
Textuality and Contextuality in the Interpretation of the Qur'an: An Integrative Hermeneutical Approach to Contemporary Social Relevance

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Abstract

This study discusses the epistemological dynamics between textuality and contextuality in the interpretation of the Qur'an, a classic yet still relevant theme in the field of tafsir studies. The paradigm difference between textual and contextual exegesis illustrates two major currents of Islamic thought: one emphasizes the integrity of the text as absolute divine revelation, while the other seeks to present the message of the Qur'an in an ever-changing social context. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method, supported by integrative hermeneutic analysis that combines Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory, al-Syatibi's *maqaṣid al-shari‘ah*, and Abdullah Saeed's ideas on contextualizing the Qur'an. The results of the study show that the textual-contextual dichotomy is actually illusory: the two must be combined so that interpretation remains faithful to divine meaning while being responsive to human reality. This integration gives rise to a transformative interpretation paradigm that is relevant to the challenges of religion, social ethics, and national life today. Thus, the interpretation of the Qur'an does not stop at theological understanding but develops into a social praxis that fosters justice, moderation, and universal humanity.

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INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, as a universal text of revelation, is the primary source of all Islamic teachings, both theological and ethical-social. However, the universality of revelation is always confronted with human limitations in interpreting it. This is where the epistemological debate between two major paradigms arises: textualism and contextualism. The textualist paradigm asserts that the meaning of revelation is fixed,

objective, and accessible through a literal understanding of the Arabic language. Conversely, the contextualist paradigm emphasises that divine texts only find their true meaning when confronted with specific socio-historical situations (Saeed, 2006).

This encounter between text and context is at the heart of Islamic hermeneutical discourse. While textualists tend to preserve the "purity" of the meaning of revelation by limiting interpretation, contextualists seek to revive the moral message of the Qur'an so that it remains relevant to humanity in every age. This tension, as expressed by Rahman (1982), is not merely a methodological battle, but also a question of how Islam interacts with modernity, social change, and the dynamics of universal humanity.

In the history of interpretation, both approaches have long roots. The tradition of *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur* (based on the accounts of the companions and tabi'in) gave rise to a strong textual pattern, while *tafsir bi al-ra'y* opened up space for rational reasoning and contextual responses to new realities. However, developments in modern exegesis reveal the need to transcend this dichotomy. Fazlur Rahman, through his theory of double movement, asserts that ideal interpretation must begin with an understanding of the historical context of revelation and culminate in the application of its moral values in the context of contemporary life (Rahman, 1982).

Abdullah Saeed (2013) then developed a *contextualist* hermeneutics approach, which not only reads the text based on *asbab al-nuzul*, but also considers the social conditions of modern readers.. In this way, the Qur'an is understood as a living text that continues to dialogue with human reality. Meanwhile, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1990) offers a radical critique by stating that religious texts, including the Qur'an, are "*open texts*", whose meanings are always negotiated between revelation, culture, and the reader.

In the Indonesian context, this discourse is highly relevant. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim society, has a rich culture and social diversity that demands an inclusive, adaptive model of interpretation rooted in local values. The idea of "Islam Nusantara" (Islam in the Archipelago) promoted by Nahdlatul Ulama thinkers, for example, reflects a contextualisation of Islamic teachings that does not diminish the sanctity of revelation, but rather aligns it with the values of nationalism, tolerance, and humanity (Siradj, 2015).

Therefore, this study attempts to reformulate the relationship between textuality and contextuality in the interpretation of the Qur'an using an integrative hermeneutical approach. This approach is not intended to eliminate the differences between the two paradigms, but rather to find a creative synthesis that allows the Qur'an to speak with divine authority and human sensitivity. This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of *tafsir* studies in Indonesia, as well as to serve as an epistemological basis for the formation of contextual, moderate, and transformative *tafsir* texts.

METHOD

The research method in *tafsir* studies is not merely a technique for analysing texts, but also an epistemological framework that determines how to understand the relationship between revelation, social reality, and the subject of interpretation. In this study, the author uses a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach with *library research* and integrative hermeneutic analysis methods. The focus is not on quantifying data, but on the depth of understanding of meaning and the dialectical process between text and context. The hermeneutic approach was chosen because it is most relevant for reading

multi-dimensional religious texts such as the Qur'an. Hermeneutics, in its classical sense, means the art of interpretation; however, in the modern context, it has become an epistemological discipline that explains how understanding is formed in the interaction between text and reader (Palmer, 1969). Thus, this approach emphasises not only what the text says, but also how the text is interpreted and actualised.

