

QUR'ANIC PARABLES AS COGNITIVE BRIDGES FOR TEACHING ABSTRACT CONCEPTS IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Abstract and unseen concepts in religious education can be difficult to teach when instruction remains predominantly verbal. This study examines how Qur'anic parables can function as cognitive bridges by linking abstract religious ideas to concrete representations in higher-education classrooms. A qualitative classroom-based inquiry combined thematic interpretation of selected Qur'anic passages with classroom observations, student presentations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of instructional artifacts. Four focal concepts (angelic appearance in human form, resurrection, *kalimah tayyibah* (kind words), and *riya'* (showing off)) were explored through parable-based demonstrations and learning aids. Thematic analysis produced three interrelated findings. First, Qur'anic parables mediated conceptual understanding by connecting textual meanings with familiar images and sequences. Second, visual demonstration and direct interaction with learning aids supported students' analogical reasoning and perceived recall, although memory retention was not measured objectively. Third, student questions, presentations, and reflective discussion encouraged interpretive engagement rather than passive reception. The findings suggest that Qur'anic parables can support meaningful learning when the analogy is clearly distinguished from the theological reality it represents.

Keywords: Qur'anic parables, abstract concepts, analogy-based learning, Islamic education, multisensory learning

Abstrak

Konsep abstrak dan perkara gaib dalam pendidikan agama sering sulit dipahami ketika pembelajaran bertumpu pada penjelasan verbal. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana perumpamaan Al-Qur'an dapat berfungsi sebagai jembatan kognitif yang menghubungkan gagasan keagamaan yang abstrak dengan representasi konkret di kelas perguruan tinggi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis kelas dengan memadukan penafsiran tematik terhadap ayat-ayat terpilih, observasi kelas, presentasi mahasiswa, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan analisis artefak pembelajaran. Empat konsep menjadi fokus, yaitu penampakan malaikat dalam bentuk manusia, kebangkitan, *kalimah tayyibah*, dan *riya'*. Analisis tematik menghasilkan tiga temuan yang saling berkaitan. Pertama, perumpamaan Al-Qur'an membantu memediasi pemahaman dengan menghubungkan makna teks dengan gambaran dan urutan yang lebih familiar. Kedua, demonstrasi visual dan interaksi langsung dengan alat bantu mendukung penalaran analogis serta ingatan yang dirasakan mahasiswa, meskipun retensi memori tidak diukur secara objektif. Ketiga, pertanyaan, presentasi, dan diskusi reflektif mendorong keterlibatan interpretatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa perumpamaan Al-Qur'an dapat mendukung pembelajaran bermakna apabila batas antara analogi pembelajaran dan realitas teologis tetap dijelaskan secara tegas.

Kata kunci: perumpamaan Al-Qur'an, konsep abstrak, pembelajaran analogis, pendidikan Islam, pembelajaran multisensori

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Introduction

Teaching abstract concepts is difficult when learners cannot readily connect verbal explanations with a mental model of what is being discussed. The challenge is especially pronounced in religious education when the subject includes *al-ghayb*, moral qualities, or theological ideas that are not directly observable. Research on abstract learning shows that students often benefit from conceptual supports that make relationships visible without reducing the concept to the support itself (Alam & Mohanty, 2024). In Islamic education, this problem has also been approached through analogy and synectic reasoning, indicating that abstract religious ideas can be made more accessible when teachers provide carefully chosen points of comparison (Amin, 2017). At the same time, the category of *al-ghayb* requires interpretive caution because what is unseen cannot simply be equated with a classroom representation (Bubandt et al., 2019).

Narrative and analogy offer one way to manage this tension. Narrative-based representations can help learners organize unfamiliar ideas, while analogy can map a known structure onto a less familiar target concept. Studies in science and general education show that analogical learning can support conceptual reasoning, metacognition, and the construction of mental models when the relation between source and target is made explicit (Keri & Elbatarny, 2021; Reyes & Villanueva, 2024; Tham et al., 2021; Wang, 2023). The pedagogical value therefore lies less in making the abstract literally concrete than in giving learners a provisional structure through which they can reason about it.

Qur'anic discourse provides a particularly relevant resource for this kind of instruction because it repeatedly uses stories, images, figurative language, and parables to invite reflection. Qur'anic storytelling has been used pedagogically to communicate religious and moral values (Akrim & Gunawan, 2021), while studies of Qur'anic figurative language and conceptual metaphor show how textual imagery can stimulate inferential and higher-order thinking (As'ad et al., 2021; Sardaraz et al., 2022). Work on Qur'anic educational philosophy likewise emphasizes reasoning, reflection, and meaningful engagement with the text (Stimpson & Calvert, 2021). More specifically, parables in Islamic scripture have been discussed as a method of guidance that links meaning with familiar images and situations (Gulzar et al., 2023). Recent work on *tadabbur* and narrative-based religious pedagogy further suggests that interpretive dialogue can turn religious texts into active learning resources rather than objects of one-way transmission (Abdul-Jabbar & Makki, 2024; Corpuz, 2025).

