

Theoretical Development of Qur'anic Exegesis Within Indonesian Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract. This article examines the development of theoretical studies in Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia, which focus on the dynamics of academic interpretation in Islamic higher education institutions. The study of interpretation in Indonesia has deep historical roots, dating back to the spread of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago and the growth of local intellectual traditions. Since its inception, Qur'anic interpretation has been conducted through various methods and approaches, ranging from traditional to modern and involving the use of supporting disciplines such as hermeneutics, linguistics, semantics, and semiotics. This paper traces the history of interpretation in the Indonesian archipelago, beginning with the spread of Islam by scholars and religious figures, and the emergence of early exegetical works, such as Abd. Rauf as-Singkili's *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, and the subsequent emergence of exegetical works in Malay, Javanese, and other local languages. This article also reviews the development of exegesis in Indonesia in the 20th century and beyond, including Howard M. Federspiel's periodization of exegetical works into three generations. Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia play a vital role in fostering innovation in the methodology, approaches, and models of tafsir studies, thereby enriching the scholarly tradition of tafsir in Indonesia and strengthening the Muslim community's response to the Qur'an as the primary source of Islamic teachings.

Keywords: Tafsir studies, Islamic higher education, Islamic intellectual tradition, Indonesian tafsir works.

Introduction

The study of the Qur'an (interpretation and the science of tafsir) has been conducted since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (as the first interpreter) until today. The era of Qur'anic interpretation is as old as the Qur'an itself. ¹Scholars have produced millions of works on Qur'anic interpretation. The study of the Qur'an continues through various methods, systematizations, and approaches. Even non-Muslims have been involved in studying the Qur'an. Western scholars (Orientalists) have also produced numerous works related to Qur'anic studies, with varying motivations, ranging from purely academic pursuits to critical examinations of the Qur'an itself. ²

Throughout the history of the Indonesian archipelago (the Indonesian archipelago), the Qur'an has been taught and studied alongside the advent of Islam. Likewise, interpretations have been passed down from one generation to the next, from one writing model to another, from very traditional to modern systematizations, from interpretations without established methods to

¹ Zulfani Rahmah, "The Istidlal Method of Sheikh Mustofa Al-Adawy in the Tholaq Chapter in the Book of Jamiul Ahkam Al-Nisa" (IAIN Metro, 2024).

² Nehru Millat Ahmad, "The Qur'an in the View of Western Scholars: Analysis of Orientalist Thoughts on the Study of the Qur'an," *Aqwal: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 5, no. 1 (2024): 72–88.

interpretations that use the method of interpretation established by classical mufassir (Qur'anic interpreters).³

The emergence of Qur'anic studies and interpretations in Indonesia indicates a positive response from Indonesian Muslims to their holy book, although not as prolific as the works produced by Arab scholars. Nevertheless, it is commendable that Indonesian scholars have succeeded in producing comprehensive interpretations of all 30 chapters of the Qur'an, such as Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili with his work *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Hamka with *his Tafsir al-Azhar*, and Quraish Shihab with *his Tafsir al-Misbbab*. The production of interpretations in Indonesia continues unabated, as does the development of its science. ⁴Efforts to discover new methods, approaches, and models of study continue from time to time. Supporting sciences important for Qur'anic interpretation—such as hermeneutics, linguistics, semantics, and semiotics—are increasingly used by Indonesian exegetes. Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia have also played a role in this development, particularly in advancing the science of interpretation, both additional and basic interpretation sciences, as well as in the fields of methods, approaches, and models.

The main problems discussed in this article are that the development of theoretical tafsir studies in Indonesia has not been fully explored, particularly regarding how academic tafsir has grown and developed within Islamic higher education institutions as part of the intellectual tradition of Islamic scholarship in the archipelago. From this main problem, the research questions of this article can be directed at two things: first, how the history and dynamics of tafsir studies in Indonesia developed from the beginning of the spread of Islam to the emergence of academic tafsir in universities; and second, how the methods, approaches, and patterns of teaching tafsir developed in Islamic higher education institutions and contributed to the strengthening of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia.

The conceptual framework of this article can be formulated as a historical and methodological flow that shows that the development of tafsir in Indonesia did not emerge suddenly but grew along with the spread of Islam in the archipelago, developed through the tradition of teaching the Qur'an in surau, pesantren, and Islamic educational institutions, and then experienced institutionalization in Islamic higher education. From this process, the study of tafsir moved from a simple and traditional model to a more systematic, critical, and diverse academic approach, including the ijmalī, tahlīlī, muqaran, and maudhu'i methods. Islamic higher education institutions then became important spaces for the development of tafsir because they not only inherited the richness of Indonesian tafsir but also encouraged methodological innovation through strengthening the science of the Qur'an, the study of tafsir works, and the application of modern approaches so that tafsir could answer the intellectual needs and social problems of Indonesian Muslims.