The main sources of data for this study include primary and secondary literature directly related to the issues of textuality and contextuality in interpretation. Primary literature includes the works of classical exegetes such as *Jami' al-Bayan* by al-Tabari, *al-Jami' li Aḥkam al-Qur'an* by al-Qurṭubi, and *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* by Ibn Kasir, which represent a textual approach. Meanwhile, secondary sources include contemporary works such as *Islam and Modernity* (Fazlur Rahman, 1982), *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century* (Abdullah Saeed, 2013), and *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini* (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 1990), which represent contextual and hermeneutic paradigms. In addition, this study also uses accredited international and national journal articles that discuss the development of Qur'anic hermeneutics, *maqaṣid al-syari'ah*, and contemporary *tafsir* methodology. All of these sources are critically analysed to find a methodological synthesis that is capable of combining the strengths of textual and contextual approaches.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integrative Hermeneutic Analysis Framework

The integrative hermeneutic model used in this study is an adaptation of Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory and the principle of *maqaṣid al-syari'ah*. This approach assumes that the interpretation of the Qur'an must depart from two movements of understanding: first, understanding the historical context of revelation, and second, transforming its universal moral values into the current social context (context of application). This analytical framework consists of five main methodological stages, which are formulated as follows:

1. Textual and Linguistic Analysis

In the initial stage, interpreters conduct a critical reading of the linguistic structure of the verse, covering lexical, grammatical, and semantic meanings. This analysis is important so that the interpretation does not deviate from the linguistic boundaries set by the text itself. For example, the difference in the meaning of the word "*daraba*" in QS. An-Nisa '4: 34 can lead to different interpretations, namely between physical meaning (hitting) as interpreted by Attabari, Alqurthubi and Ibn Kathir, and a symbolic meaning (staying away from conflict) as interpreted by Fazlur Rahman, Abdullah Seed and Nasr Hamid.

2. Historical Analysis and Asbab al-Nuzul

This stage traces the background of the revelation of verses (asbab al-nuzul) to understand the social, political, and cultural contexts that influenced the meaning of the text during the Prophet's time. For example, verses that discuss warfare (such as QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 190–193) cannot be interpreted universally without considering the context of self-defence that underlies them.

3. Analysis of the Objectives of Sharia

The principle of *maqaṣid* serves as a moral bridge between text and context. Al-Syatibi in *al-Muwafaqat* explains that the main purpose of sharia is to realise human welfare in five key aspects: protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and

property. Thus, every interpretation must be measured in terms of the extent to which it supports the principles of justice, welfare, and universal humanity.

4. Recontextualisation of Universal Values:

Once the historical and moral meanings have been identified, the next step is to translate these universal values into modern social reality. For example, the value of justice in the inheritance verse (QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 11–12) can be realised in the form of legal policies that guarantee gender justice in the distribution of economic rights.

5. Social Verification and Public Dialogue

The final stage involves interaction between academic interpretation and society. Interpretation does not stop at the conceptual level, but must be tested through social, academic and public policy dialogue. Through this process, interpretation becomes a living social practice, not merely an elitist discourse in academic circles, but part of the social transformation of Muslims.

These five stages form a "Qur'anic hermeneutic circle", in which interpretation does not only move from text to context, but also back from context to text. In this way, the meaning of the Qur'an is constantly renewed without losing its normative roots.

Validity and Objectivity in Qur'anic Hermeneutics

One criticism often levelled at the hermeneutic approach is the risk of subjectivity on the part of the interpreter. In the Islamic scholarly tradition, the validity of interpretation is usually measured based on its conformity with history, sanad, and the discipline of interpretation. However, in integrative hermeneutics, objectivity is not interpreted as freedom from subjectivity, but rather as the result of an open dialogue between the text, the interpreter, and the scientific community (Gadamer, 1975).

Thus, objectivity in interpretation is not something absolute, but rather the result of interpretive consensus built through academic and social processes. In this context, methodological honesty and transparency of argumentation are key. A hermeneutic interpreter must reveal their ideological position, cultural background, and horizon of understanding so that readers can assess the extent to which the interpretation is valid and acceptable.

In addition, the principles of ethical interpretation are also very important. Ethical interpretation requires that every interpretation prioritises the values of justice, humanity, and moral responsibility for the social consequences of that interpretation. In other words, interpretations that give rise to discrimination, violence, or intolerance cannot be considered ethically valid, even if they may be linguistically correct.

The Relevance of Hermeneutic Methodology for Exegesis Studies in Indonesia

The integrative hermeneutic approach is highly relevant to the development of exegetical studies in Indonesia. In a pluralistic and democratic society such as Indonesia, exegesis of the Qur'an should not be limited to ritual and dogmatic dimensions, but should also serve as an instrument of social and national ethics.

