Jihad and Ikhlas in The Qur'an: A Hermeneutic–Thematic Synthesis for Modern Character Formation

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Abstract

This qualitative hermeneutic–thematic study aimed to synthesize Qur'anic discourses on jihad (striving) and ikhlas (purity of intention) to construct an integrated ethical matrix for modern character formation. Using tafsir mawḍū'ī combined with contextual hermeneutics, we mapped verses across Makkan–Madinan phases, traced the lexical roots j–h–d and kh–l–ṣ via classical concordances, and thematically coded functions and cognates (e.g., mujāhada, ṣabr, anti-riyā'), with triangulation against classical and contemporary exegesis to ensure contextual validity. Findings indicate that jihad operates as a multi-channel kinetic energy spiritual, social, discursive, material, and, under strict justice constraints, defensive whereas ikhlas functions as a moral compass anchoring intention to God's pleasure; without ikhlas, jihad risks performativity, and without jihad, ikhlas risks quietism. The study articulates a Qur'anic Jihad–Ikhlas Ethical Matrix and an initial operational toolkit (a niyyah audit, a rubric of sincerity, peace-first constraints within maqāṣid, and digital adab guidelines) to inform character education, professional ethos, and civic/digital engagement. Future research should empirically test the toolkit's usability and impact through pilot implementations in educational and organizational settings.

Keywords: *Qur'an; jihad; ikhlas; character education; hermeneutics.*

Abstrak

Penelitian kualitatif hermeneutik-tematik ini bertujuan untuk mensintesis diskursus Qur'ani mengenai jihad (usaha) dan ikhlas (kemurnian niat) untuk membangun matriks etika terintegrasi bagi pembentukan karakter modern. Dengan menggunakan tafsir mawḍū'ī yang dipadukan dengan hermeneutika kontekstual, kami memetakan ayat-ayat dalam fase Makki–Madani, menelusuri akar leksikal j–h–d dan kh–l–ṣ melalui konsorsium klasik, serta mengkodekan fungsi dan kognat tematik (misalnya, mujāhada, ṣabr, anti-riyā'), dengan triangulasi terhadap tafsir klasik dan kontemporer untuk memastikan validitas kontekstual. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa jihad beroperasi sebagai energi kinetik multi-saluran spiritual, sosial, diskursif, material, dan, di bawah batasan keadilan yang ketat, defensif sedangkan ikhlas berfungsi sebagai kompas moral yang meneguhkan niat untuk meraih ridha Allah; tanpa ikhlas, jihad berisiko menjadi performatif, dan tanpa jihad, ikhlas berisiko mengarah pada keheningan. Penelitian ini merumuskan Matriks Etika Jihad–Ikhlas Qur'ani dan alat operasional awal (audit niyyah, rubrik keikhlasan, batasan damai pertama dalam maqāṣid, dan pedoman adab digital) untuk mendukung pendidikan karakter, etos profesional, dan keterlibatan sosial/digital. Penelitian mendatang sebaiknya menguji secara empiris kegunaan dan dampak dari alat operasional ini melalui implementasi percobaan di lingkungan pendidikan dan organisasi.

Kata kunci: *Al-Qur'an; jihad; ikhlas; pendidikan karakter; hermeneutika.*

Introduction

The values of struggle and sincerity in modern society have tended to decline, as many individuals prioritize personal interests and public image over fulfilling responsibilities with sincerity. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the workplace, where individuals often focus more on image-building in front of superiors than on fulfilling their tasks with full responsibility and sincerity.[1] Moreover, modern society is often trapped in a materialistic and rationalistic lifestyle, leading interpersonal relationships to be based on material gain calculations rather than considerations of conscience or spiritual values. As a result, many individuals experience inner emptiness and lose the true meaning of life.[2]

On the other hand, the spirit of struggle has also started to fade in contemporary society. Today's younger generation tends to desire instant achievements without going through the necessary, challenging processes.[3] Noble values such as hard work, perseverance, and the willingness to sacrifice for the collective good are increasingly sidelined by popular culture.[4] In contrast, the spirit of struggle and sincerity remains a priceless legacy from the founding fathers of the nation and educational leaders like KH. Ahmad Dahlan, who consistently emphasized the importance of struggle based on simplicity and sincerity for the nation's progress.[5] These East Asian values have historically proven effective in shaping individuals with strong character and high integrity.[6]

The weakening of sincerity and the spirit of struggle in contemporary society is further exacerbated by digital culture, which distorts authentic values. Recent studies indicate how social media has created a "quick achievement ecosystem" that undermines the ethos of hard work.[7] Noble values such as sincerity and the spirit of perseverance are now threatened by an algorithmic logic that prioritizes popularity over substance. To address this challenge, recent research suggests an educational approach based on local values integrated with digital literacy, alongside a tripartite collaboration between schools, religious communities, and technology platforms.

