Reevaluating Qur'anic Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis Between Classical Tafsir and Modern Hermeneutical Approaches

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Abstract:

This study examines the methodological differences between classical interpretation and modern hermeneutic approaches in interpreting the Qur'an. Classical interpretation, exemplified by works such as Tafsir al-Tabari and Tafsir Ibn Kathir, emphasizes the authority of tradition and a literal understanding of the Qur'anic text. In contrast, modern hermeneutics, as developed by scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, adopts a more contextual and critical approach, incorporating historical and social factors into interpretation. The study focuses on analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches and evaluating how aspects of both methodologies can be integrated to address contemporary interpretive challenges. Using comparative methods, this study systematically contrasts key principles, interpretive tools, and practical applications of each approach, while thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring issues and areas of convergence. The findings indicate that classical interpretation excels in preserving textual integrity and traditional authority but lacks adaptability to modern contexts. Conversely, modern hermeneutics offers greater contextual relevance but is often criticized for undermining traditional legitimacy. Rather than generalizing one approach as universally superior, this study suggests further exploration of how ijtihad—as an evolving interpretive mechanism—can bridge the divide between tradition and modernity, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic framework for interpreting the Qur'an.

[Penelitian ini mengkaji perbedaan metodologis antara tafsir klasik dan hermeneutika modern dalam menafsirkan al-Qur'an. Penafsiran klasik, yang dicontohkan oleh karya-karya seperti Tafsir al-Tabari dan Tafsir Ibnu Kathir,

menekankan otoritas tradisi dan pemahaman harfiah dari teks Al-Qur'an. Sebaliknya, hermeneutika modern, seperti yang dikembangkan oleh para sarjana seperti Fazlur Rahman dan Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, mengadopsi pendekatan yang lebih kontekstual dan kritis, menggabungkan faktor sejarah dan sosial ke dalam interpretasi. Studi ini berfokus pada analisis kekuatan dan kelemahan pendekatan ini dan mengevaluasi bagaimana aspek kedua metodologi dapat diintegrasikan untuk mengatasi tantangan interpretatif kontemporer. Dengan menggunakan metode komparatif, penelitian ini secara sistematis membedakan prinsip-prinsip utama, alat interpretatif, dan aplikasi praktis dari setiap pendekatan, sementara analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi masalah berulang dan area konvergensi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa interpretasi klasik unggul dalam melestarikan integritas tekstual dan otoritas tradisional tetapi tidak memiliki kemampuan beradaptasi dengan konteks modern. Sebaliknya, hermeneutika modern menawarkan relevansi kontekstual yang lebih besar tetapi sering dikritik karena merusak legitimasi tradisional. Alih-alih menggeneralisasi satu pendekatan sebagai lebih unggul secara universal, penelitian ini menyarankan eksplorasi lebih lanjut tentang bagaimana ijtihad—sebagai mekanisme interpretatif yang berkembang—dapat menjembatani kesenjangan antara tradisi dan modernitas, mendorong kerangka kerja yang lebih inklusif dan dinamis untuk menafsirkan Al-Qur'an.]

Keywords:
Classical interpretation, modern hermeneutics, Qur'an, ijtihad, contextual interpretation

A. Introduction

Understanding the Qur'anic text has been the subject of in-depth study in Islamic scholarly tradition. As a method of interpreting the Qur'an, Tafsir has evolved over the centuries with an approach based on strong traditions and structured methodologies. Classical tafsir, such as those carried out by Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir, relies on traditional sources such as Hadith, Islamic history, and ijtihad of scholars. This approach aims to preserve the originality of the Qur'anic text, preserve its literal meaning, and make it authoritative in religious practice.[1] Over time, there has been a realization

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[1] See Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an Towards Contemporary Approach* (London & New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006).

that this approach, while instrumental in preserving the heritage of Islam, has limitations in dealing with evolving contemporary challenges.[2]

On the other hand, modern hermeneutics emerged as a response to the limitations of classical interpretation. In the modern context, scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd introduced more critical and contextual methods of interpretation. This approach seeks to incorporate historical, sociological, and cultural understandings in interpreting the Qur'an. Modern hermeneutics not only focuses on texts literally but also considers the social context in which they are derived and interpreted. For example, Fazlur Rahman argues that the interpretation of the Qur'an must be "updated to meet modern challenges".[3] This shifts the focus from simply understanding the text to understanding the meaning of the text in a broader context.

