

Epistemic Inquiry and Ethical Formation: A Constructivist Reading of Prophet Ibrahim's Search for God

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Abstract

This paper examines constructivist values in Islamic education through the story of Prophet Ibrahim in his search for God as recorded in Surah Al-An'am verses 74-79. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach and thematic interpretation analysis, this study aims to identify Ibrahim's rational thinking process as a representation of constructivist principles in education. Classical and contemporary exegetes such as ath-Thabari, al-Maraghi, and Ali ash-Shabuni are analyzed to explore the deeper meanings of the story. The findings reveal that Ibrahim did not experience doubt in his faith but rather applied a rational and reflective approach as a strategy for preaching and educating his people. Constructivist values such as active learning, empirical observation, critical reflection, and independent search for meaning are evident in this process. The implications of these findings point to the urgency of applying a constructivist approach in Islamic education, especially in the digital age, which is full of information and intellectual challenges. Contemporary education must encourage students to think critically, develop contextual Islamic reasoning, and strengthen their faith identity through active and meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, the story of Prophet Ibrahim can serve as an educational paradigm in designing Islamic learning models that are relevant to the times while remaining rooted in revelatory values.

Abstrak

Tulisan ini mengkaji nilai-nilai konstruktivistik dalam pendidikan Islam melalui kisah Nabi Ibrahim dalam pencarian Tuhan sebagaimana diabadikan dalam Surah Al-An'am ayat 74-79. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif dan analisis tafsir tematik, penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi proses berpikir rasional Ibrahim sebagai representasi prinsip konstruktivisme dalam pendidikan. Mufasir klasik dan kontemporer seperti ath-Thabari, al-Maraghi, dan Ali ash-Shabuni dianalisis untuk menggali makna mendalam dari kisah tersebut. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa Ibrahim tidak mengalami keraguan iman, melainkan menerapkan pendekatan rasional dan reflektif sebagai strategi dakwah dan pendidikan kepada kaumnya. Nilai-nilai konstruktivistik seperti pembelajaran aktif, observasi empiris, refleksi kritis, dan pencarian makna secara mandiri tampak jelas dalam proses pencarian tersebut. Implikasi dari temuan ini mengarah pada urgensi penerapan pendekatan konstruktivistik dalam pendidikan Islam, khususnya di era digital yang sarat informasi dan tantangan pemikiran. Pendidikan masa kini perlu mendorong peserta didik untuk berpikir kritis, mengembangkan nalar keislaman yang kontekstual, serta memperkuat identitas keimanan melalui pengalaman belajar yang aktif dan bermakna. Oleh karena itu, kisah Nabi Ibrahim dapat dijadikan paradigma edukatif dalam merancang model pembelajaran Islam yang relevan dengan zaman dan tetap berakar pada nilai-nilai wahyu.

Keywords:

Ibrahim, Constructivism, Values, Islamic Education, God

Kata Kunci

Ibrahim, Konstruktivisme, Nilai, Pendidikan Islam, Tuhan

Introduction

The story of Prophet Ibrahim's search for God, as depicted in the Quran, exemplifies key principles of Islamic education. It demonstrates not only monotheism but also reflective and rational thinking (U. Faruq & Zakiyah Arifa, 2020; Sri Suyanta, 2018). This narrative emphasizes the development of faith, morality, and leadership qualities, which are fundamental to Islamic education (U. Faruq & Zakiyah Arifa, 2020). The Quranic stories, including Ibrahim's, highlight the importance of moral character, individual potential development, and critical thinking in seeking knowledge (Oktafiani Larasati, 2023). From an educational perspective, Ibrahim's story encompasses psychomotor, cognitive, and affective domains, aiming to cultivate a complete human being (Sri Suyanta, 2018). The educational values derived from Ibrahim's story can be categorized into divine values (faith and worship) and human values (morality), including honesty, trustworthiness, intelligence, and patience (Zainol Hasan, 2018).