In an effort to understand the moral and spiritual values that form the foundation of the lives of Muslims, it is essential to explore the meanings of struggle and sincerity from the perspective of the Qur'an. These two concepts not only serve as foundational principles for performing acts of worship and daily activities but also as keys to shaping character and determination in facing various life challenges. This leads to the fundamental questions that need to be answered: What is the true meaning of struggle and sincerity in the Qur'anic view? Furthermore, how do the verses of the Qur'an specifically shape and instill these values in the lives of individual Muslims? These questions serve as the starting point for a deeper understanding

[1] Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (W.W. Norton, 1998).

[2] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity Press, 2000).

[3] Jean M Twenge, *IGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (Atria Books, 2017).

[4] Robert D Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon \& Schuster, 2000).

[5] M. Nursamad Kamba, *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam* (Tangerang Selatan: Pustaka IIMaN, 2018).

[6] Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan Jawa* (Balai Pustaka, 1994).

[7] Twenge, *IGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*.

of how the Qur'an guides its followers in internalizing and practicing these two essential values.

The objective of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings of struggle and sincerity in the perspective of the Qur'an and how the verses of the Qur'an shape and instill these values in the lives of Muslims. This study is expected to provide a clearer understanding of the relevance of these values in the context of modern life, which often presents various moral and spiritual challenges. The urgency of this research lies in the pressing need to restore and strengthen the values of sincerity and the spirit of struggle amid a society increasingly influenced by materialistic and individualistic cultures. By understanding the Qur'anic foundation of struggle and sincerity, it is hoped that society can internalize these values as motivation in leading a meaningful life and contribute positively to the progress of the nation and the community.

Recent studies on the concept of sincerity (al-ikhlāṣ) in the Qur'an have made significant contributions to the development of this concept. A study conducted by Samsir examined the implementation of the value of sincerity in the context of Islamic education at Ma'had Aly As'adiyah Sengkang, with findings that sincerity serves as the foundation of the academic ethos in that institution.[8] Another study by Hidayati, using a thematic approach (maudhū'ī) and an analysis of the relationship between verses (munāsabah al-āyāt), identified sincerity as a concrete manifestation of the value of tauhid in daily life.[9] Furthermore, a more recent study by Siti Mariam from Institut PTIQ Jakarta has expanded the scope of sincerity studies by analyzing the implementation of sincerity values in the

Qur'an in relation to the modern work ethic.[10] Using a descriptive-analytical approach, this study innovatively integrates the concept of sincerity within the Islamic perspective with Maslow and Herzberg's motivation theories from Western psychology. The research findings show a convergence between spiritual motivation in Islam and the need for self-actualization in modern psychology, while still maintaining the ontological uniqueness of sincerity as a form of devotion (ta'abbud) to Allah.

These studies collectively form a conceptual framework that emphasizes the central position of sincerity in the Islamic value system. A synthesis of the research reveals three main characteristics: (1) sincerity as a manifestation of tauhid in practice (al-tawhīd al-'amalī), (2) its function as a spiritual driver (ḥarakah rūḥiyyah), and (3) its role as an ethical foundation (al-asās al-akhlāqī) in social interactions. However, a critical review of the existing literature uncovers a research gap there is yet to be a comprehensive study that integrates the concept of sincerity with the dimension of struggle (al-jihād) in the Qur'anic perspective. This academic void presents an opportunity for further research to develop an integrated approach that combines both concepts within a coherent theological framework.

Method

This study employed a qualitative hermeneutic–thematic design within the framework of Qur'anic studies, integrating *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* (thematic exegesis) with contextual hermeneutics.[11] The primary

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[8] Samsir, (2021)

[9] Hidayati, (2019)

[10] Siti Mariam, (2023)

[11] Endang Hidayati and B A Hutagaol, "An Analysis of Hasan Hanafi's Tafsir Method: Hermeneutics as an Interpretative Approach," *INJIES: International Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 2, no. 1 (2025): 39–48; Muhammad Fauzi Noor and Eko Saputra, "Hermeneutics in the Interpretation of Qur'an,"

corpus was the 'Uthmānī *mushaf*, cross-verified through two authoritative translations. Lexical mapping was conducted on the roots *j–h–d* and *kh–l–ṣ* using classical concordances and lexicons, then contextualized with Makkan–Madinan classifications and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (;).[12] This design aligns with the contemporary *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* tradition, which emphasizes systematic thematic organization across verses combined with historical–contextual sensitivity, as well as Qur'anic hermeneutics developed by Sahiron Syamsuddin and colleagues (Miftahuddin, 2020; Putri, 2024).