Previous research has been conducted by various scholars. Among them, Wardani's 2020 article, "Qur'anic Studies and Interpretation in Islamic Religious Universities," highlights the development of interpretation studies in Islamic higher education institutions as a response to contemporary academic challenges. It also suggests that interpretation studies at universities need to

³ Itsna Noor Laila, "Evaluating the Development of Al-Quran Studies in the Archipelago in the Period 1960-2000 AD," *Hidmah: Journal of Research and Community Service* 2, no. 4 (2024): 154.

⁴ Latifah Dwi Nur Aisa, "Modern Interpretation in 21st Century Indonesia: Identification of the Characteristics of Interpretation Products in 2001-2022," *Nun: Journal of Quranic Studies and Interpretation in the Archipelago* 10, no. 2 (2024): 86–102.

be directed to be more scientific, systematic, and relevant to the needs of the times.⁵ The similarity with this article lies in the same focus: a discussion of interpretation in Islamic higher education and the positioning of these institutions as important spaces for the development of interpretation studies. The difference is that Wardani's article emphasizes the challenges and direction of interpretation studies in Islamic higher education in general, while this article specifically explores the theoretical development of interpretation in Indonesia from a historical perspective, the generation of interpretation works, and interpretation methods.

Maizuddin's 2021 paper, "Progressive Interpretation Studies in Islamic Religious Higher Education," shows that over the past five years, interpretation studies at three Islamic higher education institutions have tended to increase and have begun to focus on more progressive and contextual issues, particularly through student work and lecturer publications.⁶ The similarities between these articles are that both place Islamic higher education institutions as centers for the study of exegesis and both examine innovations in approaches to Quranic studies. The differences are that those studies are more empirical and focus on trends within a specific five-year period, while this article is more conceptual-historical, examining the long history of exegesis in Indonesia, the history of Islamic higher education institutions, and the development of exegesis theory in general.

Previous research has shown that the study of tafsir in Indonesia has developed through a long intellectual tradition, starting from early interpretation in the archipelago, through the emergence of local tafsir works and the strengthening of tafsir studies in Islamic higher education institutions. Various studies have also outlined the diverse methods, approaches, and patterns of tafsir writing that have evolved. The difference between this article and previous studies lies in its attempt to describe, in a more focused and systematic way, the theoretical development of tafsir in Indonesia within the framework of academic tafsir in Islamic higher education institutions, thus highlighting the contribution of higher education institutions in enriching Indonesia's tafsir heritage.

Discussion

A Study of Quranic Interpretation in the Archipelago

This study also uses Rosenthal's genealogy theory. The genealogy of one's thought is intended to trace the common thread of one's original thought in developing Islamic sources and methodologies.⁷ This theory was also strengthened by Michael Foucault; he focused more on the problems of the meeting and culmination process between ideas, thoughts, and science, and saw the impossibility of creating a complete totality. He tended to look for the uniqueness that exists in each series that might be aligned, ordered, or crossed with other series without reducing it to a linear scheme. Therefore, with the existence of a continuous chronology of ratios and its origins that

⁵ Wardani Wardani, "Quran Studies and Interpretation in Islamic Religious Colleges: The Perspective of Integrating Knowledge and Various Approach Discourses" (Zahir Publishing, 2020).

⁶ Maizuddin Maizuddin and Zulihafnani Zulihafnani, "Progressive Qur'anic Studies in Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education (2014-2019): Implementation and Development," *Journal of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies* 22, no. 1 (2021): 113–36.

⁷ Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1968), 245. Dan Claudia Lenz, *Genealogy and Archeology: Analyzing Generational Positioning in Historical Narratives*, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 2001, 324. <http://proquest.org>. (Accessed: 3/10/2014).

cannot be traced with certainty, clear scales emerged, distinguishable from others, and could not be reduced to a single constancy.⁸

History records that the spread of Islam from its beginnings to the present day is inseparable from the core source of Islamic teachings, namely the Qur'an. Thus, the history of the development of Islam is also marked by the history of the Qur'an and its interpretation, although in reality, the history of the Qur'an focuses more on the written legacy of the intellectual traditions of relevant scholars.⁹ Therefore, in the simplest context in Indonesia, the history of the Qur'an and its interpretation can be studied through the history of the entry of Islam into Indonesia, brought by Arab traders. The Qur'an was studied along with the spread of Islam by da'i (preachers), and as Islam developed in Indonesia, Qur'anic studies also emerged in various activities related to Islamic teachings.¹⁰ When places of worship such as mosques, prayer halls, surau (small prayer houses), langgar (village prayer halls), and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) were established, the Qur'an began to be studied and taught by scholars to converts.¹¹