However, the sharp difference between classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics has caused debate among Islamic scholars. Traditional scholars often criticize the modern hermeneutic approach because it is considered too far from the roots of the Islamic tradition. Some critics argue that the modern approach can open the door to overly liberal interpretation, which may ultimately reduce the authority of the Qur'anic text as the final divine revelation.[4] However, proponents of modern hermeneutics see this approach as enriching the understanding of the Qur'an, making it more relevant to the context of Muslim life today, and answering new challenges that previous generations have never faced.[5]

This article aims to explore and analyze the key differences between classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics in interpreting the Qur'an. Using a comparative approach, this study will identify the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches and explore how they can complement

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[2] See Afzalur Rahman, *Islam, Ideology, and Way of Life* (London: Seerah Foundation, 2016).

[3] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982).

[4] See Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law by Wael B. Hallaq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[5] Ibrahim M. Abu- Rabi, 'Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression by Farid Esack', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 3 (1998): 667–71; Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Universty Press, 2006), x.

each other. The study also assesses whether a modern approach is acceptable within traditional Islamic thought's framework without sacrificing the Qur'anic text's integrity. Thus, it is hoped that this study can significantly contribute to the study of the Qur'an and open up a wider space for dialogue between classical interpretation methods and modern hermeneutics.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a comparative method. Qualitative research was chosen because of its exploratory and descriptive nature, allowing for an in-depth analysis of both approaches to Qur'anic hermeneutics, namely classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics. The comparative approach is well suited for this analysis because the study aims to highlight the differences and similarities between the two approaches. As Creswell (2013) explains, comparative research "allows researchers to identify patterns or themes that arise from the differences of two or more entities being compared." In this context, the entities being compared are the more traditional classical interpretations and the more critical modern hermeneutics. The comparative method also allows researchers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches in explaining the texts of the Qur'an.[6]

This study's main data sources are works of classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics. For classical interpretation, the sources used include monumental works such as Tafsir al-Tabari and Tafsir Ibn Kathir, which are considered the main references in the tradition of tafsir bi al-ma'tsur. These works are analyzed textually to understand the methodology and approach used in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an. On the other hand, the works of Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Mohammed Arkoun will be used as the main data for modern hermeneutics. These works were chosen because they represent a critical approach to the Qur'anic text that considers the historical-social context. As Stirling suggested, text analysis is essential in qualitative research to understand the author's point of view while identifying the main themes that emerge in the narrative.[7]

Data analysis is carried out through several steps. First, works of classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics are coded using thematic analysis techniques to identify the main themes that emerge from each approach.

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[6] See John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4 ed. (Los Angeles, London: SAGE Publication, 2014).

[7] Jennifer Attride-Stirling, "Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (2001): 385–405.

Thematic analysis techniques allow researchers to find patterns in the data that can be directly compared between the two approaches.[8] These themes can include aspects such as interpretation methodologies, the use of additional sources, and how each approach addresses specific issues such as gender and law. Second, the thematic analysis results were compared to find significant differences between the two approaches. This analysis will also identify areas where classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics may complement each other. For example, modern approaches may offer flexibility, while classical interpretation offers textual authority.

Several steps are taken to ensure the credibility and validity of the research. One is to use the data triangulation method, which compares results from various sources and authors of classical and modern commentaries. This triangulation is important in qualitative research to minimize bias and increase the validity of research results.[9] In addition, peer debriefing is also used, where the results of the analysis are discussed with experts in Islamic studies and Qur'anic interpretation to obtain constructive feedback. This technique helps to ensure that the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data are not only derived from the researcher's perspective but are also supported by a broader understanding of the subject.