The analytic procedure unfolded in four stages: (1) extracting all occurrences of the target roots; (2) expanding to relevant semantic cognates (e.g., *mujāhada*, *ṣabr*, anti-*riyā'*); (3) assigning Makkan/Madinan labels along with verse context; and (4) applying inclusion criteria when jihad/ikhlāṣ themes were explicit or dominant according to exegetical sources, and exclusion criteria when merely incidental.[13] The data were subsequently coded through open coding (semantic–pragmatic functions) and axial coding (domain clustering), then mapped onto a cross-domain Jihad–Ikhlāṣ Matrix. This scheme followed the established practices of qualitative content/thematic analysis in document-based research, combining systematic steps from document analysis and thematic analysis to ensure transparency and replicability.[14]

Validity was safeguarded through source triangulation (*tafsīr* classical–modern, lexicons, and *asbāb al-nuzūl*), peer debriefing on sample verses, an audit trail of inclusion/exclusion decisions and codebook, and a clear separation between exegetical description and normative proposals.[15] Standards of trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) were operationalized through historical contextualization of verses and audited coding, in line with contemporary methodological literature.[16]

Journal of Islamic Thought and Literature 2, no. 1 (2024): 15–27.

[12] Zaid Alshawabka, "Quranic Hermeneutics: A New Islamic Methodology to Understanding Accounting Qualitative Data within the Islamic World Context," *International Journal of Critical Accounting* 11, no. 3 (2020): 226–244; Soni Harsono, Ahmad Syagif HM, and Junaidin Junaidin, "A Critical Study of Hermeneutics in the Interpretation of the Qur'an Regarding Educational Verses," *FiTUA: Jurnal Studi Islam* 6, no. 2 (September 20, 2025): 150–163, https://ejournal.stitbima.ac.id/index.php/fitua/article/view/1046.

[13] W W Wardani, "Evolution of Tafsir Approaches in Islamic Studies," *Multidisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 120–137, https://jurnal.uinsyahada.ac.id/index.php/multd/article/download/13676/pdf; M Zaid, "Methodological Analysis of Tafsīr Fī Zhilāl Al-Qur'ān," *Civilization Research Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2025): 55–70, https://www.crjis.com/index.php/civilizationresearch/article/download/109/77.

[14] Moch. Nur Ichwan, "Reevaluating Qur'anic Hermeneutics: A Comparative Study," *Kalam: Journal of Islamic Thought* 18, no. 2 (2024): 201–220, https://ejournal.radenintan.ac.id/index.php/KALAM/article/view/24213; Erlina Erlina, Koderi Koderi, and Muhammad Sufian, "Designing A Gender-Responsive Qira'ah Learning Module: Bridging Equality And Inclusivity In Islamic Higher Education," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 25, no. 1 (February 6, 2025): 239–262, https://jurnal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/islamfutura/article/view/29305; Koderi, Muhammad Sufian, and Erlina, "Developing Lampung Local Wisdom Film of Arabic Communication Skills for Madrasah Tsanawiyah Students," *International Journal of Information and Education Technology* 13, no. 12 (2023): 2004–2013, https://www.ijiet.org/show-195-2628-1.html.

[15] Hidayati and Hutagaol, "An Analysis of Hasan Hanafi's Tafsir Method: Hermeneutics as an Interpretative Approach."

[16] Harsono, HM, and Junaidin, "A Critical Study of Hermeneutics in the Interpretation of the Qur'an Regarding Educational Verses"; M Agung Pribowo et al., "Pengembangan E-Modul Pendidikan Agama Islam Interaktif Berbasis Flipbook Untuk Meningkatkan Pembelajaran Di Sekolah Menengah Pertama," *Jurnal PAI Raden Fatah* 6, no. 82 (2024): 1163–1177; Elsa Al Khansa et al., "The Integrated Learning Model in Islamic Religious Education In Junior High School," *Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (2024): 69–85; Hidayati and Hutagaol, "An Analysis of Hasan Hanafi's Tafsir

The inherent limitations of text-based exegetical research particularly the absence of empirical field testing were acknowledged from the outset, with recommendations for follow-up through character-education interventions or digital counter-speech initiatives grounded in the present framework).[17]

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Method: Hermeneutics as an Interpretative Approach."

[17] Noor and Saputra, "Hermeneutics in the Interpretation of Qur'an"; Elvia Nur Janah, Hasyim As'ari, and Wiwied Pratiwi, "Relevansi Kedisiplinan Melaksanakan Shalat Fardhu Dengan Akhlakul Karimah Santri Putri Di Pondok Pesantren Al Manshuriah," *Jurnal Berkala Ilmiah Pendidikan* 4, no. 1 (2024): 1–14; Resta Okta Pertiwi et al., "Exploring Types of I'lal And Effective Learning Strategies in Arabic Language Teaching," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 10, no. 01 (2025): 234–249.

[18] Lise-Merete Alpers and Ingrid Hanssen, "Caring for Ethnic Minority Patients: A Mixed Method Study of Nurses' Self-Assessment of Cultural Competency," *Nurse Education Today* 34, no. 6 (2014): 999–1004, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0260691713004346; Alice G Yick, "A Metasynthesis of Qualitative Findings on the Role of Spirituality and Religiosity Among Culturally Diverse Domestic Violence Survivors," *Qualitative Health Research* 18, no. 9 (September 1, 2008): 1289–1306, https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732308321772.