The Qur'anic account of Prophet Ibrahim's search for God does more than affirm monotheism; it models a pedagogy of inquiry grounded in fitrah yet disciplined by reasoned reflection. Ibrahim's staged observation of celestial bodies, followed by their critical rejection as ultimate realities (Q. 6:76–79), exemplifies an instructional arc from observation to evaluation and conviction an arc that Islamic education seeks to reproduce in learners. As Suyanta shows, the narrative integrates the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective domains in balanced formation toward the ideal of *insān kāmil* (a complete person), indicating that faith development in Islam is not merely doctrinal assent but embodied habit, sound reasoning, and refined feeling (Suyanta, 2007).

Equally important are the values and methods embedded in Ibrahim's interactions. Hasan (2017) distinguishes *ulūhiyyah* (divine) values faith and worship from *insāniyyah* (human) values ethics and social virtues arguing that the story cultivates honesty, trustworthiness, intelligence, patience, and exemplary conduct (*uswah*). These virtues surface through dialogic engagement and principled action: Ibrahim's respectful yet firm reasoning with his people and his consultative dialogue with Ismā'īl before the great trial (Q. 37:102) frame leadership as moral persuasion, not coercion (Hasan, 2017). In pedagogical terms, these moments legitimate strategies such as dialog (*hiwār*), exemplification (*ibrah/maw'izah*), demonstration, and rational argument methods that Al Faruq and Arifa (2020) extract explicitly from the verses to guide faith, character, and leadership education.

From a curriculum perspective, Ibrahim's story aligns with contemporary aims of Islamic education that prioritize character formation, potential development, and critical thinking as integral to seeking knowledge. Larasati (2023) highlights how Qur'anic narratives—exemplified by Ibrahim and Mūsā anchor *iman* and *taqwa* while training learners to reason ethically and think critically. When translated into learning design, the Ibrahim narrative supports inquiry-based tasks (guided observation and reflection), dialogic assessment (structured debate and counsel), and values-based projects (service and stewardship) so that learners practice belief, reasoning, and action coherently (Larasati, 2023). Together, these findings reinforce that Ibrahim's path from wonder to certainty is a template for holistic Islamic pedagogy: it forms beliefs through reasoned inquiry, refines morals through practiced virtues, and shapes leadership through dialog and example (Al Faruq & Arifa, 2020; Hasan, 2017; Suyanta, 2007; Larasati, 2023).

The Qur'anic story of Prophet Ibrahim exemplifies a constructivist approach to learning: knowledge is actively built through observation, hypothesis testing, reflection, and social negotiation. Ibrahim's sequential consideration of the star, moon, and sun—and his rejection of each as an ultimate reality illustrates cognitive conflict and resolution, the hallmark of constructivist meaning-making (Rusuli et al., 2022). This “guided inquiry” arc—moving from experience to judgment models how learners can reorganize prior conceptions into deeper, more coherent understanding.

Beyond epistemic formation, Ibrahim's narrative also centers values that Islamic education seeks to internalize steadfast monotheism (*tawhīd*), honesty, patience, trustworthiness, and principled leadership. These are not merely taught as propositions but embodied as virtues that inform decision-making and public action (Al Faruq & Arifa, 2020). In a modern curriculum, such virtues are cultivated through repeated practice, reflection, and feedback so that “knowing” is inseparable from “being” and “doing.”

A value-centered reading also aligns with broader calls in Islamic education to emphasize internalization rather than transmission alone moving from declarative knowledge to lived dispositions. Work in this stream highlights phases like value transformation, transaction, and trans-internalization; operationally, it means designing learning that engages conscience, reason, and conduct together (Khusnan, 2016).