Through this methodology, Indonesian exegetes can develop contextual interpretations that remain rooted in tradition. For example, on national issues such as interfaith tolerance, social justice, and gender equality, an integrative hermeneutic approach can provide a relevant and solution-oriented interpretation of the Qur'an. This is in line with the spirit of Islam Rahmatan lil 'Ālamīn, which is the theological paradigm of the Indonesian nation.

Furthermore, this method also encourages the emergence of collaborative interpretation, which is an interpretation developed through cooperation between scholars, academics, and civil society. Collaborative interpretation not only enriches the scientific dimension but also broadens the social utility of the message of the Qur'an. Thus, integrative hermeneutic methodology can serve as an important foundation for the development of a moderate, open, and community-oriented national interpretation.

Relevance and Contextual Application: Integrative Interpretation in Social Life, Nationalism, and the Digital Age

Integrative hermeneutics is not merely an academic project, but also a practical paradigm that has direct implications for the social and national life of Muslims. In the pluralistic, democratic, and religious context of Indonesia, integrative interpretation serves as a means of balancing the integrity of divine messages with the demands of an ever-changing social reality. This section discusses three main areas of relevance: (1) interpretation and social ethics; (2) interpretation and nationality; and (3) interpretation and the challenges of the digital age.

One important dimension of integrative hermeneutics is its ability to restore the Qur'an to its original role as *kitāb al-hidayah* - a book of moral and social guidance. The Qur'an not only speaks about individual worship, but also regulates social relations, economic justice, and human solidarity. In this context, overly textual interpretations often fail to capture the more fundamental ethical message, while overly contextual approaches risk abandoning the foundation of revelation.

For example, verses about zakat, infaq, and sadaqah cannot be understood merely as ritual obligations, but rather as a social distribution system that serves to reduce economic inequality. QS. At-Taubah [9]: 60, which explains the eight categories of zakat recipients, shows that the main purpose of zakat is to build socio-economic justice. Using an integrative hermeneutic approach, this verse is understood not only in the context of 7th-century Arab society, but also within the framework of modern social policies such as poverty alleviation, justice-based economics, and the empowerment of the poor.

Furthermore, the Qur'an also emphasises the value of *ta'aruf* (getting to know one another) in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13 as the foundation of social relations between humans. This value serves as an ethical basis for building a multicultural society and preventing social polarisation based on religious or ethnic identity. In the modern context, this verse contains a universal message about equality and respect for diversity - a principle that is highly relevant in the context of Indonesia's diverse nationality.

Thus, integrative hermeneutics makes the Qur'an not only a book to be read in the spiritual realm, but also a living social guide capable of responding to contemporary human problems such as economic inequality, ecological crisis, and social conflict. Such interpretation does not stop at the cognitive level, but gives rise to ethical awareness and social praxis for the ummah.

Integrative and National Interpretation: Islam Nusantara as a Model of Contextualisation

In the Indonesian context, integrative hermeneutics finds its most concrete application through the concept of Islam Nusantara. This concept is not a political idea, but rather a historical practice of how Muslims in the Nusantara archipelago interpret

Islamic teachings by accommodating local cultures without sacrificing their theological substance.

The Walisongo scholars of the 15th and 16th centuries, for example, used a cultural approach in spreading Islam. They combined the messages of the Qur'an with local symbols, traditions and arts, such as wayang and gamelan. This approach was not a form of theological compromise, but a contextualisation of the message of revelation so that it could be accepted by the local community. From a hermeneutic perspective, this shows that understanding a text always requires a contextual cultural horizon (Gadamer, 1975).

In the modern era, the principles of Islam Nusantara can be viewed as a local manifestation of integrative hermeneutics. Interpretation is not only about interpreting texts, but also understanding the Indonesian context with all its complexities: religious plurality, cultural diversity, and a state system based on Pancasila. Thus, the interpretation of the Qur'an in Indonesia cannot be separated from national values that uphold justice, tolerance, and universal humanity.

For example, QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]: 8, which emphasises the importance of being fair even to those who are hated ("Let not your hatred of a people incite you to act unjustly..."), can be used as a normative basis for political and legal ethics in Indonesia. This verse emphasises that the principle of justice is transcendent and must not be compromised by ideological interests or group identities.

Integrative interpretation allows this verse to be applied in the context of modern democracy, for example in enforcing laws that do not discriminate against minorities or groups with different views. This is where the Qur'an plays a role not only as a source of law, but also as a source of public ethics that guides the nation towards substantive justice.