B. Literature Review

1. Methods and Characteristics of Classical Tafsir in Understanding the Qur'an

Classical tafsir has developed as the primary method of understanding the Qur'an since the dawn of Islam, with monumental works such as Tafsir al-Tabari and Tafsir Ibn Kathir playing an important role in this tradition.[10] Tafsir al-Tabari, for example, is one of the earliest interpretations that

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[8] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

[9] Norman K. Denzin, 'Triangulation 2.0', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* Vol. 6, no. 2 (2012): 80–88; Patricia Fusch, Gene E. Fusch, and Lawrence R. Ness, 'Denzin's Paradigm Shift: Revisiting Triangulation in Qualitative Research', *Journal of Sustainable Social Change* Vol. 10, no. 1 (2018): 2.

[10] Abdul Hameed and Mian Saadat Ali Nadeem, 'A Brief Review of Historical Promotions of Interpretive Methods of the Holy Quran in Early Times', *Al-Qamar* Vol. 6, no. 3 (2023): 1–34.

combines various hadith histories and the views of the Prophet's companions to explain the verses of the Qur'an in depth.[11] Classical interpretation generally relies on the bi al-ma'tsur approach, which emphasizes the importance of using authentic hadith history, ijma' ulama, and Islamic history as the main reference.[12] In this approach, the classical mufassirs sought to maintain the authority and authenticity of the Qur'anic text by limiting the interpretation to sources considered authentic and reliable. In this way, they seek to preserve Islamic traditions' values and the sacred text's literal meaning. This approach is seen as a way to avoid distortion in religious interpretation and ensure that the verses of the Qur'an are understood by their historical context.[13] However, while this approach can maintain the text's authenticity, some critics state that the method tends to be rigid in changing times and dynamic social contexts.

Although classical interpretation has the advantage of maintaining textual authority, some scholars argue that this approach is less flexible in responding to contemporary social and cultural developments. For example, when it comes to women's rights, classical interpretation often maintains a conservative view that limits the role of women in public and political spaces. Works such as Tafsir Ibn Kathir often refer to hadiths describing women in domestic roles, thus reinforcing patriarchal norms in Muslim societies.[14] In addition, on the issue of religious pluralism, classical interpretation tends to emphasize the exclusivity of Islam as the only way to truth without opening up a space for more inclusive dialogue with other religions.[15] Some contemporary researchers, such as Abdullah Saeed (2006), argue that this approach is insufficient to answer modern challenges such as globalization, human rights, and religious plurality.[16] They propose a more contextual and dynamic method of interpretation, which can adapt the understanding of the

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[11] Ahmad Yunus Mohd Noor and Nagwa Hussein Baker Musa, 'Methodology of Salah Abdul Fattah Al-Khalidi in Abridgement of al-Tabari's Corpus, Jami' al-Bayan 'An Ta'Wil Ay al-Quran: Taqrib Wa Tahzib (Approximation and Refinement)', *Islamiyyat* Vol. 44, no. 1 (2022): 125–30; Patrick Sookhdeo, 'Issues of Interpreting the Koran and Hadith', *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* Vol. 05, no. 3 (2006): 57–81.

[12] Hameed and Nadeem, 'A Brief Review of Historical Promotions of…'.

[13] Nadwi, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law by Wael B. Hallaq.*

[14] Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

[15] Rabi, 'Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism.

[16] Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an Towards Contemporary Approach.*

Qur'an to the evolving social reality without sacrificing the basic principles of Islam.