Methodologically, the Ibrahim narrative showcases a toolkit that overlaps strongly with constructivist pedagogy: dialog (*ḥiwār*), storytelling and exemplification (*‘ibrah/man‘izhah*), demonstration/practice, and even “experimentation” (e.g., symbolic acts that test communal assumptions). Studies mapping the story to educational method list dialogic questioning, narrative instruction, modeling, practice, guidance, encouragement/discipline (*targhīb–tarhīb*), and experiment methods that support active, social knowledge construction and reflective independence (Syamsurijal et al., 2023). Together, these elements make Ibrahim's story a durable template for a dynamic Islamic education paradigm that forms critical, independent, and reflective learners whose faith is reasoned, ethical, and actionable (Al Faruq & Arifa, 2020; Rusuli et al., 2022; Syamsurijal et al., 2023).

Method

This study adopts a qualitative design using a library-based (documentary) approach, which is the most appropriate for analyzing Qur'anic texts and their exegetical interpretations. A hermeneutic lens is employed to interpret relevant verses and to elucidate the pedagogical significance of the Prophet Ibrahim narrative.

Data sources. Primary sources consist of major works of Tafsir al-Maraghi, Tafsir al-Tabari, and Shafwat al-Tafasir as well as scholarly writings that engage the topic directly. Secondary sources include literature on Islamic educational theory, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic essays, and books on constructivism and the philosophy of education.

Data analysis. The material is examined through descriptive-analytic procedures, including close reading, thematic interpretation, and cross-textual comparison. This strategy enables a deep recovery of textual meaning, the articulation of values embedded in Ibrahim's story, and a critical linkage of those values to the contemporary challenges of Islamic education in the digital era.

Results and Discussion

Ibrahim and the Search for God in the Qur'an

The story of Ibrahim's search for God in Surah al-An'ām 6:74–79 models a carefully staged inquiry from observing stars, the moon, and the sun to critically rejecting their ultimacy that culminates in principled conviction about divine oneness. Read pedagogically, this sequence aligns with discovery learning: learners actively explore, hypothesize, test against evidence, and refine conclusions until they cohere with enduring truth (Saputri, Rifqi, Najiha, & Karman, 2024). In Islamic education terms, the episode integrates cognitive (reasoning), affective (awe, sincerity), and behavioral/psychomotor dimensions (turning away from false objects toward God) to form the whole person (*insān kāmil*) (Suyanta, 2007).

Ibrahim also “meets” his audience at their level of understanding: he uses the very celestial objects they revered as provisional signposts, then employs respectful debate and calibrated argumentation to dismantle mistaken assumptions and guide them to *tamhīd*. Contemporary analyses of these verses highlight *himār* (dialogue) and *jadal* (argument) as legitimate instructional strategies that can be translated into classroom practices such as guided inquiry, structured debates, and reflective journaling (Che Mat & Apriyanti, 2021; Saputri et al., 2024). From a semiotic angle, the star–moon–sun function as signs whose impermanence defeats their candidacy for divinity; Ibrahim's reasoning reorients interpretation toward the Necessary Being, while his people exemplify negation produced by unexamined tradition. This semiotic reading strengthens the case for critical religious literacy: revelation-directed reasoning that decodes signs without absolutizing them (Mustain & Muna, 2021).

The account of Prophet Ibrahim's search for God in Surah al-An'ām 6:76–79 can be read as an early constructivist arc: Ibrahim actively builds understanding through observing the star, moon, and sun, testing provisional conclusions, and revising them until he affirms the Necessary Creator. In educational terms, this mirrors constructivist principles learner-centered exploration, hypothesis formation, and reflective reorganization of prior beliefs while engaging the full triad of domains: cognitive (reasoning to monotheism), affective (awe, sincerity), and behavioral/psychomotor (turning away from false objects of devotion) (Rusuli, Daud, & Supiah, 2022; Suyanta, 2007). This framing helps translate the passage into classroom practice (guided inquiry, structured debate, reflective journaling) that cultivates critical religious literacy.