Furthermore, integrative hermeneutics also helps to reduce the emergence of exclusive interpretations that tend to politicise religion. In Indonesian socio-political discourse, it is not uncommon for certain verses to be used partially to legitimise acts of intolerance or discrimination. The integrative hermeneutic approach teaches that every interpretation must be returned to the principles of *maqaṣid al-syari‘ah* - namely justice, mercy, and the benefit of the people. Thus, religion is no longer a tool for political polarisation, but rather a moral force that strengthens the social cohesion of the nation.

Integrative Interpretation and the Challenges of the Digital Age

One of the biggest challenges in contemporary Qur'anic studies is the emergence of digital space as a new arena for interpretation. On social media, interpretations often appear in the form of verses taken out of context, used to support certain ideological or political claims. This phenomenon signals the fragmentation of interpretive authority, where anyone can become an "interpreter" without going through a scientific process and methodological ethics.

Integrative hermeneutics offers an ethical framework for responding to this phenomenon. First, by emphasising the importance of digital interpretive literacy, the ability to distinguish between academic interpretations based on methodology and superficial religious opinions. Second, by encouraging the presence of channels for preaching and interpretation that prioritise a contextual approach based on science, such as academic interpretation channels in Islamic universities or fatwa institutions that are transparent in their methodology.

The challenges of the digital age also require scholars and academics to utilise technology as a means of preaching and teaching interpretation in a more inclusive

manner. For example, the development of interactive tafsir based on digital applications that allow users to understand verses in stages: from their literal meaning to their socio-historical context. Thus, technology is no longer a threat to the authority of tafsir, but rather a tool for expanding access to a deep and balanced understanding of the Qur'an.

In a broader context, integrative hermeneutics can serve as an ethical paradigm for the use of the Qur'an in the digital public sphere. It requires every interpreter—whether academic, preacher, or member of the general public—to uphold the principle of moral responsibility for the social impact of their interpretations. The Qur'an is not a text to be used to attack, judge, or justify violence, but rather a source of inspiration for liberation, justice, and public welfare.

The Transformational Impact of Integrative Interpretation

The main advantage of integrative hermeneutics lies in its transformative power. It changes interpretation from mere scientific discourse into an intellectual and moral movement that contributes significantly to civilisation. By integrating fidelity to the text and sensitivity to context, interpretation becomes a means of moral education that builds the character of the people, not just teaching formal laws.

In the world of education, this approach can be integrated into the curriculum of tafsir studies in Islamic universities. Students are not only taught linguistic and historical analysis methods, but are also trained to read the Qur'an within the framework of *maqāṣid* and actual social issues. This will give rise to a generation of *mufassir* who are critical, moderate, and oriented towards public interest.

In the social sphere, an integrative approach can form the basis for a humanistic and dialogical approach to *da'wah*. *Da'wah* is no longer oriented towards ideological conversion, but rather towards the formation of ethical awareness and human solidarity. Thus, the interpretation of the Qur'an returns to its original mission: to bring mercy to all creation (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*).

CONCLUSION

The debate between textual and contextual approaches to interpreting the Qur'an is not merely a methodological difference, but a reflection of epistemological dynamics that reflect how Muslims interact with revelation amid changing times. The textual approach emphasises the integrity of revelation as an authoritative source that cannot be challenged, while the contextual approach emphasises the moral and social relevance of the Qur'an in facing the challenges of modernity. Through an integrative hermeneutical approach, this study asserts that the two paradigms should not be opposed, but rather synthesised. This integration produces interpretations that are faithful to the linguistic structure and theological principles of the text, but also adaptive to social developments and humanitarian needs. By combining textual and historical analysis, *maqāṣid al-syārī'ah*, and social reflection, integrative hermeneutics makes the interpretation of the Qur'an dynamic and applicable.

In the Indonesian context, this approach has strategic significance. It is able to bridge the tension between religion and nationality, between revelatory idealism and the reality of plurality. The interpretation produced through this approach not only affirms the values of monotheism, but also strengthens an Islamic identity that is tolerant, moderate, and *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a blessing for all creation). Through this model, Islam

is understood not only as a belief system, but also as a social ethic that guides national and state life.

In the digital age, integrative hermeneutics has also become an important framework for overcoming the fragmentation of interpretive authority and the misuse of verses for political or ideological purposes. By combining academic rigour and ethical responsibility, this approach builds critical, contextual and liberating interpretive literacy. Finally, integrative hermeneutics presents a new paradigm in the study of interpretation: that fidelity to revelation does not mean rejecting change, and openness to context does not mean abandoning divine principles. Both can be combined within an epistemological framework that is just, civilised, and oriented towards the welfare of humanity.

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