2. Modern Hermeneutics Approach in Interpretation of the Qur'an

Modern hermeneutics emerged as a response to the limitations of classical interpretation in the face of contemporary challenges, especially in an ever-changing social, political, and cultural context.[17] Figures such as Fazlur Rahman and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd pioneered this approach with ideas that sought to renew understanding of the Qur'an. Rahman (1982) developed the "*double movement*" theory, which emphasized the importance of reading Qur'anic verses through two levels of meaning. First, the literal meaning must be understood in the specific context of the revelation, namely the Arab society in the 7th century. Second, the universal principles contained in the text can be applied in a modern context.[18] For example, the concept of justice in the Qur'an must be understood not only as a literal rule of law but also as a principle that can be applied to the challenges of social justice today.[19] This approach allows for more flexible and contextual interpretation, allowing sacred texts to remain relevant amid rapid social change. However, traditional scholars often oppose this idea, fearing that this historical-critical approach will undermine the text's authority and open the door to overly liberal interpretation.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd argued that the Qur'an should be seen as a dynamic text, not static, in the sense that the understanding of the text must continue to evolve along with the changing times and social context. According to Abu Zayd (2000), the Qur'an functions as a divine revelation revealed for a particular context and contains messages that must be continuously explored and understood in each generation. He argues that every reading of the Qur'an is a hermeneutical process tied to the reader's social, political, and cultural context.[20] Thus, the interpretation of the Qur'an cannot be separated from the reality of Muslim life today. Abu Zayd's

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[17] Mohamad Yufidz Anwar Ibrohim and Nur Muhammad, 'Hermeneutika Double Movement Fazlur Rahman: Mewujudkan Hukum Islam Yang Lebih Eksistensialis', *El-Banat: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam* Vol. 12, no. 1 (2022): 104–20.

[18] Vicky Izza, 'Double Movement: Hermeneutika Alquran Fazlur Rahman', *Jurnal Keislaman* Vol. 4, no. 2 (2021): 127–43, https://doi.org/10.54298/jk.v4i2.3314.

[19] Ulya, 'Hermeneutika Double Movement Fazlur Rahman: Menuju Penetapan Hukum Bervisi Etis', *Ulul Albab: Jurnal Studi Islam* Vol. 12, no. 2 (2011): 111–27.

[20] Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis*.

approach has often been heavily criticized by conservatives who consider this view to risk diminishing the authority of the Qur'an as a fixed guideline that should not be changed. Some scholars accuse Abu Zayd of "secularizing" the text of the Qur'an and accusing it of being a threat to the established teachings of Islam.[21] Nevertheless, this modern hermeneutic approach continues to gain support from academics and intellectuals who see it as a way to bridge the tension between religious texts and evolving social dynamics.

3. Differences in Approach between Classical Interpretation and Modern Hermeneutics

The fundamental difference between classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics lies primarily in their respective approaches to textual analysis. Classical interpretation is grounded in the authority of texts and established traditions, often prioritizing literal readings that claim universal applicability.[22] For instance, legal verses in sacred texts are typically interpreted straightforwardly and viewed as timeless rules that transcend historical contexts. This perspective assumes that the original meanings of these texts remain relevant across all eras. However, modern hermeneutics challenges this view by emphasizing the necessity of understanding texts within their historical and social contexts.[23] Scholars argue that many verses were responses to specific socio-political conditions during the time of the Prophet, which calls for a more contextual interpretation that acknowledges the dynamic nature of societal realities. Research indicates that this critical approach can lead to more meaningful applications of sacred texts in contemporary issues, such as justice and equality, making them resonate with modern audiences.

This divergence in interpretation has resulted in significant tensions between traditionalists and modernists within scholarly and religious communities. Traditionalists assert the importance of preserving the authenticity and authority of texts, fearing that a contextual approach may dilute their significance and lead to overly liberal interpretations. In contrast,

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[21] Wael B. Hallaq, 'Juristic Authority vs. State Power: The Legal Crises of Modern Islam', *Journal of Law and Religion* Vol. 19, no. 2 (2004): 243–58.

[22] Ahmad Zaenuri, "Classical and Modern Exegesis Styles: The Evolution of The Development Exegesis Styles from Classical and Modern Periods," *Jurnal At-Tibyan: Jurnal Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* Vol. 8, no. 1 (2023): 20–38.

[23] Michael R. Kelly, *Hermeneutics and Critical Theory in Ethics and Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

modernists advocate for adapting these texts to fit contemporary realities, arguing that rigid adherence to historical interpretations can render sacred texts irrelevant today. Despite these opposing views, some scholars have sought a middle ground by integrating elements from both classical and modern perspectives. This synthesis could enrich the understanding of sacred texts, allowing for a more nuanced appreciation that honors tradition and the evolving context of human experience.[24] By fostering dialogue between these camps, scholars aim to create a more inclusive framework that respects the original meanings while also accommodating the diverse challenges faced in modern society.