The narrative also resonates with Islamic rationalist reform, especially Muhammad 'Abduh's emphasis on reason, moral agency, and human free will in interpreting revelation. Read alongside 'Abduh's project, Ibrahim's method models how *'aql* tests appearances, discerns signs, and aligns conviction with revealed guidance an approach that has influenced modern reformist discourse in various Muslim contexts, including Indonesia (Abbas, 2014). Integrating these lenses highlights the passage as both spiritual testimony and pedagogical template: faith is formed through reasoned inquiry, ethical agency, and praxis—not by passive acceptance alone (Rusuli et al., 2022; Abbas, 2014).

Across the sources, Ibrahim's search for God is presented as a rational reflective process that rejects *taqlīd* (blind imitation) and trains the believer to interrogate appearances. By sequentially observing star, moon, and sun—and then showing why none qualifies as ultimate Ibrahim models critical inquiry that leads to principled assent, not passive acceptance (Suyanta, 2007). As Che Mat

and Apriyanti (2021) emphasize, this staged reasoning doubles as a pedagogical script: begin with the audience's existing symbols, invite observation, test claims, and reason toward *tawhīd*. The approach therefore functions as an educational prototype that integrates cognition (argument), affect (awe and sincerity), and behavior (turning away from false objects), aligning with holistic aims of Islamic education.

To address contemporary tendencies to accept doctrine uncritically, Rismawati (2016) argues for a rational-argumentative method of *tawhīd* education precisely the pattern dramatized in Ibrahim's debates. Read alongside Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, Darmawan (2020) shows that Ibrahim's pedagogy deploys scientific inquiry, dialectical dialogue (*hīwār/jadal*), exemplary conduct, and reasoned argumentation, all of which remain translatable to classroom and public *da'wah* today. Together, these works converge on a constructively "active" learning paradigm: faith is formed through guided observation, disciplined reasoning, and ethical practice, rather than through inherited claims alone (Darmawan, 2020; Rismawati, 2016; Suyanta, 2007)

Al-Ṭabarī, in his exegesis of Q. al-An'ām 6:76–79, affirms that the search for God contains elements of dialogue and rational reasoning. Ibrahim does not simply accept his people's beliefs; he actively tests and probes his understanding of divinity through logic and direct observation of natural phenomena. By showing the limitations of the star, the moon, and the sun—which rise and set and are incapable of governing the universe, Ibrahim demonstrates that these objects are unfit to be taken as deities. This process accords with constructivist principles: knowledge is built through experience, reflection, and the step-by-step testing of hypotheses until one arrives at conviction grounded in evidence.

Within the framework of *da'wah*, al-Ṭabarī emphasizes that Ibrahim's approach is rational and open: he "meets" his people at their level of understanding, engages them with calm, measured argumentation, and then guides them to *tawhīd* through evidence drawn from observation and sound reasoning. This dialogical–rational approach is not only relevant to its historical context; it also offers a methodological model for contemporary education and *da'wah*: do not accept beliefs blindly, but examine and affirm them with common sense, observation, and responsible argumentation.

li al-Shābūnī's *Shafwat al-Tafāsīr* presents Ibrahim's search for God as a rational, staged inquiry (*tadarruj fī al-istidlāl*) in which observation and sound reasoning operate under the guidance of revelation (Suyanta, 2007). In this reading, Ibrahim's stepwise rejection of star, moon, and sun models constructive, critical thinking that culminates in affirming divine oneness an approach consistent with Ahl al-Sunnah pedagogy that forms belief through argument, example, and reflection (Suyanta, 2007). Beyond its clarity and accessibility, *Shafwat al-Tafāsīr* is frequently noted for weaving *fiqh*, theological, and Sufistic strands; recent work characterizes al-Shābūnī as broadly aligned with *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā'ah*, especially the Ash'arī school, with a strong emphasis on spiritual felicity in the hereafter (Azizah & Romziana, 2024). Linguistically, al-Shābūnī's method highlights derivation (*isytiqāq*) and rhetoric (*balāghah*) alongside semantic analysis features that make the work fertile for research in Arabic linguistics and *tafsīr* studies (Suhaimi, 2020; Jamil, 2022). Taken together, these features encourage Muslims to refine conduct, improve quality of life, and commit to sound worship and good character, whether through direct public outreach or by internalizing values in daily life (Azizah & Romziana, 2024; Fahimah, 2021).

