991).

As a foundational character value, *ṣabr* supports learning discipline, perseverance, and moral responsibility among students. Patience in obedience (*ṣabr ‘alā al-ṭā‘ah*) encourages consistency, effective time management, and academic integrity, in harmony with the Qur’anic vision of *tarbiyah* as a gradual and sustained educational process rather than instant achievement (Al-Attas, 1999).

In the domain of moral education, *ṣabr* as self-restraint (*ṣabr ‘an al-ma‘ṣiyah*) is particularly relevant in the digital age, which is characterized by distraction, consumerism, and ethical relativism. The internalization of *ṣabr* trains students to delay gratification, regulate impulses, and make ethically grounded decisions, aligning closely with contemporary psychological theories of self-regulation and character strength (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007).

Furthermore, patience in confronting trials (*ṣabr ‘alā al-balā’*) corresponds with the modern concept of resilience, defined as the capacity to recover from adversity and life stressors. Islamic education that cultivates this dimension of patience contributes to the development of emotional intelligence, stress management skills, and mental well-being among learners (Masten, 2001).

Pedagogically, the formation of the character of *ṣabr* requires reflective learning approaches, ethical habituation, engagement with Qur'anic narratives of the prophets, and the embodiment of patience by educators themselves as moral exemplars. In this context, teachers function not merely as transmitters of knowledge, but as agents of character formation and moral development (Al-Ghazālī, 1993; Lickona, 1991).

The findings of this study affirm that *ṣabr* in the Qur'an is a comprehensive ethical construct with profound educational relevance. The semantic richness and exegetical depth of patience reveal it as a virtue that integrates faith, morality, and psychology. When embedded within Islamic education, *ṣabr* contributes to the formation of learners who are spiritually grounded, morally disciplined, and psychologically resilient. Thus, patience emerges not only as a personal virtue but as an educational objective essential for nurturing holistic human development in accordance with the Qur'anic vision of the ideal believer (*al-insān al-ṣāliḥ*).

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the concept of patience (*ṣabr*) in the Qur'an, when analyzed through an integrated semantic and interpretive approach, represents a multidimensional moral-spiritual construct rather than a passive or monolithic virtue. Semantic analysis reveals that the diverse grammatical forms of *ṣabr* in the Qur'an indicate its dynamic and process-oriented nature, emphasizing that patience is an active and ongoing moral practice. Further exegetical findings confirm that *ṣabr* functions as a fundamental ethical value that integrates theological commitment, moral self-regulation, and psychological resilience.

The analysis identifies three interrelated dimensions of *ṣabr*: patience in obedience to Allah, patience in refraining from sinful desires, and patience in facing life's trials. These dimensions collectively illustrate that *ṣabr* operates simultaneously on the spiritual-theological, ethical-behavioral, and psychological levels. This integrative understanding bridges divine revelation (*naql*) and human experience (*aql*), positioning *ṣabr* as a core value of the Qur'an that is eternally relevant to contemporary human development.

In the context of Islamic education, these findings highlight that *ṣabr* should be placed as the primary goal of character formation, not merely a peripheral moral ideal. The internalization of patience through pedagogical strategies that integrate cognitive understanding, emotional formation, and ethical practice contributes to the development of students who are disciplined, morally responsible, and psychologically resilient. By aligning Qur'anic ethics with contemporary insights from educational psychology, *ṣabr* emerges as a key resource for addressing modern educational challenges, including moral fragmentation, emotional instability, and declining perseverance among students.

Overall, this study contributes to Qur'anic studies and Islamic educational thought by offering a holistic framework for understanding patience as both a theological virtue and an educational asset. Future research could further explore the empirical application of this framework in Islamic educational institutions, as well as comparative analysis between the Qur'anic conception of patience and character education models in other religious and philosophical traditions.

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