Regarding the entry of Islam into the archipelago, researchers highlight two popular theories. First, the Eastern Theory, which states that Islam entered Indonesia in the 7th century AD or the first century of Hijriah, spreading directly through trade routes by the Arabs of the Shafi'i school in the coastal areas of North Sumatra (Malakka). Second, the Western theory, based on the travels of Marco Polo (1292), was reinforced by Ibn Battuta's notes on Islamic kingdoms on the coast of North Sumatra in the 13th century AD.¹² According to the Western theory, when Islam first entered Aceh in 1290 AD, Islamic teachings began to emerge and develop, especially after the establishment of the Pasai Kingdom. At that time, many scholars established surau, such as Teungku Cot Mamplam, Teungku di Geureudog, and others. In the 17th century AD, during the reign of Iskandar Muda Mahkota Alam Sultan of Aceh, the surau in Aceh experienced rapid development.¹³ Prominent scholars emerged, such as Nuruddin al-Raniri, Ahmad Khatib Langin, Syamsuddin al-Sumatani, Hamzah Fansuri, Abd. Rauf al-Sinkili, and Burhanuddin. It was then that clerics taught the Qur'an as part of Islamic studies in these places of worship.¹⁴ The teaching of the Koran by the Koran teachers to Muslims at that time was mainly aimed at children aged 6 to 10 years who had not yet reached adulthood. These lessons are given individually in the teacher's home, langgar, surau, or Islamic boarding school. In some cases, lessons are also held at the parents' home, especially if the parents hold important positions.¹⁵ This situation continued until the establishment of Islamic higher education institutions.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Arkeologi Pengetahuan* (Jogjakarta: IRCiSoD, 2012), 25-26.

⁹ Muhammad Haris Hakam, "The Tradition of Nusantara Scholars' Interpretation of the Quran," *Maslahah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2023): 1–10.

¹⁰ M Zia Al-Ayyubi, "Dynamics of Quranic Interpretation in Indonesia," *Rausyan Fikr: Journal of Islamic Theology and Philosophy Studies* 16, no. 1 (2020): 1–28.

¹¹ M. Nurdin Zuhdi, *Indonesian Interpretation Market: From Methodological Contestation Up to Contextualization* (Yogyakarta: Kaukaba Dipantara, 2014), p. 45.

¹² Robert McHenry (gen. Ed.), *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 21, p. 235.

¹³ Suhaimi Fajrin, "Reorientation of Traditional Islamic Education in Indonesia," 2021.

¹⁴ DEPARTMENT OF HADITH INTERPRETATION and FACULTY OF USHULUDDIN UIN WALISONGO, "Models of Writing Quranic Interpretations in the Archipelago," and

¹⁵ Islah Gusmian, *Indonesian Interpretation Treasure: From Hermeneutics to Ideology*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2013), p. 19.

a. Early Writings on Interpretation of the Qur'an in the Archipelago

Since Islam spread in the archipelago starting from Sumatra, especially Aceh, the study of the Qur'an has developed rapidly. Referring to manuscripts by Acehnese scholars, attempts to interpret the Qur'an have emerged since the 16th century. A manuscript interpreting QS. al-Kahf: 9, author unknown, is thought to have been written at the beginning of the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636), whose mufti was Syamsuddin as-Sumatani, or even earlier during the reign of Sultan 'Ala'uddin Ri'ayat Syah Sayyid al-Mukammil (1537-1604), whose mufti was Hamzah al-Fansuri. In another part of Sumatra, a century later, a complete commentary of 30 chapters entitled *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* appeared, written by Abd. Rauf as-Singkili (1615-1693 AD).¹⁶ As a pioneering work, this tafsir holds an important place not only in Indonesia but also in other Islamic countries. For example, these tafsirs were published in Singapore, Penang, Bombay, Istanbul (Mathba'ah al-'Usmaniyyah, 1302/1884 and 1324/1906), Cairo (Sulaiman al-Maragi), and Mecca (al-'Amiriyah). The teaching of the Koran also reaches the Sufi community in Indonesia. When teaching Sufism to students, they often include the study of the Koran. Meanwhile, Indonesian Sufi figures such as Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin Sumatrani often quote verses from the Koran, which are interpreted in a mystical context. There is even a small note which states that in the era of these two classical Sufi figures, a simple tafsir of Surah al-Kahf was produced, which is thought to follow the tradition of *Tafsir al-Khazjin*.¹⁷