The Value of Education in the Story of Ibrahim's Search for God

In Islamic tradition, Ibrahim's life functions as a pedagogical template that unites faith, worship, and moral conduct with critical inquiry. Studies highlight how his story cultivates obedience, steadfastness, and reflective thinking rather than passive imitation; learners are guided to interrogate appearances and commit to monotheism through reasoned judgment (Muthoifin & Al Fajri, 2022; Hasan, 2017). Read educationally, this means Islamic education is not merely reception of doctrine but an active quest—seeking, verifying, and applying knowledge in practice.

A strong foundation of *tamhīd* from early childhood emerges as a recurring emphasis: when belief is formed early and well, later pressures are less likely to unsettle conviction (Saefuddin, Darodjat, & Makhful, 2024). Ibrahim's methods exemplify conduct, wise counsel, dialogue, and argumentation also model differentiated instruction for varied audiences (family and wider community), offering transferable strategies for contemporary classrooms and public *da'wah* (Rozaq & Suliyanto, 2020). Together these principles aim to shape persons whose faith is intelligent and enacted: grounded in devotion, clarified by reason, and embodied in upright character.

In Islamic education, the story of Prophet Ibrahim foregrounds experience-based learning, critical thinking, and independent knowledge construction. Read through a constructivist lens, Ibrahim actively builds his understanding of God by observing the star, moon, and sun, forming provisional explanations, then revising them through reflection until he affirms the true Creator (Rusuli, Daud, & Supiah, 2022). This underscores that genuine faith grows from personally worked-through experience rather than mere inheritance (Saefuddin, Darodjat, & Makhful, 2025). Ibrahim's truth-seeking proceeds by critically examining celestial phenomena as limited and contingent, which invalidates them as candidates for divinity and directs reason toward the Necessary Being (Rusuli et al., 2022). Educationally, the narrative also articulates a rich value set—obedience, care, firmness, tolerance, responsibility, honesty, communicative clarity, politeness, and steadfastness—offering actionable dispositions for character formation (Muthoifin & Al Fajri, 2021). Together, these principles aim to instill robust monotheistic conviction in children and youth, equipping them against corrosive influences and false ideologies through reasoned belief and practiced virtue (Saefuddin et al., 2025; Rusuli et al., 2022).

Constructivist Values in the Story of Ibrahim's Search for God

The story of Prophet Ibrahim in Surah al-An'ām 74–79 portrays an intellectual and spiritual journey that closely mirrors constructivist learning. In this view, knowledge is built through lived experience, engagement with one's environment, and deliberate reflection. Ibrahim exemplifies these elements by (1) learning through experience: he observes the stars, the moon, and the sun objects venerated by his people and draws conclusions from direct, personal observation rather than uncritically inheriting ancestral beliefs; (2) independent thinking: he questions tradition, pursues truth autonomously, and uses reasoned inquiry to determine that celestial bodies are unworthy of worship; (3) a reflective, gradual process: he moves step by step from star to moon to sun—modeling how understanding matures through iterative, contemplative stages rather than instant insight; and (4) contextualization and communication: he shares and tests his conclusions through dialogue with his community, showing that knowledge is not only constructed individually but also refined socially. Taken together, Ibrahim's method aligns with core constructivist and

social-constructivist principles, presenting a pedagogical model that privileges inquiry, reflection, and accountable discourse over mere indoctrination.