The existing literature, however, leaves a narrower classroom-level question insufficiently explored. Studies have examined Qur'anic storytelling, figurative language, Islamic pedagogy, and culturally grounded instructional resources, but fewer classroom-based studies show how Qur'anic parables are operationalized through concrete learning aids and then interpreted by university students during instruction. This distinction matters because a teaching aid can clarify a textual relationship while also creating misunderstanding if learners treat the aid as a literal representation of an unseen reality. Research on Islamic pedagogy and student-centered Qur'an-Hadith learning therefore points to a need for approaches that combine cultural and textual relevance with dialogue, participation, and interpretive control (Memon et al., 2021; Rahmatullah et al., 2025). Similar work on culturally aligned artifacts also shows the value of linking disciplinary ideas with familiar

material objects, provided that the relationship is pedagogically explained rather than assumed (Govender & Mudzamiri, 2022).

Against this background, this study investigates how Qur'anic parables function as cognitive bridges for teaching abstract and unseen concepts in a higher-education classroom. It focuses on three questions embedded in the classroom inquiry: how parables mediate conceptual understanding, how visual and tactile learning aids support analogical reasoning, and how student presentation and dialogue shape reflective interpretation. The study contributes a classroom-based account of Qur'anic parable pedagogy while maintaining a clear distinction between the theological concept, the Qur'anic image, and the temporary instructional representation used to support learning.

The study therefore positions Qur'anic parables not as substitutes for theological explanation, but as structured prompts for meaning-making. In this approach, the parable provides the textual relationship, the learning aid makes that relationship discussable, and classroom dialogue tests whether students understand both the analogy and its limits.

The theoretical contribution lies in bringing Qur'anic parable pedagogy into conversation with research on analogical learning, mental models, and reflective instruction. Practically, the study offers educators a way to use culturally meaningful texts without collapsing faith claims into visual or scientific proof. This balance is central when the object of learning belongs to the unseen or to moral meaning rather than to directly observable phenomena.

Accordingly, the analysis does not ask whether a classroom object can represent the unseen reality itself. It asks how a carefully bounded analogy can help students follow relationships expressed in Qur'anic discourse, articulate their interpretations, and recognize where the analogy must stop.

Method

This study used a qualitative classroom-based inquiry supplemented by thematic reading of selected Qur'anic passages. The design was interpretive rather than experimental: it examined how students made sense of abstract religious concepts when Qur'anic parables were paired with concrete instructional objects. Statements about understanding, engagement, or recall were therefore treated as participant perceptions and observational evidence, not as causal estimates of instructional effectiveness.

The research was situated in higher education and involved undergraduate students enrolled in an Islamic education-related course. Four student presentations served as focal instructional cases because each presentation addressed an abstract or unseen concept through a Qur'anic analogy: angelic appearance in human form, resurrection, *kalimah tayyibah* (kind words), and *riya'* (showing off). Other students in the classroom contributed through questions, responses to demonstrations, and reflective interviews. The unit of analysis was therefore the instructional episode and the meaning students constructed around it, rather than individual achievement scores or statistical differences between groups.

This focus is important for interpreting the evidence reported below. The study did not treat the four presentations as equivalent experimental treatments, nor did it assume that every student

responded to the learning aids in the same way. Instead, the cases were examined comparatively to identify recurring ways in which students connected a Qur'anic textual image, a concrete classroom representation, and the abstract concept under discussion. This case-comparative logic allowed common patterns to be identified while preserving differences among the four instructional episodes.

Data were drawn from four complementary sources. First, classroom observations documented how the parables were introduced, how learning aids were used, and how students responded during presentations and demonstrations. Second, the four focal student presentations were documented to capture the analogical explanations students constructed using banners, birds, robots, a tree, stones, water, and related objects. Third, semi-structured interviews and reflective conversations were used to explore students' perceived clarity, engagement, and recall; interview excerpts in the dataset were documented in 2024 and 2025. Fourth, instructional artifacts and classroom documentation were examined to compare the intended analogy with the explanation actually presented. Figure 1 summarizes these data sources.