In Java, Islam was spread by the Walisongo (Nine Saints). This spread included the teaching of the Qur'an. It began with Raden Rahmad (Sunan Ampel), who taught the Qur'an at his Islamic boarding school in Ampel. Denta. As in Sumatra, in Java, Qur'anic teaching took place in surau (prayer rooms), langgar (prayer rooms), mushalla (prayer rooms), mosques, and teachers' houses. From the process of Islamization led by the Walisongo and the establishment of the Demak Kingdom around 1500 AD, Qur'anic teaching became more widespread, albeit simple. In the next generation, Islamic kingdoms were ruled by the Islamic Sultanate of Mataram. In several *Suluk* (Javanese mystical texts) such as *Suluk Sunan Bonang*, *Suluk Kalijaga*, and *Suluk Syaikh Siti Jenar*, the Qur'anic text becomes the main reference in building religious concepts.¹⁸

In Java, in the following centuries, Qur'anic teaching became increasingly developed. In 1847, although Indonesian education did not yet have a specific name, Qur'anic teaching took place in places called *nggon ngaji* (Qur'anic study places). The levels varied. The basic level was taught by caring parents at home from the age of five, with a focus on memorizing short surahs. By the age of seven or eight, children learned Arabic letters and memorized the Qur'an.¹⁹ The emergence of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Java marked a strategic advancement in Qur'anic teaching.

¹⁶According to studies by several experts, there are two main opinions regarding this interpretation. First, Snouck Hurgronje considers this translation more closely resembles *al-Baidawi's Tafsir*. See Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, II, 17, Note 6, in Azyumardi Azra, *Middle East Scholars Network...*, p. 203, and Rinkes, Hurgronje's student, added that in addition to being Al-Singkili's translation of *Tafsir al-Baidawi* also includes a translation of *Tafsir Jalalain*. Voorhove, a student of Hurgronje, also, following the opinion of Hurgronje and Rinkes, argued that the interpretation draws on various Arabic commentaries. Second, Riddel and Harun confirmed that *Tarjuman Mustafid* is a translation of *Tafsir Jalalain*. Only in certain parts does the interpretation utilize *Tafsir al-Baidawi* and *Tafsir al-Khazjin*. DO Rinkes, *Abdoerraof van Singkel; Bidrage tot de Kennis van de Mystiek op Sumatra en Java*, Heerenven: Hepkema, 1909, pp. 31-32 in Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah...*, p. 203.

¹⁷Azyumardi Azra, *Middle East Ulama Network...*, p. 202.

¹⁸Islah Gusmian, *Indonesian Tafsir Treasury ...* p. 22.

¹⁹Islah Gusmian, *Indonesian Tafsir Treasury ...* p. 23.

Various Islamic boarding schools in Java introduced basic Qur'anic study, including the rules of tajwid and interpretation, for students who were able to write the meaning concisely. A common reference is *the Tafsir al-Jalalain* by Jalaluddin al-Mahalli and Jalaluddin al-Suyuti.²⁰ Thus, Qur'anic study and interpretation in Indonesia were pioneered by Abdur Rauf Singkili, who translated the Qur'an into Malay in the mid-17th century. This was continued by Munawar Chalil (*Tafsir Al-Qur'an Hidayah, Ar-Rahman*), A. Hassan Bandung (*al-Furqan*, 1928), Mahmud Yunus (*Tafsir Al-Qur'an Indonesia*, 1935), Hamka (*Tafsir al-Azhar*, 1973), Zainuddin Hamidi (*Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 1959), Halim Hasan (*Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Karim*, 1955), Iskandar Idris (*Hibarna*), and Kasim Bakry (*Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Hakim*, 1960).²¹ In regional languages, works such as the works of Islamic scholars of Yogyakarta (*Quran Kejaven* and *Quran Sundaniyah*), Bisryi Musthafa Rembang (*al-Ibriq*, 1960), KH. R. Muhammad Adnan (*The Holy Qur'an Basa Jawi*, 1969) and Bakri Syahid (*al-Huda*, 1972) followed. Previously, in 1310 H, Kyai Mohammad Saleh Darat Semarang wrote a commentary in Javanese Arabic script. There is also an unfinished work by Kyai Bagus Arafah Solo entitled *Tafsir Jalalain Basa Jawi Alus Arabic Letters*.²²

b. Development of Exegetical Studies in the Archipelago

1) The Development of Nusantara Exegesis Before the 20th Century

Efforts to understand the messages of the Quran using Indonesian (Malay) and regional languages in the archipelago began shortly after the arrival of Islam, even before the establishment of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). However, very few Quranic studies and interpretations have been compiled into stand-alone books. Tafsir studies are still integrated and combined with the teachings of tauhid (monotheism), fiqh (jurisprudence), tasawuf (Sufism), and others, presented practically in everyday life.²³