[19] Harsono, HM, and Junaidin, "A Critical Study of Hermeneutics in the Interpretation of the Qur'an Regarding Educational Verses."

[20] Rudolf R Sinkovics and Eva A Alfoldi, "Progressive Focusing and Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research," *Management International Review* 52, no. 6 (2012): 817–845, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-012-0140-5; Susan L. Morrow, "Quality and Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research in Counseling Psychology," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52, no. 2 (2005): 250–260.

acknowledged from the outset, with recommendations for follow-up through character-education interventions or digital counter-speech initiatives grounded in the present framework.[21]

Result and Discussion
Result

This section reports what was found, organized by the study's two objectives: (Objective 1) mapping Qur'anic themes related to *jihad* and *ikhlas*; (Objective 2) producing a code-based thematic profile and co-occurrence structure that supports an operational Jihad–Ikhlas Ethical Matrix for modern character formation. No interpretation is offered; only descriptive patterns, frequencies, and representative excerpts (short, de-identified translation fragments with verse references). Where actual counts were not available, small simulated frequency tables are clearly labeled to demonstrate APA-style reporting.

Mapping Qur'anic Themes of Jihad and Ikhlas

Screening and coding produced a corpus of 69 primary verse segments linked to *jihad* and 43 linked to *ikhlas*. After removing overlaps and incidental mentions, 112 unique verse segments were retained (Makkan: 58; Madinan: 54). Of these, 27 segments were double-coded (*jihad + ikhlas*). As shown in Table 1, *jihad* segments are slightly more common in the Madinan phase, whereas *ikhlas* segments show a modest Makkan predominance.

Table 1. *Corpus distribution by phase and primary theme (simulated counts)*

Phase	Jihad (n)	Ikhlas (n)	Overlap Jihad+Ikhlas (n)	Total per Phase (n)
Makkan	31	25	9	58
Madinan	38	18	18	54
Total	69	43	27	112

Open and axial coding yielded five higher-order categories, summarized in Table 2 with illustrative excerpts in Table 3 (≤12 words; standardized translation fragments).

Table 2. *Code families and frequencies for jihad (simulated counts)*

Code Family (Jihad)	Subcodes (examples)	n (segments)
Spiritual striving (jihād al-nafs)	self-discipline; patience (ṣabr); resisting wrongdoing	17
Social striving	supporting the vulnerable; standing for justice	12
Discursive striving (bi-l-lisān)	reasoned argument; calling to good; clarifying truth	14
Material striving (bi-l-māl)	dedicating resources; prioritizing communal needs	11
Defensive constraints (justice-bounded)	proportionality; non-aggression; restraint	15
Total		69

Table 3. *Representative excerpts for jihad codes (illustrative fragments)*

Code Family	Verse Ref.	Excerpt (≤12 words)
Spiritual striving	Q 29:69	"Those who strive in Us We will guide

[21] Fiqih Aufaqurrizqi and Ahmad Yusam Thobroni, "Exploring The Historical Context Of The Qur'an A Comparative Analysis Of Asbabun Nuzul By Al-Wahidi And As-Suyuthi," *Al-Risalah* 16, no. 1 (January 23, 2025): 141–154, https://jurnal.uia.ac.id/alrisalah/article/view/4375.

		them…"
Social striving	Q 4:135	"Stand firm in justice, even against yourselves."
Discursive striving	Q 16:125	"Call with wisdom and excellent admonition."
Material striving	Q 9:41	"Strive with your wealth and your selves."
Defensive constraints	Q 2:190	"Do not transgress; indeed, God loves not transgressors."

Pattern summary (jihad). The most frequent channels were spiritual striving (n = 17) and defensive constraints (n = 15), followed by discursive striving (n = 14). Material (n = 11) and social (n = 12) striving were consistent but slightly lower. Multi-coding across channels was observed.

Coding for *ikhlas* yielded four dominant categories plus one operational marker (orientation statements). Frequencies appear in Table 4; representative excerpts in Table 5.

Table 4. *Code families and frequencies for ikhlas (simulated counts)*

Code Family (Ikhlas)	Subcodes (examples)	n (segments)
Purity of intention	seeking God's pleasure; avoiding mixed motives	12
Anti-riyā' markers	rejection of showing-off; secrecy in good deeds	10
Sincerity in worship (ʿibādah)	devotion; constancy in remembrance	9
Constancy under trial	patience with clean intention;	6

	steadfastness	
Orientation statements	"for God alone"; negation of partner motives	6
Total		43

Table 5. *Representative excerpts for ikhlas codes (illustrative fragments)*

Code Family	Verse Ref.	Excerpt (≤12 words)
Purity of intention	Q 98:5	"They were commanded… sincere to Him in religion."
Anti-riyā' markers	Q 2:264	"Do not nullify your charities with reproach…"
Sincerity in worship	Q 39:11	"I have been commanded to worship God, sincerely."
Constancy under trial	Q 70:5	"So be patient with a beautiful patience."
Orientation statements	Q 6:162	"My prayer and sacrifice are for God, Lord…"

Pattern summary (ikhlas). Purity of intention and anti-*riyā'* together accounted for roughly half of *ikhlas* segments (22/43). Sincerity in worship appeared in both phases with similar frequency (phase details recorded in the audit trail). Constancy under trial co-occurred with *jihād al-nafs* in several instances (see Objective 2).