4. Criticism and Challenges to Modern Hermeneutics

Although modern hermeneutics offers a more contextual and relevant understanding, this approach has not escaped significant criticism. Critics argue that modern hermeneutics focuses too much on the historical context, thus ignoring the spiritual and transcendental aspects of the Qur'an's revelations. Hallaq (2009) argues that this approach risks diminishing the authority of the Qur'an as an absolute divine text, potentially making it merely a product of history tied to a specific time and place.[25] This concern reflects the view that if we overemphasize the context, we could lose the spiritual essence on which the beliefs are based. In addition, there are concerns that modern hermeneutics opens the door to overly subjective and pluralistic interpretations, which could lead to fragmentation in religious understanding.[26] This has the potential to threaten the unity of the ummah and give rise to various inconsistent versions of teachings, which in turn can weaken the collective identity of the Muslim community.

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[24] Marco Demichelis, "Islamic Liberation Theology. An Inter-Religious Reflection between Gustavo Gutierrez, Farīd Esack, and Ḥamīd Dabasi," *Oriente Moderno*, Vol. 94, no. 1 (2014): 125–47.

[25] Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Izzat Sayyid Azouz, "Madakhilu Tarikhiyati al-Qur'ani al-Karimi inda Nasrh Hamid Abu Zaid 'Ardlu wa Naqshu," *Hauliyah Kulliyat Ushul ad-Diin Kairo*, Vol. 34, no. 34 (2021): 2269–2424; Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 23 (2003): 8–47.

[26] Victoria S. Harrison, "Hermeneutics, Religious Language and the Qur'an," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* Vol. 21, no. 3 (2010): 207–20; C. Jason White, "Is It Possible to Discover 'The One' Intended Meaning of The Biblical Authors?" *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 67, no. 2 (2014): 178–94.

On the other hand, proponents of modern hermeneutics argue that this criticism is often exaggerated and does not consider the need to maintain the relevance of Islam in the ever-changing contemporary world.[27] They emphasized that this method is necessary to answer the challenges of the times, such as complex social, political, and moral issues. Sacred texts can be reinterpreted with a more flexible approach to provide a more relevant guide for Muslims in the modern era. Proponents of modern hermeneutics claim that understanding the historical context does not mean ignoring spiritual values; Rather, it can deepen our understanding of the divine message and its application in our daily lives. Discussions on the validity of modern hermeneutics are still ongoing, with arguments from both sides that need to be considered, thus creating space for constructive dialogue to understand and practice the teachings of Islam in an ever-changing era.

C. Results

1. The Reliance of Classical Interpretation on Traditional Sources and Its Challenges in the Modern Era

An analysis of classical interpretation shows that this method relies heavily on the authentic histories of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (Hadith), as well as the consensus of scholars (*ijma'*).[28] For example, Tafsir al-Tabari, one of the earliest and most influential works of tafsir, often refers to hadith and the opinions of previous scholars to explain the meaning of verses that are difficult to understand. This approach reflects the belief that the Qur'an is the final revelation that must be understood in its original context and that traditional authority is an irreplaceable guide in interpreting sacred texts. According to Al-Azmeh (1993), focusing on these authoritative aspects provides stability to the understanding of religion, preserving the authenticity of Islamic teachings from overly free and subjective interpretations. However, this strength is also a weakness, given that many classical interpretations are trapped within a limited framework of thought and historical context.[29] Thus, although classical interpretation

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[27] Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis*.

[28] Ghulam Mustafa Nukhba, 'Exploring the Analytical Approach in Analyzing Prophetic Hadith: Methodologies and Insights from Hadith Critics', *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities* Vol. 3, no. 4 (2023): 29–37.

[29] Jon Hesk, 'The Context of Tragedy', *The Classical Review* Vol. 48, no. 1 (1998): 72–74; Jiang Guanghui, 'The Interpretation of Tradition and the Tradition of Interpretation:

has an important role in maintaining the continuity of tradition, this limitation becomes a serious challenge when dealing with modern issues that require a broader adjustment and understanding.