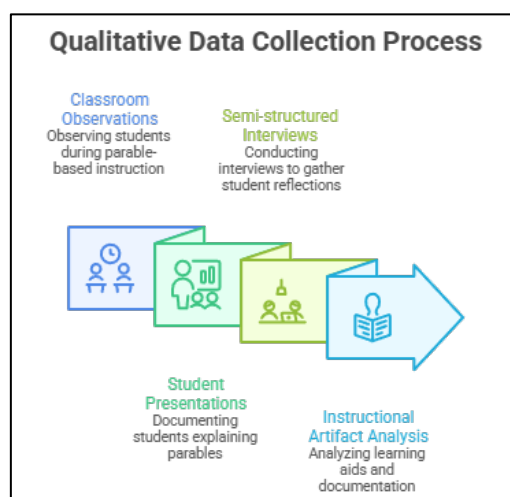


Figure 1. Data Collection Process

Selected Qur'anic passages were also read thematically to identify the textual images and relationships on which the classroom analogies were based. This textual step was used to establish what the verse itself contributed to the instructional comparison. The analysis deliberately distinguished among three levels: the theological or moral concept under discussion, the Qur'anic image or narrative through which the concept is expressed, and the classroom object used to make the relation visible. This distinction was especially important for unseen matters, where a learning aid cannot be treated as a depiction of the unseen reality itself.

Analysis proceeded through repeated reading of observation notes, interview material, presentation records, and textual interpretations. Initial codes captured recurring patterns such as conceptual mediation, source-target mapping, sensory interaction, student questioning, perceived recall, and interpretive correction. The codes were then compared across the four focal cases and grouped into three cross-cutting themes: parables as conceptual mediators, visual and tactile engagement as support for analogical reasoning, and dialogic interpretation as a basis for reflective meaning-making. The procedure followed the recursive logic of thematic analysis, moving between

coding, theme development, and review rather than treating themes as fixed in advance (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation across observations, interviews, student presentations, and instructional artifacts. Interpretations were checked against more than one data source, and selected participants were asked to confirm whether the analysis reflected the meaning of their classroom experience. Participation was voluntary and student responses were treated confidentially. Identifiable participant photographs are not included in the publication version of the manuscript. Because the study did not administer a controlled delayed post-test, references to long-term memory in participant accounts are reported as perceived recall rather than as objectively established retention.

This design made it possible to examine both the textual logic of the selected parables and the classroom processes through which students used them. The resulting themes are presented below with the four focal concepts serving as empirical cases rather than as independent claims of effectiveness.

Results and Discussion

Results

The thematic analysis produced three interrelated findings. First, Qur'anic parables operated as conceptual mediators by giving students a textual image, relation, or sequence through which an abstract idea could be discussed. Second, visual and tactile engagement supported analogical reasoning when the learning aid displayed a meaningful relation rather than merely attracting attention. Third, presentations and classroom questions turned the analogy into a dialogic activity in which students tested, refined, and sometimes corrected their interpretations. The three themes overlap in practice, but separating them analytically clarifies what the learning aids contributed and what they did not.

The analysis also showed that the pedagogical value of the activity did not reside in the object alone. A banner, robot, tree, stone, or other aid became useful only when students could relate it to a specific Qur'anic image and then explain how that relation illuminated the target concept. For this reason, the results below distinguish between the textual basis of each analogy, the classroom representation, and the student response generated around it.

Qur'anic Parables as Conceptual Mediators

Angels

Qur'anic narratives distinguish the unseen nature of angels from occasions when angelic messengers appear to human beings in human form. Maryam 19:17 describes the spirit appearing to Maryam as a well-proportioned man, while Hud 11:69–70 and 11:81 narrate angelic visitors in human appearance. Al-An'am 6:9 likewise states that, if an angelic messenger were sent to people, he would be made to appear as a man. The classroom banner therefore represented the human appearance described in these narratives; it was not presented as an image of an angel's unseen ontological form. During the student presentation, the Qur'anic passages and the Hadith of Jibril were used to explain why a human-form image could serve as a limited instructional analogy.

The presentation prompted a question about whether angels should be imagined as appearing in the same way in every cultural setting. Rather than extending the analogy into speculation about clothing or locality, the discussion returned to what the cited texts actually establish: angels may appear in human form in particular narratives, but the texts do not provide a basis for fixing a universal cultural appearance. This exchange clarified the boundary between a pedagogical image and a theological claim.

Students also asked how Maryam, Prophet Ibrahim, Prophet Lut, and Prophet Muhammad recognized angelic visitors. The class traced the answer back to the narrative context: recognition followed disclosure or circumstances within the account rather than the visitors' initial appearance alone. In the story of Ibrahim, for example, concern arose when the guests did not eat (Hud 11:69–70), while the visitors to Lut later identified their mission (Hud 11:81). The question-and-answer sequence turned the image from a passive illustration into a prompt for textual interpretation.

Students responded positively to the banner because it provided a concrete point of reference for a concept that would otherwise have remained largely verbal. After the presentation, students interacted with the learning aid and several interview comments associated the visual and tactile encounter with easier recall of the lesson (Student interview, 2024). These statements are reported as perceptions of memorability rather than evidence that contact with the banner independently caused long-term retention.