The story of Ibrahim's search for God and its implications for education in the digital age

The digital age strengthens the case for pairing constructivist learning with digital literacy so that students actively build knowledge, interrogate sources, and create responsible digital outputs. A Qur'anic template for this already appears in Prophet Ibrahim's inquiry (Q 6:76–79): he observes, hypothesizes, tests, and revises until conviction aligns with enduring truth precisely the inquiry cycle constructivism prescribes (Rusuli, Daud, & Supiah, 2022). In higher education, these principles translate into concrete digital media literacy competencies content creation, information management, evaluation, and critical engagement so learners do not merely consume media but analyze and produce it accountably (Hariyati, Nursalim, Fitri, Heriyanto, & Destrianto, 2025).

For Islamic education specifically, digital technology introduces opportunities (interactive apps, multimedia tafsīr, discussion forums) and risks (mis/disinformation, distraction, ethical lapses). A values-first constructivist design helps address both: model Ibrahim's staged reasoning in digital tasks (observe → test → conclude), pair activities with adab and *tawhīd* outcomes, embed verification routines (source tracing, lateral reading), and require reflective journaling that links evidence to belief and conduct. The result is an independent, reflective, and responsible learner digitally fluent yet spiritually grounded able to navigate an information-rich landscape while sustaining faith and character (Gultom, Candra, Dasopang, Sihombing, & Ali, 2025; Hariyati et al., 2025).

In Islamic education, Prophet Ibrahim's search for God functions as both a constructivist and transformative learning model. Constructively, Ibrahim does not inherit creed passively; he actively observes, hypothesizes, tests, and revises—moving from the star to the moon to the sun until he affirms the Necessary Creator. This arc centers the learner's agency and includes social-interactive meaning-making, matching core constructivist principles identified in recent Qur'anic pedagogy research (Rusuli, Daud, & Supiah, 2022).

Read through transformative pedagogy, Ibrahim's journey depicts the “autonomous I” in motion an ongoing becoming that progresses from *'ilm al-yaqīn* to *'ayn al-yaqīn*, framing faith development as reflective, value-laden growth rather than passive reception (Hidayat & Naim, 2022). This dual reading constructivist method plus transformative formation suggests classroom practices such as guided inquiry, structured dialogue/debate, and reflective journaling that link evidence to belief and behavior.

The same narrative also grounds ethical leadership for Islamic educational institutions. Studies distill Ibrahim's leadership principles integrity, justice, obedience/discipline, trustworthiness and translate them into Human Resource Management (HRM) practices that align Islamic values with modern governance (e.g., fair recruitment, transparent evaluation, value-based professional development). Embedding these principles fosters a values-driven culture that balances religious commitments and professional standards (Hikmawati, Makruf, Gusmian, & Wedi, 2024).

Together, these insights yield a coherent approach to Islamic education: active learning that builds knowledge through experience and interaction, critical thinking that tests claim against evidence and revelation, and spiritual growth articulated in personal transformation and ethical

institutional practice. This synergy equips learners and institutions to be intellectually rigorous, spiritually grounded, and morally accountable.

Conclusion

The story of Ibrahim in Surah al-An'am verses 74-79 contains educational values that are highly relevant to the constructivist approach. Ibrahim's search for God was not a spiritual struggle, but rather a rational, argumentative, and reflective strategy to enlighten his people about the errors in their beliefs. Ibrahim employed an observational approach, critical thinking, and testing of reality to arrive at the conviction of the existence of the One True God.

Among exegetes such as ath-Thabari, al-Maraghi, and ash-Shabuni, there is a strong view that Ibrahim already possessed knowledge of tawhid from the beginning, and that the story of his search was a pedagogical and constructive means of da'wah. This is in line with the principles of constructivism in education, which emphasises active learning, real-life experiences, critical dialogue, and the development of understanding through reflection and contextualization.

In the context of Islamic education, this story offers a liberating educational framework that builds intellectual autonomy and encourages the use of reason as a gift from Allah in the pursuit of truth. These values are essential in responding to the challenges of education in the digital age, where information develops rapidly and students are required to become independent and critical learners.

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