Referring to historical reality, the writing of interpretations of the Qur'an in the archipelago has occurred since the 16th century, as proven by the discovery of a manuscript of the interpretation of Surah al-Kahfi (18): 9 from that era.²⁴ A century later, a masterpiece of interpretation of the Qur'an appeared entitled *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by Abd. Rauf as-Singkili, which is recognized as the first complete 30 juz interpretation by a Malay-Indonesian mufassir (interpreter). This work is considered the first because no Malay-Indonesian interpreter had previously produced a complete 30-Juz interpretation.²⁵

²⁰ Sehudin Sehudin and Indah Wahyu Ningsih, "History and Development of Tajweed Science in Java," *Al-Amar Journal: Islamic Economics, Islamic Banking, Islamic Religion, Management and Education* 4, no. 1 (2023): 1–12.

²¹ TAFSIRS OF JALALAIN BY SAHID AND TAFSIRS OF THE FACULTY OF USHULUDDIN AND HUMANIORA, "HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF MANUSCRIPTS," nd

²² SAHID and DA HUMANIORA.

²³ Ainita Nurussoumi and Setio Budi, "History of Quranic Interpretation in the Archipelago," *Iqtiran: Journal of Quranic and Interpretation Studies* 1, no. 1 (2025): 67–77.

²⁴ Srikandi Ma'rifah, "Dynamics of the Productivity of Nusantara Interpretation Works": A Study of Mapping Interpretation Works from the 17th to the 19th Century: The Socio-Cultural Context of Interpretation Studies in Indonesia, Variety of Nusantara Interpretations from the 16th to the Early 19th Century," *El-Wasathy: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023): 186–207.

²⁵ Roihatul Jannah Siagian et al., "Analysis of the Sources of Interpretation of Juz 30 in Tarjuman Al-Mustafid by Abdurrauf Al-Fanshuri," *REVELATLA Journal of Quranic Studies and Interpretation* 6, no. 1 (2025): 88–113.

In the generation after *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, a work entitled *Kitab Faraid al-Qur'an* appeared, which used Malay-Javanese. The use of Malay and Javanese further demonstrated their strength because these languages were the mother tongues of the archipelago, used in government, interstate relations, and trade.²⁶ This tafsir book is simple in form, resembling an article of tafsir, consisting of only two pages with small writing and double spacing. This manuscript is part of a collection edited by Isma'il bin Abd al-Muthallib al-Asyi, entitled *Jami' al-Jawami 'al-Musannafat: Majmu' several Books Written by Several Acehnese Ulama*.²⁷

In the 19th century, another complete commentary appeared entitled *Tafsir Munir li Ma'alim al-Tanzil*, written by the Indonesian cleric Sheikh Imam Muhammad Nawawi al-Bantani (1813-1879 AD), who lived in Saudi Arabia for a long time. This tafsir uses Arabic and was written and printed there (formerly the Hijaz), completed on Wednesday, 5 Rabiul Akhir 1305 AH. The manuscript was reviewed by the scholars of Mecca and Medina, then appreciated by the Egyptian scholars, so Imam Nawawi received the title "Sayyid Ulama 'Hijaz" (Leader of the Hijaz Ulama).²⁸

2) Interpretation of the Qur'an in Indonesia after the 20th Century

Howard M. Federspiel conducted research on Qur'anic studies in Indonesia, published as **Qur'anic Studies in Indonesia: From Mahmud Yunus to Quraish Shihab** (Mizan, Bandung, 1996). Federspiel divides the periodization of Indonesian scholars' works on the Qur'an and its interpretation into three generations.²⁹

The first generation was characterized by a separate translation or interpretation movement from the early 20th century to the early 1960s. The second generation served as a methodological refinement of the first generation, appearing in the mid-1960s, usually accompanied by special notes, footnotes, and a simple index. Works such as *al-Furqan* (A. Hassan, 1928), *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Karim* or *Tafsir Quran Indonesia* (Mahmud Yunus, 1935), and *Tafsir Quran* (Zainuddin Hamidi and Fachruddin, 1959) represent this generation.³⁰

²⁶ Nurushshoumi and Budi, "History of Interpretation of the Qur'an in the Archipelago."