Analytically, the most informative part of this episode was not the human-form image itself but the interpretive work that followed it. The image gave students something definite to question: whether the visual form represented the essence of an angel, whether the appearance described in the verse was contextual, and how human characters in the Qur'anic narratives came to recognize angelic visitors. The classroom discussion therefore shifted from passive reception of a doctrinal statement to examination of what the cited narratives actually permit the learner to infer.

The episode also revealed a necessary boundary for parable-based instruction. A concrete representation can make a textual description easier to discuss, but it can also invite overextension if students begin to treat the representation as an ontological depiction of the unseen. Returning to Maryam 19:17, Hud 11:69–81, and Al-An'am 6:9 allowed the discussion to distinguish a narrated human appearance from the unseen reality of angels. In this case, conceptual clarity emerged from the combination of visualization and correction, not from visualization alone.

Resurrection

The resurrection case drew on Al-Baqarah 2:260, where Prophet Ibrahim is instructed to take four birds and is shown a sign related to Allah's power to give life, and on Ya-Sin 36:78–79, which responds to the question of who can give life to decayed bones. In the classroom, bird-related learning aids, including live birds and a miniature bird, were used to anchor discussion of the Qur'anic narrative. The objects were not treated as a reenactment of resurrection; they served as concrete referents for following the sequence and meaning of the cited passage.

During the presentation, students recited and discussed Al-Baqarah 2:260 and explained the sequence described in the verse. The classroom demonstration focused on the relation between separation, calling, and restoration as a way of organizing the narrative for learners. Details not stated explicitly in the verse were not treated as Qur'anic facts. This distinction helped keep the

teaching activity within the limits of the textual account while still giving students a concrete structure for discussion.

Students described this approach as unfamiliar but easier to follow than explanation alone. One participant noted that the use of birds made the Qur'anic account easier to visualize, while another said that the parable helped connect an unseen concept with a sequence that could be discussed step by step (Student interviews, 2025). The finding concerns perceived conceptual clarity; it does not claim that the demonstration constitutes empirical proof of resurrection.

A second representation used four toy robots as an analogy for disassembly and reassembly. Students removed and mixed detachable parts and then reconstructed the robots, as illustrated in Figure 2. The analogy made the idea of reconstitution easier to reason through because learners could follow a visible sequence from an intact object, to separated parts, and back to an organized whole. The classroom explanation nevertheless kept the analogy bounded: the robot sequence illustrated a relation of disassembly and reassembly and was not presented as a model of the divine act itself.



Figure 2. Robot Disassembly and Reassembly Sequence

During the extended demonstration, students watched closely, asked questions, and later reported that the sequence helped them remember the structure of the lesson. The observable result was increased attention and a clearer ability to explain the analogy in discussion. Claims about durable memory were based on participant reports and therefore remain interpretive rather than experimental.

The activity concluded with students handling the robot and bird learning aids. Participants commonly associated this direct interaction with a stronger impression of the lesson. The significance of touch in this study is therefore best understood as one component of a wider multisensory episode (seeing, listening, manipulating, questioning, and discussing) rather than as an isolated mechanism that can be credited with learning gains on its own.

The two representations served different analytical purposes. The birds kept the lesson close to the Qur'anic narrative, while the robots made a structural sequence visible in a form that students could manipulate repeatedly. Together they show that fidelity and accessibility need not be treated as competing goals. The textual example anchored the theological meaning; the manufactured object supported reasoning about sequence. When those functions were made explicit, students could move between the verse and the analogy without collapsing one into the other.

Student comments that the activity was easier to follow than explanation alone are significant because they identify what changed in the learning situation: the sequence became inspectable. Students could point to stages, ask where the analogy fitted the verse, and reconstruct the

explanation in their own words. That is a more defensible interpretation of the observed benefit than claiming that the demonstration proved the truth of resurrection or objectively increased memory. The instructional gain documented here is greater conceptual accessibility within the classroom episode.

Kind Words (Kalimah Tayyibah)

The third case used the Qur'anic image of *kalimah tayyibah*, a good or wholesome word, in Ibrahim 14:24–25. The passage compares a good word with a good tree whose root is firm, whose branches reach upward, and which gives its fruit. A real tree was brought into the classroom so that students could examine the structural relation between the textual image and the moral concept. The lesson therefore began with the Qur'anic comparison itself rather than with a separate list of polite expressions.

Students mapped the parts of the tree onto the meaning discussed in class: firm roots were associated with a stable moral basis for speech, branching represented the reach and variety of good expression, and fruit represented beneficial consequences. The mapping was treated as an instructional interpretation of the Qur'anic image rather than as a fixed exegetical scheme. In presentations, students were able to explain why the tree made the abstract moral quality easier to organize conceptually (Student interview, 2024).