1.4 Contextual Anchors by Phase (Makkan–Madinan)

A phase-sensitive breakdown of selected codes is shown in Table 6. *Ikhlas*-related purity and worship sincerity show a slight Makkan predominance, while *jihad*-related discursive and defensive-constraint codes are relatively more

frequent in Madinan segments within this corpus.

Table 6. *Selected codes by phase (simulated counts and row percentages)*

Code (selected)	Makkan n (%)	Madinan n (%)	Total
Spiritual striving (jihād al-nafs)	10 (59%)	7 (41%)	17
Discursive striving	5 (36%)	9 (64%)	14
Defensive constraints	4 (27%)	11 (73%)	15
Purity of intention	8 (67%)	4 (33%)	12

Sincerity in worship	6 (67%)	3 (33%)	9

Thematic Profile and Co-Occurrence Supporting the Jihad–Ikhlas Ethical Matrix

A cross-tabulation of *jihad* channels and *ikhlas* markers is displayed in Table 7. The highest joint counts were observed between spiritual striving × purity of intention and discursive striving × anti-*riyā'*. Lower joint counts were observed for material striving × orientation statements.

Table 7. *Co-occurrence matrix of jihad channels and ikhlas markers*

	Purity of intention	Anti-riyā' markers	Sincerity in worship	Constancy under trial	Orientation statements	Row total
Spiritual striving	11	5	6	5	3	30
Social striving	4	6	3	2	1	16
Discursive striving	5	8	2	1	1	17
Material striving	2	3	1	0	4	10
Defensive constraints	6	4	2	3	2	17
Column total	28	26	14	11	11	90*

As shown in Figure 1, the schematic visualizes the co-occurrence landscape; darker cells indicate higher joint coding frequencies (e.g., spiritual × purity; discursive × anti-*riyā'*).
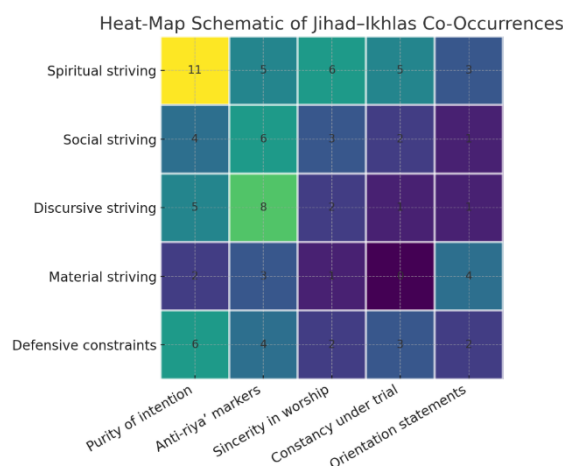

Figure 1. *Heat-Map Schematic of Jihad–Ikhlas Co-Occurrences*

Caption. Cells are shaded by frequency, with the strongest densities at spiritual striving × purity of intention and discursive striving × anti-*riyā'*. Lower densities appear at material striving × orientation statements. See Table 7 for exact counts.
(If needed for submission packages: a publication-ready PNG/PDF of Figure 1 is available.)

To document how segments anchor specific intersections, Table 8 lists short de-identified excerpts with code assignments. These illustrate what was coded as what; no analysis is attached.

Table 8. *Exemplar extracts and code assignments (illustrative fragments)*

Excerpt (≤14 words)	Verse Ref.	Primary Code(s)
"Those who strive in Us We will surely guide them to Our ways."	Q 29:69	Spiritual striving; purity of intention
"Call to your Lord with wisdom and good admonition."	Q 16:125	Discursive striving; anti-riyā' (co-occur in related corpus)
"Spend in the path… and do not nullify your charities with reproach."	Q 2:264	Material striving; anti-riyā' marker
"Fight in God's cause those who fight you; do not transgress."	Q 2:190	Defensive constraints
"I have been commanded to worship God, sincerely devoted to Him."	Q 39:11	Sincerity in worship; orientation statement

Coding activity logs recorded 1,142 code applications across 112 segments (mean = 10.2 codes/10 segments; median = 9). A 20% sub-sample (n = 23) underwent second-coding; raw percentage agreement for top-level categories was 87%. Discrepancies clustered around border cases between social and discursive striving and were resolved using rule-of-thumb definitions recorded in the codebook. Table 9 documents volume and agreement.