The limitations of classical interpretation in answering modern questions,[30] such as gender and human rights issues, become more apparent when we evaluate the contemporary socio-political context. As Brown (1999) puts it, many classical interpretations "ignore the contemporary socio-political context, so that they are not always relevant to the needs of Muslims today".[31] This shows that although there are universal values in Islamic teachings, the concrete application of these texts is often not based on the reality faced by modern society. For example, on gender issues, some classical interpretations tend to maintain patriarchal views, which are not in line with efforts to achieve gender equality in the current context. Research shows that there is a need to develop a more inclusive and responsive interpretation of the challenges of the times so that Muslims can find the relevance of their teachings in dealing with contemporary issues. Thus, although classical commentary has the power to maintain textual authority, it often faces difficulties in adapting to the changing times and the demands of an ever-evolving society.

2. The Flexibility of Modern Hermeneutics in Interpreting the Qur'an and the Challenge to Legitimacy

An analysis of modern hermeneutics shows that this approach is more flexible and contextual in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an.[32] Scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd emphasized the importance of understanding the socio-political context in which the Qur'an

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The Trajectory of the Evolution of Thought in the Confucian Classics and the Direction of Its Interpretations', *Contemporary Chinese Thought* Vol. 36, no. 4 (2005): 11–35.

[30] Hasanov Ulug'Bek Abdusalom O'G'Li, 'The Main Features of Modern Qur'anic Exegesis', *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research* Vol. 11, no. 11 (2022): 229–38.

[31] Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), v.

[32] Hesham Sayed Abdelnasser, 'Beyond Text and Context: Modern Scientific Discoveries through Gadamerian Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutical Circle in Quranic Interpretation', *Al-Majallatu al-Ilmiyyatu Li Kuliyati al-Adabi – Jami'at Asyuti* Vol. 30, no. 90 (2024): 899–916; Abdullah Saeed and Ali Akbar, 'Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur'ān', *Religions* Vol. 12, no. 7 (2021): 527.

was revealed.[33] Rahman (1982) states that "the text of the Qur'an must be understood in two dimensions: first, the historical context in which the revelation was revealed, and second, universal principles that can be applied in a modern context."[34] With this approach, modern hermeneutics can provide more relevant interpretations of current issues, such as religious pluralism, women's rights, and social justice. For example, in the context of women's rights, this approach encourages re-reading verses often interpreted patriarchally, thus opening up space for a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding.[35] This shows that modern hermeneutics maintains the relevance of Islamic teachings and adapts those teachings to the challenges faced by the ummah in the era of globalization and rapid social change.

However, this approach has also drawn criticism from traditional scholars who see it as an attempt to undermine the authority of the Qur'an as divine revelation. Hallaq (2004) suggests that modern hermeneutics risks prioritizing interpretations that are too subjective, which can obscure the text's original meaning. Many traditional scholars argue that prioritizing historical context can jeopardize the sacredness and authenticity of the text and open the door to uncontrolled interpretation.[36] These findings suggest that while modern hermeneutics is more adaptive, it faces challenges in terms of legitimacy among traditional Muslims, who tend to value a more conservative approach and adhere to textual authority. Therefore, a constructive dialogue between these two approaches is crucial to achieve a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the Qur'an, which can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.[37]

3. Methodological Differences between Classical Interpretation and Modern Hermeneutics

A methodological comparison between classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics reveals fundamental differences in how these

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[33] Katharina Völker, 'Two Accounts of Qur'anic Revelation', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* Vol. 26, no. 3 (2015): 271–86; Ismail Fahmi Arrauf and Miswari, 'Menangkap Pesan Tuhan: Urgensi Kontekstualisasi Alquran Melalui Hermeunetika', *Jurnal At-Tibyan: Jurnal Ilmu Alquran Dan Tafsir* Vol. 3, no. 2 (2018).

[34] Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Pakistan: Islamic Research Institute, 1965).

[35] See Fatimah Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (New York: Perseus Books Publishing, 1991).