Students described the tree activity as engaging because the relationship between the verse and the object could be seen and discussed at the same time. They later handled the roots, trunk, and leaves, and several participants said that the physical encounter helped them recall the structure of the analogy (Student interviews, 2024–2025). As in the other cases, these comments indicate perceived recall rather than a measured memory effect.

What distinguished this case from a decorative use of nature was the relational mapping. Students were asked to explain why firmness belonged to the roots, why growth and extension were represented by branches, and why fruit could stand for consequences produced by speech. Their explanations therefore moved beyond naming an object and toward identifying correspondences between parts of the Qur'anic image and aspects of the moral concept. This made the parable available for analysis rather than merely appreciation.

The tree example also showed that a concrete aid can support abstraction rather than eliminate it. The class did not reduce *kalimah tayyibah* to a botanical object; instead, the visible structure gave students a stable reference from which to discuss moral foundations, forms of expression, and consequences. The conceptual movement remained two-directional: the verse gave meaning to the object, while the object helped students articulate the internal structure of the verse. That reciprocity is central to the idea of a cognitive bridge used in this study.

Riya' (Showing Off)

The fourth case addressed *riya'*, understood in the lesson as performing a good deed for public recognition. Al-Baqarah 2:264 compares the person who spends to be seen by others with a smooth stone covered by soil that is struck by heavy rain and left bare. The classroom used a stone, soil, water, money, a charity box, a miniature mosque, a needle, and a basin to make the cause-and-effect sequence visible (Figure 3). The aim was not to assign an independent theological meaning

to every object, but to show how an apparently good deed can lose its moral value when the intention is corrupted by display.



Figure 3. Learning Aids Used to Discuss Riya'

In the demonstration, a student placed money in the charity box and then narrated the act publicly. Water was subsequently allowed to fall over soil placed on a smooth stone, approximating the Qur'anic image of rain removing the surface layer. Students used the visible change in the stone to discuss the fragility of charity performed for recognition. This sequence was more consistent with the verse than a one-to-one claim that the stone, soil, or rain each represented a separate moral category.

Students said the demonstration made the relationship between intention, action, and consequence easier to follow (Student interview, 2025). The presentation also generated informal discussion among classmates as they examined the objects and replayed the sequence. Their engagement suggests that the learning aid worked not simply as a visual display but as a shared object around which interpretation could be negotiated.

One student reflected that the activity helped connect the physical demonstration with the moral point of the lesson: giving charity should not become an occasion for self-display (Student interview, 2024). Another participant said that the learning aid remained easy to recall after the lesson (Student interview, 2024). Such statements are valuable evidence of how students experienced the activity, although they do not replace objective assessment of delayed retention.

The strength of this activity lay in the visibility of consequence. Students could observe the soil being removed from the stone while the presenter explained the moral logic of the verse. That observable change gave the class a common reference point for discussing why outward action alone is not sufficient for evaluating a deed. The demonstration thus externalized a relation that is morally abstract without claiming to make intention itself visible.

At the same time, the episode required careful interpretive control. A literal one-to-one assignment of stone, soil, water, money, and other objects could easily produce a meaning not stated in Al-Baqarah 2:264. The discussion was therefore strongest when it returned to the overall relation in the parable an apparently covered surface becoming bare, rather than forcing every classroom object to carry a separate theological referent. This distinction helped preserve the Qur'anic logic while still allowing the sequence to function pedagogically.

Across the four cases, the parable functioned as a conceptual mediator when students could identify three elements clearly: the abstract target concept, the Qur'anic image or narrative that structured the comparison, and the classroom representation used to make that relation discussable.

Table 1 summarizes how these elements were connected and where interpretive caution was required.

Table 1. Analytical Synthesis of the Four Parable-Based Instructional Cases

Concept and Qur'anic basis	Classroom representation	Analytical role in learning	Evidence and interpretive caution
Angelic appearance in human form — Maryam 19:17; Hud 11:69–81; Al-An'am 6:9	Human-form banner used as a discussion prompt	Provided a concrete point from which students examined narrated human appearance and asked how angelic visitors were recognized	Generated questions and reported memorability; the image was not treated as a depiction of the unseen essence of angels
Resurrection — Al-Baqarah 2:260; Ya-Sin 36:78–79	Bird-related aids and a disassembly/reassembly sequence using toy robots	Made sequence and reconstitution easier to follow by separating textual anchoring from manipulable structural analogy	Students reported greater clarity; the demonstration illustrated a relation and did not model or prove the divine act
Kalimah tayyibah — Ibrahim 14:24–25	A real tree examined through roots, branches, and fruit	Supported relational mapping between structural features of the Qur'anic image and the moral consequences of good speech	Students explained the mapping and reported easier recall; the tree remained an analogy rather than an equivalent of the moral concept
Riya' — Al-Baqarah 2:264	Stone, soil, water, money, charity box, and related demonstration materials	Made the consequence structure of the parable observable and discussable	Students connected intention, action, and consequence; interpretation was kept at the level of the overall parable rather than assigning fixed meanings to every object