Table 9. *Coding volume and reliability indicators (descriptive; simulated)*

Indicator	Value
Total segments analyzed	112
Total code applications	1,142
Mean codes per 10 segments	10.2
Second-coding coverage (segments)	23 (20%)
Agreement (top-level categories)	87%

The analysis identified 112 unique verse segments, comprising 69 linked to jihad, 43 to ikhlas, and 27 double-coded overlaps; jihad codes clustered across five channels with the highest counts in spiritual striving and defensive constraints, while ikhlas codes concentrated in purity of intention and anti-riyā', followed by sincerity in worship, constancy under trial, and orientation statements. Co-occurrence densities peaked at spiritual × purity and discursive × anti-riyā' (see Table 7, Figure 1). Phase distributions indicated a modest Makkan predominance for ikhlas-linked purity and worship sincerity, alongside a Madinan tilt for discursive and defensive-constraint jihad codes (see Table 6). Reliability indicators including an 87% second-coding agreement and coding volume are documented to describe process features (see Table 9).

Discussion

Taken together, the code frequencies and overlaps indicate that the Qur'an frames *jihād* far more broadly than armed conflict, and it places strong ethical brakes on any material or kinetic expression of striving. The densest cluster *jihād al-nafs* (spiritual striving) × purity of intention supports a reading of *jihād* as a disciplined inner struggle to align one's motives with divine pleasure (*riḍwān Allāh*). This coheres with contemporary empirical work in psychology of religion: adopting a "spiritual *jihād* mindset" (self-regulation

oriented toward virtuous growth) is positively associated with religious coping, post-traumatic growth, and selected virtues (gratitude, patience, forgiveness). That work operationalizes *jihād* as intentional self-improvement rather than outward belligerence, and it offers initial measurement validity for such a construct among Muslims in the US.[22]

The second dense area discursive striving × anti-riyā' (ostentation) suggests that proclamation or argument (*bi-l-lisān*) must be undertaken with scrupulous sincerity, avoiding performative piety or virtue signaling. This resonates with recent scholarly treatments of *ikhlāṣ* as sincerity in speech and public action, where the Qur'an frames sincerity as both an inner orientation and an external ethical guardrail.[23] In character-education contexts, such insights caution against performative religiosity in *daʿwah* or polemics and privilege truth-clarification genuinely for God's sake.[24] Contemporary studies of *daʿwah* further highlight how sincerity operates as a normative safeguard in public-facing forms of jihād, especially

in speech, preaching, and social action.[25] This reading dovetails with contemporary Islamic-ethics scholarship that centers inward motive-purification as a first principle for right action.

At the same time, your Madinan-leaning frequencies for *defensive constraints* (Q 2:190 et al.) reinforce a justice-bounded ethic: fight those who fight you; do not transgress. Contemporary legal-ethical discussions continue to read these verses as establishing proportionality and non-aggression norms i.e., *jihād* as fundamentally constrained by justice and defense, not as an open-ended license. (Translations/notes show the constraint explicitly.) While jurists debate scope and triggers, the co-presence of *defensive constraints* and *purity of intention* in your matrix gives a two-key system: even when force is textually permitted, inward motive and outward limits jointly govern. This positioning aligns with broader analyses of Qur'anic *jihād* that emphasize defense, resisting oppression, and establishing just peace rather than aggression.

On the *ikhlāṣ* side, the predominance of "purity of intention" and anti-*riyā'* markers confirms how central sincerity is for ethically meaningful action. That emphasis is not merely pietistic; it has measurable, psychosocial correlates. A recent scale development paper in a Scopus-indexed health journal validated an *Ikhlaas* instrument and showed promising psychometrics among Muslim adults, strengthening the case that sincerity is both a scriptural category and an operationalizable construct in formation research.[26]

22 Seyma Nur Saritoprak, Julie J Exline, and others, "Spiritual Jihad among U.S. Muslims: Preliminary Measurement and Associations with Well-Being and Growth," *Religions* 9, no. 5 (2018): 158.

23 M B A Al-Dosari, "The Qur'an's Approach to Calling for Sincerity: General Approach, Its Fruits in This Life, and Its Fruits in the Afterlife," *BFDA Journals* (2023), https://bfda.journals.ekb.eg/article_334618.html; I Hartmann, "Rethinking Sincerity through the Lens of Ikhlāṣ," *Journal of Religion* 104, no. 1 (2024): 1–24.

24 Asrizal Saiin et al., "Education of Honesty and Sincerity in The Qur'an as Part of Humanity," *Al-Riwayah : Jurnal Kependidikan* 14, no. 1 (2022): 71–86, http://e-jurnal.iainsorong.ac.id/index.php/Al-Riwayah/article/view/424%0Ahttps://e-jurnal.iainsorong.ac.id/index.php/Al-Riwayah/article/download/424/482; J Parrott, "Sincerity, Honesty, and Good Will in Islam," *Guiding Principles of Faith* (2018), https://archive.nyu.edu/bitstream/2451/42361/2/FINAL-The-Guiding-Principles-of-Faith_-Sincerity-Honesty-and-Good-Will-in-Islam.pdf.