²⁷ AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION and IZZA AZMIATUL HIKMAH, "THE CALIPHATE IN THE QUR'AN ACCORDING TO INDONESIAN MUFASSIR," and

²⁸ Hakam, "The Tradition of Nusantara Scholars' Interpretation of the Quran."

²⁹ The research conducted by Federspiel by explaining the periodization of works about the Qur'an and its interpretation in Indonesia, has received rebuttal from other researchers, especially related to his neglect of several early works on Qur'anic studies in Indonesia and the periodization he made. For example, Atabik mentioned that the emergence of the Qur'anic interpretation has played a big role in the studies of Qur'anic interpretation in the following centuries. Therefore, if someone who studies the history of the Qur'an and its interpretation in Indonesia, without involving Abdur Rauf Singkili's *Tarjuman Mustafid*, his research will be like research that is uprooted from its historical roots. Federspiel is one of them, he studied the Qur'an and its interpretation in Indonesia by starting his study only from Mahmud Yunus to M. Quraish Shihab, without providing a realistic explanation why he describes the writing of Indonesian interpretations from the beginning of its emergence, or before the era of Mahmud Yunus, even though the original title of his research was *Popular Indonesian Literatures on the Qur'an*. See Ahmad Atabik, *The Development of Modern Interpretation in Indonesia*, in *Hermeneutics*, Vol. 8, No. 2, December 2014, p. 319. And Howard M. Federspiel, *Qur'anic Studies in Indonesia; From Mahmud Yunus Until Quraish Shihab*, cet. 1st (Bandung: Mizan, 1996).

³⁰ Howard M. Federspiel, *Qur'anic Studies in Indonesia; From Mahmud Yunus to Quraish Shihab* (Bandung: Mizan, 1996).

The third generation, starting in the 1970s, featured complete translations or interpretations of Qur'anic verses, usually with a methodological introduction and an extended index. Representative works include *Tafsir al-Nur al-Bayan* (Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqi, 1966), *Tafsir al-Azhar* (Hamka, 1973), and *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Karim* (Halim Hasan et al., 1955). Federspiel notes that second-generation works share a similar format: Arabic text on the right-hand page, translation on the left-hand page, and explanatory notes as commentary. They explain difficult terms without Indonesian equivalents, summarize the contents of the surahs, and some discuss the history of the Qur'an with a simple index.³¹

The third-generation works employ contemporary methodology, beginning with a methodological introduction and Qur'anic sciences. Hasbi and Hamka group verses 1-5 for broad interpretation, while Hasan follows the sequential format of the second generation. All provide summaries of the surah; only Hamka includes historical and contemporary events, which is understandable given that he completed them during his imprisonment under the Old Order regime.³²

In the fourth generation (1980s), tafsir in Malay-Jawi appears, such as KH. Bisri. Mustofa's *al-Ibriq* (Rembang, Javanese with Arabic Pegon script) and Misbah Zainal Mustafa's *Iklil li Ma'ani at-Tanzil* (1981, Javanese with Latin script). Quraish Shihab represents the fourth generation of complete tafsir. Despite his busy schedule, Shihab was very productive, viewing his work as a "second life." His *tafsir al-Misbah* was begun on Friday, 4 Rabiul Awwal 1420 H / 18 June 1999, while serving as the Indonesian Ambassador to Cairo.³³

3) Techniques and Systematics of Exegesis Studies in Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia

Writing tafsir Al-Qur'an in Indonesia shows various techniques and systems across generations. Tafsir works show interesting dynamics in the presentation, themes, and characteristics of the interpreter. In the 1920s, *Algoeranoel Hakim*, along with *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Karim* by A. Halim, Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Abdurrahman Haitami, appeared, although only the first juz, marking a collective interpretation by several authors. This collective model continued in the 1930s with *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Karim* by A. Halim, Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Abdurrahman Haitami, and in the 1950s with *Tafsir Al-Qur'an* by Zainuddin Hamidy and Fakhruddin.³⁴

Nineteenth-century works also introduced a simple thematic systematization of exegesis. For example, *the anonymous Faraid al-Qur'an* (in the collection of Isma'il ibn Abd al-Muthalib al-Asyi) interprets Surah al-Nisa' verses 11-12 on inheritance law. Later thematic works include *A Series of Stories in the Qur'an* by Bey Arifin (1963), *The Qur'an on Women* by M. Said (1969), and *The Oneness of God in the Qur'an* by Mukti Ali (1969), all in Indonesian.³⁵

³¹ Federspiel.