Theme 2. Visual and Tactile Engagement as Support for Analogical Reasoning

A second pattern concerned the role of sensory engagement in helping students follow analogical relationships more clearly. The learning aids provided visible structures such as human appearance, separation and reassembly, roots and branches, and soil being washed from stone. These concrete representations allowed students to observe the relationship between the object and the concept while the explanation was taking place. Classroom observations showed that students paid closer attention when they could point to, handle, or return to an object that had previously been introduced through verbal explanation. Sensory engagement was therefore important not simply because it made the lesson more interesting, but because it gave students a concrete reference that helped them follow and discuss the intended analogy.

The most useful aids were those that displayed a relation or sequence rather than a single decorative image. The robot activity presented successive states; the tree displayed a part-whole structure; and the *riya'* demonstration made a change in condition observable. These features gave students something that could be followed, compared, and explained. By contrast, a static image had less analytical value unless it generated questions that sent students back to the textual basis of the analogy.

Touch was a recurring feature of the classroom episodes. Students handled the banner, robots, bird-related aids, tree, and *riya'* materials after the explanation. Interview comments often linked

this physical interaction with a stronger impression of the lesson and with easier recollection at a later point. The consistency of these comments makes tactile engagement a meaningful feature of the participants' experience, but it does not establish touch as an independent cause of retention.

The result therefore supports a cautious interpretation: the learning aids helped create a richer instructional episode in which visual, auditory, tactile, and dialogic information converged. Research on multisensory integration suggests that information presented across more than one sensory channel can shape attention and processing (Stein et al., 2020), while studies of concrete and technology-supported learning aids likewise indicate that manipulable representations can assist concept formation under suitable instructional conditions (Gargrish et al., 2022; Prihestiyani et al., 2025). The present qualitative data are consistent with that broader literature, but they do not justify a claim that handling an object by itself produces durable memory.

A further point concerns instructional timing. Students appeared to gain most from interaction after the conceptual relation had been explained, not from unstructured handling of the objects. The sequence was generally explanation, demonstration, questioning, and then direct interaction. This order matters because it positions the object as a support for an emerging mental model rather than as a stimulus from which students must infer the lesson without guidance. In practical terms, the learning aid worked best as part of a designed explanatory sequence.

The cases also indicate that sensory richness has diminishing value when it is not tied to a clear analytical purpose. Adding more objects did not automatically produce a stronger explanation. The pedagogically useful feature was selective correspondence: students needed to know which property of the object mattered for the target concept and which properties were irrelevant. This finding helps explain why relatively simple materials could support substantial discussion when their function was made explicit.

This distinction also matters for theological accuracy. A model is useful precisely because it simplifies, but the simplification becomes problematic when learners treat the model as a literal representation of an unseen or moral reality. In all four cases, the strongest learning moments occurred when the teacher or presenting student named the boundary of the comparison. The classroom object could clarify a relation, sequence, or consequence; it could not exhaust the meaning of the verse or turn an unseen reality into an observable object.

Taken together, the second theme shows that concrete aids were most productive when they were embedded in explanation, manipulation, and explicit source–target mapping. Their contribution was therefore relational and procedural. They made aspects of the reasoning available for inspection and discussion while leaving the abstract or unseen status of the target concept intact.

Dialogic Interpretation and Reflective Meaning-Making

The third theme emerged from the interaction around the learning aids. Student presentations routinely generated questions that could not be answered by the object alone: whether a visual representation had been extended too far, how a sequence related to the wording of a verse, and which features of an analogy were essential. These questions became part of the data because they showed where students experienced conceptual tension. Rather than indicating failure of the method, the questions often marked the point at which an initial visual impression was being tested against textual and theological constraints.

Reflection was also visible in the way students revisited the lesson after the demonstrations. Interview comments did not only report enjoyment; students described the relation they remembered between the object and the concept, such as reconstruction in the resurrection case or the exposed stone in the *riya'* case. This distinction matters because enjoyment alone would say little about conceptual learning. The more informative responses reconstructed a relation, sequence, or moral consequence and thereby showed what aspect of the lesson had become cognitively available to the participant.

The dialogic function was particularly important for correcting overextensions. Questions about angelic appearance, the resurrection demonstration, and the mapping of moral concepts required the class to return to the Qur'anic text and clarify what the analogy could legitimately support. In that sense, dialogue acted as a quality-control mechanism within the learning process. It prevented the concrete aid from becoming the final authority and re-established the text as the reference point for interpretation.