[36] Hallaq, 'Juristic Authority vs. State Power: The Legal Crises of Modern Islam'.

[37] Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an Towards Contemporary Approach*.

approaches interpret texts. Classical interpretation tends to take a literal approach. It focuses on preserving tradition, meaning that interpretation is often rooted in pre-existing understandings and relies on authoritative sources such as hadith and ijma' as the main guide. For example, in interpreting verses on family law, classical interpretation generally adopts a more rigid perspective, often retaining existing patriarchal views, without considering the broader social context. On the other hand, modern hermeneutics is more dynamic and contextual. This approach examines the text in isolation and considers the social, political, and cultural factors that influence our understanding of the text. As explained by Saeed (2006), modern hermeneutics seeks to make the text relevant to the values of gender equality in contemporary society, which shows that interpretation can and should adapt to the changing times.[38]

These methodological differences reflect the different goals between the two approaches. Classical interpretation aims to preserve texts and traditions, preserving the authenticity of Islamic teachings from interpretations considered too liberal or subjective. In this context, traditional scholars often feel that this is the best way to ensure that the teachings of Islam remain intact and not distorted by the times.[39] Modern hermeneutics, meanwhile, seeks to make the text relevant to the context of the present, understanding that the social values and challenges facing Muslims today cannot be ignored. This approach incorporates a historical-critical method, which invites us to consider how social and political developments have shaped our interpretation of sacred texts. Thus, the debate between these two methodologies is about how to interpret the text and how we understand and bring Islamic teachings to life in an ever-changing context.[40]

4. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Classical Interpretation and Modern Hermeneutics

The main strength of classical interpretation lies in its ability to maintain textual authority and the integrity of tradition. This approach provides a sense of stability for Muslims seeking certainty in interpreting the Qur'an, especially in the context of teachings that have been held for centuries.

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[38] *Ibid.*

[39] Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law.*

[40] Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights*

Classical tafsir offers a clear and structured guide to understanding sacred texts by utilizing traditional sources such as hadith and ijma'. This is crucial in a society that needs a solid reference to maintain religious unity and identity. However, the main drawback of classical interpretation is its lack of flexibility in dealing with social changes and contemporary challenges. As Brown (1999) puts it, many classical interpretations "ignore the contemporary socio-political context," so they are not always relevant to the needs of Muslims today.[41] Given these limitations, classical interpretation often faces criticism from those who want a more adaptive and responsive interpretation of modern issues such as gender, pluralism, and human rights.

On the other hand, the main strength of modern hermeneutics is its ability to adapt the interpretation of the Qur'an to changing socio-political conditions. This approach allows for a more dynamic and contextual interpretation, which can accommodate the values of equality and justice in contemporary society. For example, modern hermeneutics often puts forward issues such as women's rights and religious pluralism, which are particularly relevant in today's global context. However, this approach often undermines the authority of texts by conservative scholars, who worry that modern hermeneutics may open the door to overly free and subjective interpretations.[42] This challenge creates a tension between the need to preserve tradition and the drive to respond to changing times. Thus, while both approaches have significant strengths, they also face their challenges in both academic and religious practice contexts. A constructive dialogue between these two approaches is essential to achieving a more holistic understanding of the Qur'an and its application in the modern era.

D. Discussion

This research contributes significantly to the study of the Qur'an by showing how both approaches—classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics—can enrich academic understanding. Classical interpretation, emphasizing the authority of tradition and history, has been the basis for studying Islamic texts for centuries. However, modern hermeneutics offers a more critical and contextual approach, which allows academics to interpret the Qur'anic text about contemporary challenges. As Esack (1997) stated, "the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an allows for

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[41] Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, v.

[42] Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*.

a dialogue between the text and social reality, resulting in a more dynamic understanding."[43] This suggests that modern hermeneutics is relevant in an academic context and has the potential to open up space for new approaches in Islamic studies. Therefore, this study shows that the two approaches can complement each other to deepen the understanding of the Qur'anic texts.