³² Federspiel.

³³ Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Messages, Impressions and Harmony of the Qur'an* (Tangerang: Lintera Hati, 2016).

³⁴ Islah Gusmian, *The Treasury of Indonesian Interpretation; From Hermeneutics to Ideology* (Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 2013).

³⁵ Gusmian.

Other systematics focus on specific surahs, such as multiple works on Surah al-Fatiha: *Tafsir Al-Qur'anul Karim, Surat al-Fatihah* (Muhammad Nur Idris, 1955), *Rahasia Ummul Qur'an* (A. Abhry, 1956), *Konten al-Fatihah* (Bahroem Rangkuti, 1960), *Tafsir Surat al-Fatihah* (H. Hasri, 1969), *Samudra al-Fatihah* (Bey Arifin, 1972), and *Tafsir Ummul Qur'an* (1981). Sequential 30-juz exegeses include Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Karim* (completed 1938) and A. Hassan's *al-Furqan*.³⁶

In 1958, the cleric and writer Hamka wrote a 30-juz commentary entitled *Tafsir al-Azhar*, originally a dawn sermon at the al-Azhar Mosque in Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta, starting from Surah al-Kahfi (juz 15) in 1962. Arrested on January 27, 1964, under the Old Order regime, his two-year prison sentence became a blessing, allowing the completion of his work, which was published in 1967.³⁷

Quraish Shihab continued this tradition with diverse models: (1) Thematic exegesis in *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i* (1996) addressing contemporary issues;³⁸ (2) complete tahlili (verse-by-verse) exegeses in *Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Kesebarannya Al-Qur'an*, following the Uthmani mushaf.³⁹

Qur'anic and Exegesis Studies in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education

The attention of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals to the study of the Qur'an led to the establishment of Islamic higher education in which the Qur'an and Tafsir became core subjects. In the early 20th century, figures such as M. Natsir (1938) advocated for Islamic colleges (STI) to address worldly issues beyond the scope of the pesantren/madrasah. Satiman Wirjosandjojo outlined the need for (1) Islamic education lagging behind non-Muslim progress, (2) adopting Western models, (3) global connections, and (4) local emphasis.⁴⁰

In 1945, Bung Hatta proposed that STI integrate philosophy, history, and sociology with non-dogmatic Islamic studies, including state law. STI Jakarta (1945) moved to Yogyakarta (1946) due to Dutch aggression and became the Islamic University of Indonesia (UII, 1948) with faculties of Law, Economics, Education, and Religion. In 1950, the UII Faculty of Religion became independent as an Islamic Religious College (PTAIN) with faculties of Tarbiyah, Qadha', and Dakwah—influenced by the Middle Eastern (Egyptian) model.⁴¹

The initial courses of PTAIN included Tafsir along with Arabic, Hadith, Kalam, etc. In the 1950s, the Jakarta Academy of Religious Affairs (ADIA) merged with PTAIN to form IAIN (1960), which then split into IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah (1963). Since

³⁶ Gusmian.

³⁷ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Juz 1 (Jakarta: Pembina Massa, 1967), p. 41.

³⁸ Quraish Shihab, *Qur'anic Insights on Dhikr and Prayer (New Edition)* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati Group, 2018).

³⁹ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Message, Impression and Harmony of the Qur'an*.

⁴⁰ Fuad Jabali and Jamhari (eds.), *IAIN and the Modernization of Islam in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Logos, 2002), pp. 3-4.

⁴¹ Mujiburrahman, *The Future of Islamic Studies in PTAI*, paper from the 9th Annual Conference on Islamic Studies in Surakarta, 2-5 November 2009 in Individual Research Kaltsum Lilik Ummi (et. al), *Map of Al-Qur'an Studies in Islamic Boarding Schools 2005-2012 : Analysis of the Development of Dissertations at UIN Jakarta, UIN Yogyakarta and IAIN Surabaya* (Jakarta: Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta, 2011), p. 16.

the mid-1960s, IAIN's development has continued with the expansion of faculties influenced by Middle Eastern models while adapting to Indonesian needs.⁴²

By the 1970s and 1980s, IAIN evolved into PTKIN (State Islamic Religious Universities) through mergers and upgrades. Key milestones include IAIN Alauddin Makassar (1960), IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang (1960), and others, culminating in the transformation to State Islamic University (UIN) status, starting with UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (2000) and UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta (2010). This institutionalization elevated Qur'anic studies from traditional pesantren models to systematic academic programs.⁴³

Methodological Innovations in PTKIN Tafsir Studies

PTKIN/PTAI Institutions have become primary incubators of innovation in the study of tafsir.⁴⁴ They achieve this through comprehensive curriculum integration, combining the sciences of *the Qur'an* (ulum al-Qur'an), classical works such as the Tafsir of Jalalain and Ibn Kathir, and modern methodologies such as hermeneutics, linguistics, and semiotics.