Student presentations also redistributed some of the interpretive work normally carried by the lecturer. Presenters had to make the analogy intelligible to peers, defend the connection they proposed, and respond when classmates identified an ambiguity. The rest of the class, meanwhile, participated as evaluators rather than only listeners. This pattern gave the activity a collaborative dimension in which understanding was negotiated publicly and revisions to an explanation could occur in real time.

The theme therefore extends beyond participation in a general sense. What mattered was the form of participation: students articulated mappings, questioned boundaries, compared the object with the verse, and reflected on what remained memorable after the activity. Those practices are compatible with metacognitive and reflective learning because they make the learner's own process of understanding available for examination (Alt & Raichel, 2020; Ratnayake et al., 2024). The classroom dialogue did not remove the need for guidance; it created a setting in which guidance could respond to visible reasoning rather than assumed comprehension.

Taken as a whole, the third theme explains why the same learning aid could be educationally productive in one moment and potentially misleading in another. Its value depended on whether the surrounding conversation opened the analogy to scrutiny. The cognitive bridge was therefore not a fixed object but a process of moving between text, representation, question, explanation, and revision.

Discussion

The findings support the central proposition that analogy can serve as a cognitive bridge when learners are helped to map relationships rather than merely associate an abstract idea with a picture. This pattern is consistent with research showing that narrative representation and analogy can support mental-model construction, conceptual transfer, reflective thinking, and metacognitive engagement (Hwang et al., 2025; Keri & Elbatarny, 2021; Reyes & Villanueva, 2024; Tham et al., 2021; Wang, 2023). The present study extends that discussion to Qur'anic pedagogy by showing that the bridge is built through an ordered relation among text, representation, and dialogue. The object is pedagogically useful because it makes selected relations inspectable; it is not the source of meaning on its own.

The Qur'anic dimension is not incidental to this process. Studies of Qur'anic figurative language and conceptual metaphor show that the text frequently invites readers to reason through images, spatial relations, and comparison (As'ad et al., 2021; Sardaraz et al., 2022). Scholarship on Qur'anic parables and educational philosophy likewise identifies reflection and guided inference as important features of engagement with the text (Gulzar et al., 2023; Stimpson & Calvert, 2021). The classroom findings add an applied layer to this literature: a parable became pedagogically productive when students had to explain the relation it proposed and examine how far that relation could be carried.

This approach also helps explain why culturally and religiously grounded narratives can support engagement without being reduced to motivational decoration. Qur'anic storytelling, analogical cues, and tadabbur-oriented pedagogy have been used to encourage moral reflection and interpretive participation (Abdul-Jabbar & Makki, 2024; Akrim & Gunawan, 2021; Amin, 2017). In the present study, students were more active when the learning aid became an object of shared inquiry. The pattern also resembles parable-based teaching in other religious education contexts, where a familiar narrative can provide a common reference point for discussion while leaving room for questioning and critical reflection (Corpuz, 2025).

The moral cases also suggest a connection between analogical structure and ethical awareness. Research on analogical encoding shows that comparing structured cases can deepen knowledge of ethical principles and make morally relevant features easier to notice (Kim & Loewenstein, 2021). The tree and *riya'* activities worked in a comparable way at the classroom level: students did not only hear that good speech is beneficial or that showing off can undermine charity; they traced a relation in which stability, growth, consequence, covering, and loss could be discussed. The value of the analogy lay in this relational organization, not in treating the physical object as equivalent to the moral reality.

The distinction between relational and decorative representation is particularly important. Visual cognition research has shown that representations are most useful when they help learners organize conceptual relations rather than simply add visual interest (Reyes & Villanueva, 2024). A similar pattern appeared here. The robot sequence, tree structure, and stone–soil transformation supported explanation because each preserved a relation that students could track. This offers a practical design criterion for Islamic education: the choice of a learning aid should begin with the relation to be understood, not with the attractiveness or availability of an object.

The tactile findings should be interpreted in the same disciplined way. Multisensory integration research supports the general proposition that coordinated sensory information can influence processing (Stein et al., 2020), and applied studies have reported positive learning experiences with manipulable or augmented representations (Chang & Chen, 2022; Gargrish et al., 2022; Prihestiyani et al., 2025). Yet the present data do not isolate touch from the rest of the lesson. Students touched objects after watching demonstrations, hearing explanations, asking questions, and discussing meanings. The most defensible conclusion is therefore that tactile interaction formed part of a multimodal learning sequence that participants experienced as memorable.

The dialogic pattern also places the study within a broader learner-centered understanding of Islamic pedagogy. Research on Islamic teacher education and Qur'an–Hadith instruction has

emphasized the value of participation, reflection, and discussion rather than relying exclusively on one-way transmission (Memon et al., 2021; Rahmatullah et al., 2025). In this study, dialogue had a specific epistemic role: it exposed where a concrete representation risked exceeding the textual basis. Student questions created opportunities to refine the analogy, which means that participation contributed to conceptual accuracy as well as classroom engagement.