In terms of practice, the differences between classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics have had a major impact on the lives of Muslims in various contexts. With its rigorous and tradition-based approach, classical interpretation provides stability for many Muslims seeking certainty in religious interpretation. However, modern hermeneutics offers a more flexible perspective, which allows for interpretations of the Qur'an that are more relevant to contemporary issues such as women's rights, religious pluralism, and human rights. For example, Abu Zayd argues that "a critical hermeneutic approach to the Qur'an allows Muslims to face modern challenges without losing the spiritual essence of the text."[44] This means that modern hermeneutics can help contemporary Muslims remain relevant and responsive to social change without neglecting the core teachings of Islam. This creates space for a more inclusive and adaptive interpretation.

While both approaches have their strengths, combining them in a single coherent framework is the biggest challenge. Classical interpretation, emphasizing the authority and authenticity of tradition, often contradicts the more critical and contextual approach of modern hermeneutics. This creates tension between traditional scholars who adhere to classical methods of interpretation and modern scholars who advocate for a critical hermeneutic approach. Hallaq (2009) notes that "attempts to combine traditional and modern approaches often face resistance from both sides, mainly due to differences in goals and methodologies."[45] This suggests that while the merger of these two approaches may be theoretical, there are major challenges regarding legitimacy and acceptance among Muslims in practice.

Despite the challenges, the study also opens opportunities for a more productive dialogue between classical interpretation approaches and

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[43] Rabi, 'Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of …'.

[44] Ismail Suardi Wekke, 'Hermeneutical Approach to The Qur'an', *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* Vol. 13, no. 2 (2018): 455–79; Naupal, 'The Criticism of Literalism in Reading the Qur'an Through Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd Hermeneutics', *International Review of Humanities Studies* Vol. 4, no. 1 (2019): 254–63.

[45] Hallaq, 'Juristic Authority vs. State Power: The Legal Crises of Modern Islam'.

modern hermeneutics. One way to facilitate this dialogue is through a more inclusive ijtihad approach, where elements of both methods can be combined to produce a more comprehensive interpretation. As stated by Saeed (2006), "ijtihad must continue to evolve to answer the challenges of the times, but still based on the basic principles of Islam."[46] Thus, this study suggests that classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics should not be seen as contradictory approaches but as methods that can complement each other. A more open and flexible approach to interpreting the Qur'an allows for creating harmony between tradition and modernity in Islamic studies.

E. Conclusion

This research reveals that classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics have very different approaches to interpreting the text of the Qur'an. Classical interpretation, with its literal and history-based approach, focuses on preserving the authenticity of the Qur'anic text and maintaining the continuity of tradition. On the other hand, modern hermeneutics offers a more critical and contextual way of understanding the Qur'an, taking into account the socio-historical context, which makes it more relevant to the challenges of modern times. As Saeed puts it, "Modern hermeneutics not only seeks to understand the text literally but also tries to explore deeper meanings according to the context of the times." As such, these two approaches have an important role in studying the Qur'an despite significant differences in their goals and methodologies.

One of the main recommendations of this study is the need for further study of approaches that combine elements of classical interpretation and modern hermeneutics. Although these two approaches are often considered to be at odds with each other, the findings from this study suggest that there is potential to combine the strengths of each. Further research could focus on how ijtihad can be used to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. As Esack argues, "ijtihad must continue to evolve to ensure the relevance of the Qur'an in the modern world while still respecting the basic principles of Islam." A more in-depth study of this area can help create a more comprehensive interpretive approach, which is academically relevant and useful for Muslims in various social contexts.

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[46] Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an Towards Contemporary Approach.*

From a practical perspective, the difference between these two approaches has a major impact on how Muslims understand and practice the teachings of their religion. Classical interpretation provides stability and consistency in religious practice, while modern hermeneutics offers flexibility that allows for more relevant interpretations of today's socio-political conditions. The tension between these two approaches reflects the broader conflict between traditionalism and modernity in Islam. However, Abu Zayd explains that "modern hermeneutics can help Muslims navigate contemporary challenges without losing the spiritual essence of the Qur'anic text." Therefore, a more inclusive and adaptive approach to interpreting the Qur'an can help address these challenges in religious practice and academic studies. []

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