These programs also pioneered an interdisciplinary model, combining tafsir with social sciences, *maqasid*, *Sharia*, and contextual analysis. This approach directly addresses pressing issues in Indonesia, including pluralism, gender dynamics, and economic justice.⁴⁵

Further research underscores this evolution. An analysis of dissertations from UIN Jakarta, UIN Yogyakarta, and IAIN Surabaya (2005–2012) revealed that 65% displayed methodological innovations, including *tahlili* (verse-by-verse), *muqaran* (comparative), *maudhu'i* (thematic), and *ijmali* (summary) approaches.⁴⁶

Distinctive Contributions of Islamic Higher Education

Unlike previous descriptive studies, this article systematically maps the theoretical development of tafsir within the framework of academic tafsir at PTKIN. It highlights three key differences. First, in terms of historical periodization, the discussion begins with *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* in the 17th century, continues through three generations of Federspiel, and extends to the fourth generation of digital and contextual tafsir. Second, regarding the institutional role, PTKIN is presented as a catalyst transforming tafsir from a surau-based tradition into a global scientific field. Third, in terms of methodology, PTKIN graduates have produced a hybrid model that bridges classical approaches, such as *tafsir bil (literary) and tafsir bil (literary) approaches ma'thur* with a contemporary approach, such as *the interpretation of mau d u'i*.

⁴² Mujiburrahman

⁴³ Junaidah, "Book on Implementation of Strategic Management in Islamic Higher Education Dr. Junaidah, S. Ag., MA," *CV. Anugrah Utama Raharja (AURA) Bandar Lampung*, 2022.

⁴⁴ Nurjanah Achmad, Mustafa Abdullah, and Mohamad Azrien Mohd Adnan, "Empowerment of Quranic Studies in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTAI) in Indonesia: A Study at the Institute of Quranic Sciences (IIQ) Jakarta," *Al-Basirah Journal* 12, no. 1 (2022): 70–82.

⁴⁵ Rosa Trisnia and Suti Rahayu, "Contemporary Interpretation Approach: Maqashid Al-Quran," *Journal of Education, Sociology and Law* 1, no. 2 (2025): 935–50.

⁴⁶ Uun Yusuf, "ACADEMIC QURAN INTERPRETATION IN INDONESIA: A STUDY OF THEMATIC DISSERTATION METHOD AT UIN YOGYAKARTA AND UIN JAKARTA" (UIN SUNAN KALIJAGA YOGYAKARTA, 2016).

Conclusion

PTKIN's contributions strengthen Muslims' understanding of the Qur'an as the primary source of Islam, producing contextually relevant interpretations for Indonesia's diverse society. This evolution—from humble *surau* teaching to sophisticated university research—positions Indonesian *tafsir* as a contributor to the global heritage, particularly through its interdisciplinary methodology oriented toward *maqasid* (the meaning of Islamic teaching).

This article traces the long history and theoretical development of Quranic exegesis *in the Indonesian context*. It highlights how the discipline evolved from a tradition of community-based teaching in *surau* (Islamic prayer houses) and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) to a structured and systematic academic field in contemporary Islamic higher education institutions. By analyzing this shift, this study demonstrates that the development of *exegesis* in Indonesia was not a sudden emergence, but rather a continuous process reflecting the nation's intellectual and religious growth.

Central to this transformation are Islamic higher education institutions, which have served as important centers for methodological innovation. By integrating *classical tafsir studies* with modern interdisciplinary approaches—including hermeneutics, linguistics, and the social sciences—these institutions have enabled scholars to address complex contemporary issues such as pluralism, gender equality, and economic justice. This academic evolution has moved the field beyond traditional models, fostering a rigorous environment for research and teaching.

Ultimately, this article concludes that the institutionalization of *tafsir studies* has significantly strengthened the Muslim community's engagement with the Qur'an as a primary source of guidance. By bridging classical traditions with contemporary analytical methods, Indonesia has established itself as a significant contributor to global Islamic studies. *This ongoing maturation of tafsir* continues to produce contextually relevant interpretations, ensuring that the archipelago's intellectual heritage remains vibrant and globally significant.

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