This corrective function is especially significant when the target concept belongs to al-ghayb. The unseen cannot be converted into an empirical object simply by introducing a model, and Islamic understandings of al-ghayb require recognition of that epistemic boundary (Bubandt et al., 2019). The study therefore contributes a more qualified account of concreteness in religious education. What becomes concrete is not the unseen reality itself, but a selected relation, sequence, or image through which learners can reason about the textual teaching.

The findings also have implications for culturally grounded instructional design. Studies that incorporate culturally meaningful artifacts into learning suggest that familiar resources can support engagement when they are integrated with a clear pedagogical model rather than inserted superficially (Govender & Mudzamiri, 2022). Qur'anic parables carry an additional layer because they are not merely familiar cultural references; for Muslim learners they may also possess normative and spiritual significance. That status increases their pedagogical potential but also raises the standard for interpretive care. The teacher must preserve the distinction between scriptural meaning, pedagogical analogy, and classroom object.

Taken together, these points refine the idea of a cognitive bridge. The bridge is not a claim that concrete experience replaces abstract thought. It is a temporary instructional structure that helps learners enter an abstract concept, organize its relations, test an interpretation, and then return to the source with greater conceptual differentiation. This formulation helps reconcile contemporary analogy-based pedagogy with the epistemological caution required in teaching Qur'anic and theological content.

Several limitations should qualify the interpretation. The study was conducted in one higher-education setting and centered on four focal presentations, so the findings are analytically transferable rather than statistically generalizable. Perceived recall was reported in interviews but was not tested with a controlled delayed assessment. The study also did not compare parable-based instruction with another teaching condition, and the available manuscript data do not permit subgroup analysis of how students with different prior knowledge responded to the analogies. These limits make it important to frame the findings as an account of pedagogical processes and participant perceptions rather than as evidence of causal effectiveness.

Future research can test this interpretation more rigorously without abandoning the qualitative insight generated here. A mixed-method design could combine observation and interviews with delayed concept measures, while comparative classes could examine whether the contribution comes primarily from the Qur'anic parable, the manipulable aid, the dialogic presentation, or their combination. More detailed reporting of participant characteristics and instructional duration would also help determine whether the approach functions similarly across levels of prior religious knowledge and different educational contexts.

Conclusion

This study answers its central question by showing how Qur'anic parables can function as cognitive bridges for abstract religious concepts when three conditions are present: the textual image or narrative relation is clearly identified, the learning aid makes the relevant structure visible or manipulable, and classroom dialogue clarifies the limits of the comparison. Across the cases of angelic appearance in human form, resurrection, *kalimah tayyibah*, and *riya'*, students used concrete materials to organize explanations that would otherwise have remained largely verbal.

The main contribution is therefore not a claim that unseen realities can be made observable. Rather, the study demonstrates a pedagogical process for moving between abstract meaning and concrete representation without treating the representation as the reality itself. Visual and tactile interaction appeared to support engagement and perceived recall, while student questioning and presentation created opportunities for reflective interpretation and correction.

The analysis further indicates that the strongest instructional value came from relational mapping rather than from the mere presence of visual media. A concrete aid became meaningful when students could explain what feature of the object corresponded to the Qur'anic image, why that correspondence mattered for the target concept, and where the analogy stopped. This finding gives the study a practical contribution: educators can evaluate a proposed learning aid by the clarity of its mapping and its capacity to support discussion, not by novelty alone.

These conclusions should be interpreted within the scope of the qualitative design. The study describes how students experienced, understood, and explained the learning process. It does not provide evidence of causal effectiveness or objectively measured long-term memory. The main implication is that Qur'anic parables can support meaningful learning when analogies are carefully designed, consistently linked to the relevant Qur'anic text, and clearly explained so that students understand both the intended comparison and its limits.

In Islamic education, this approach can help connect Qur'anic discourse with learner-centered teaching without reducing the theological depth of the concepts being discussed. The purpose of the cognitive bridge is not to make abstract concepts fully concrete, but to provide students with a structured way to think about ideas that are otherwise difficult to visualize or explain.

Educators who use parable-based learning should choose learning aids that clearly represent the intended relationship or sequence. The connection between the source of the analogy and the concept being taught should be explained before students interact with the learning aids. Teachers should also clarify where the analogy no longer applies so that students do not treat the representation as an exact description of the concept. Student presentations, guided questions, and classroom discussion can then be used to identify misunderstandings and refine students' interpretations.

Future research could examine this approach at different educational levels and across a wider range of subjects. Studies should also provide more detailed information about participants, instructional settings, and learning procedures. If memory retention is examined, qualitative findings could be combined with delayed assessments to provide stronger evidence. Comparative

studies may also help clarify the separate contributions of Qur'anic parables, concrete learning aids, and classroom discussion to students' understanding.

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