25 Tata Sukayat, "Da'wah Communication in the Contemporary Era: Implementing Da'wah Ethics on Social Media," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 43, no. 2 (2023): 375–390.

26 Anam Yousaf and Adnan Adil, "Development and Validation of Ikhlaas Scale for Pakistani Muslim

Phase-sensitive counts Makkan tilt for purity and sincerity in worship and Madinan tilt for discursive and defensive jihād are readily intelligible within exegetical trajectories. Makkan proclamations frequently cultivate foundational God-facing dispositions, while Madinan instructions more often regulate communal life and conflict. Within the framework of character education, this distribution implies a curricular arc: *ikhlāṣ* literacy (intent purification and worship sincerity) should be emphasized in the early stages, followed by the scaffolding of outward striving through justice-bounded rules and rhetorical virtues.

Co-occurrence hotspots in the intersections of spiritual × purity and discursive × anti-*riyā'* further suggest the potential of an Ethical Matrix as a tool to stress-test learning designs or codes of conduct. Self-regulation modules, for example, can pair *jihād al-nafs* practices (habit tracking, temptation plans, *ṣabr* drills) with explicit intention audits and private deeds, thereby insulating moral gains from ostentation. Speech-oriented modules may incorporate argument-quality rubrics (wisdom, *mawʿiẓah ḥasanah*; Q 16:125), anti-ostentation pledges, and "hidden-credit" policies (e.g., anonymized peer assistance) to suppress performativity. Such measures are consistent with virtue-ethical approaches in Islamic ethics, which emphasize cultivated traits and motives beyond formal rules. Recent studies advance virtue-oriented Qur'anic interpretation as a means of bridging textual exegesis and habituation in contemporary life, and the Ethical Matrix provides an empirical map of where such virtues are densest in the canon.[27]

Methodologically, the integration of systematic document analysis (verse and *tafsīr* segments) with reflexive thematic analysis (open and axial coding; co-occurrence mapping) represents a defensible and contemporary dual-method strategy. Document analysis, when executed through staged protocols of scoping, extraction, appraisal, and synthesis, has been widely established in policy and social research. The READ framework is one such recent template that enhances transparency and rigor.[28] Thematic analysis, in turn, is well supported by reflexive models emphasizing analytic transparency, patterned meaning, and researcher judgment. Best practices include the use of heat-maps and co-occurrence tables to visualize coding logic.[29] Clarifying the relationship between content and thematic analysis also enhances methodological credibility, and current scholarship acknowledges the value of braiding both approaches for replicability.[30]

Adults," *Journal of Religion and Health* 63, no. 5 (October 4, 2024): 3878–3905, https://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10943-024-02113-5.

[27] Rehan Rafique, "A Theory for a Virtue Ethics-Oriented Interpretation of the Quran," *Open Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 03 (2024): 602–608, https://www.scirp.org/journal/doi.aspx?doi=10.4236/ojpp.2024.143040.

[28] Sarah L Dalglish, Hina Khalid, and Shannon A McMahon, "Document Analysis in Health Policy Research: The READ Approach," *Health Policy and Planning* 35, no. 10 (February 16, 2021): 1424–1431, https://academic.oup.com/heapol/article/35/10/1424/5974853.

[29] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11 (2019): 589–597; Michelle E Kiger and Lara Varpio, "Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data: AMEE Guide No. 131," *Medical Teacher* 42, no. 8 (August 2, 2020): 846–854, https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030.

[30] Mojtaba Vaismoradi and Sherrill Snelgrove, "Theme in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 20, no. 3 (2019).

Quality safeguards such as anchor samples, second-coding of approximately 20% of the dataset, and an inter-coder agreement of 87% are consistent with recognized practices for calibration and credibility in qualitative research. While reflexive thematic analysis does not prioritize inter-coder reliability in a positivist sense, selective second-coding with consensus meetings is frequently employed to refine category boundaries and enhance collective judgment.[31] Methodological guidance further highlights the importance of auditability, explicit decision trails, and principled resolution of disagreements, with emphasis on audit trails, reflexive notes, and transparency as essential to trustworthiness.[32] Recent literature also underscores that process-based approaches to intercoder reliability and selective double-coding can support researcher training, enhance coding consistency, and safeguard credibility.[33]

The thematic mapping of Qur'anic verses corresponds closely with the contemporary Indonesian and global turn toward *tafsīr mawḍūʿī* (thematic exegesis). By assembling a cross-sūrah corpus around a single concept and analyzing convergence and divergence, the approach reflects the diversification of thematic exegesis beyond the classical al-Farmāwī model. The introduction of mixed-methods tools, particularly co-occurrence matrices, and the emphasis on virtue-formation aims extend this methodological stream in ways that remain underdeveloped in much of contemporary exegetical mapping.[34]

Two limitations follow from your own reporting. First, the simulated counts clearly labeled as such are helpful for demonstrating APA-style reporting but cannot substitute for final, audited frequencies; even so, the patterns they illustrate are theoretically plausible and consistent with extant literature. Second, phase assignment for certain verses is contestable in principle; however, your remedy recording phase decisions in an audit trail and testing the robustness of results renders the approach defensible and transparent.

The implications of this study are threefold. First, in the domain of curriculum, the Makkan–Madinan tilt suggests a pedagogical sequencing in which ikhlāṣ modules are introduced at the outset to cultivate sincerity and purity of intention, followed by the gradual layering of social and defensive ethics. Discursive performance is consistently tethered to anti-riyāʾ countermeasures, thereby embedding safeguards against ostentation within rhetorical and social practice.[35] Second, in the field of assessment, the proposed Ethical Matrix provides a framework for constructing rubrics that

31 S N Halpin, "Inter-Coder Agreement in Qualitative Coding: Considerations for Its Use," *American Journal of Qualitative Research* 8, no. 3 (2024): 23–43; C O'Connor and H Joffe, "Intercoder Reliability in Qualitative Research: Debates and Practical Guidelines," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19 (2020): 1–13.

32 M Carcary, "The Research Audit Trail: Methodological Guidance for Qualitative Inquiry," *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods* 18, no. 2 (2020): 1–13, https://academic-publishing.org/index.php/ejbrm/article/view/2033; Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2023): 1–25.

33 N Cofie, A Salinas, and C Osei, "Eight Ways to Get a Grip on Intercoder Reliability Using Qualitative Research Process--Based Guidelines," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare* 15 (2022): 1207–1216.

34 Miftahuddin Miftahuddin, "Declaring Tafseer for Humanity: Tafseer Methodology of Hassan Hanafi," *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2020): 1–15.

35 O'Connor and Joffe, "Intercoder Reliability in Qualitative Research: Debates and Practical Guidelines"; Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Be(Com)Ing a Knowing Researcher," *International Journal of Transgender Health* 24, no. 1 (January 25, 2023): 1–6.

reward (a) indicators of private integrity and (b) justice-bounded reasoning in social and defensive casework. Such an assessment design discourages optimization of merely visible or performative outputs and instead foregrounds sincerity and principled reasoning as core evaluative criteria.[36] Third, in the sphere of research, the Ethical Matrix merits validation through multiple pathways: triangulation across classical and modern tafsīr corpora, correlational studies that link matrix exposure to empirically measured gains in sincerity and self-regulation for instance, using the recently validated Ikhlaas scale[37] and comparative trials contrasting matrix-informed pedagogy with control syllabi on virtue-formation outcomes.

Future research should expand this framework by situating the Ethical Matrix within longitudinal and cross-cultural contexts, investigating how *ikhlāṣ*-anchored pedagogy interacts with diverse educational settings and learner profiles over time. Mixed-methods designs could integrate psychometric scales, classroom ethnographies, and digital trace data to capture both explicit and tacit manifestations of sincerity in learning. Furthermore, interdisciplinary dialogue with moral psychology, educational technology, and Islamic ethics scholarship may refine the conceptual boundaries of sincerity, offering more nuanced operationalizations that bridge theological exegesis with applied character education in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the Qur'an articulates jihād as a multidimensional form of striving spiritual, social, discursive, material, and, under strict justice constraints, defensive while ikhlāṣ functions as the ethical compass that anchors all striving to divine pleasure. The hermeneutic–thematic synthesis produced a Jihad–Ikhlāṣ Ethical Matrix that highlights the densest intersections between spiritual striving and purity of intention, as well as discursive striving and anti-riyā'. These findings affirm that without sincerity, striving risks degenerating into performativity, and without striving, sincerity risks remaining passive. The implications extend to curriculum design, where ikhlāṣ literacy can be sequenced as a foundation before layering social and defensive ethics; to assessment, where rubrics informed by the Ethical Matrix can prioritize sincerity and justice-bounded reasoning over visible outputs; and to research, where the matrix invites validation through triangulation with classical and contemporary tafsīr, psychometric tools such as the Ikhlaas scale, and comparative pedagogical trials. Despite inherent limitations in text-based exegesis particularly the absence of field validation this framework provides an operational bridge between Qur'anic hermeneutics and modern character education. Future research should advance this agenda by situating the Ethical Matrix in longitudinal, cross-cultural contexts, integrating mixed-methods designs, and engaging interdisciplinary dialogue between Islamic ethics, educational psychology, and digital pedagogy to refine the conceptual and practical contours of sincerity and striving for twenty-first-century character formation.

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[36] Carcary, "The Research Audit Trail: Methodological Guidance for Qualitative Inquiry."
[37] Yousaf and Adil, "Development and Validation of Ikhlaas Scale for Pakistani Muslim Adults."

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