

QAWĀ'ID AL TAFSĪR AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL MODEL FOR VALID QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MARĀH LABĪD AND AL-MIŞBĀH

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Received: 07-05-2025 | Revised: 07-10-2025 | Accepted: 31-12-2025

ABSTRACT

The growing circulation of ideologically driven and methodology-inconsistent Qur'anic interpretations highlights the absence of a clear epistemological standard for assessing interpretive validity. This study addresses this gap by examining *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as a structured epistemological model capable of guiding reliable Qur'anic interpretation. Using qualitative data derived from primary tafsīr texts, the study employed a comparative hermeneutical method and critical textual analysis to evaluate two influential works in the Nusantara tradition: the nineteenth century *Marāh Labīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and the contemporary *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāh* by M. Quraish Shihab. The analysis is organized around five epistemological pillars that function as analytical domains, namely exegetical competence, ethical integrity, textual understanding, socio cultural contextual awareness and methodological coherence. The findings show three key patterns. First, both exegetes consistently apply these principles, demonstrating their normative relevance across historical contexts. Second, Nawawi al-Bantani emphasizes textual stability and doctrinal continuity through classical linguistic analysis and transmitted readings. Third, Shihab prioritizes contextual relevance by employing thematic coherence and maqāṣid oriented reasoning. These differences illustrate the adaptability of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* to diverse interpretive orientations. The study concludes that *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* provides a dynamic and universal framework for safeguarding interpretive validity. Its application strengthens Qur'anic hermeneutics in pluralistic societies and offers a practical tool for mitigating deviant interpretations while promoting responsible exegetical practice.

Keywords: Epistemological Model, Quraish Shihab, Nawawi al-Bantani, Nusantara Tafsīr, *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr*, Qur'anic Hermeneutics

ABSTRAK

Meningkatnya peredaran *tafsir Al-Qur'an* yang digerakkan oleh ideologi dan tidak konsisten secara metodologis menyoroti ketiadaan standar epistemologis yang jelas untuk menilai validitas penafsiran. Penelitian ini merespons kekosongan tersebut dengan mengkaji *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr* sebagai suatu model epistemologis terstruktur yang mampu membimbing penafsiran *Al-Qur'an* yang dapat dipertanggungjawabkan. Dengan menggunakan data kualitatif yang bersumber dari teks-teks *tafsir primer*, penelitian ini menerapkan metode hermeneutika komparatif dan analisis teks kritis untuk mengevaluasi dua karya berpengaruh dalam tradisi Nusantara, yaitu *Marāh Labīd* karya Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani dari abad ke-19 dan *Tafsīr al-Mišbāh* karya M. Quraish Shihab yang bersifat kontemporer. Analisis disusun berdasarkan lima pilar epistemologis yang berfungsi sebagai ranah analitis, yaitu kompetensi *tafsir*, integritas etis, pemahaman tekstual, kesadaran konteks sosial budaya, dan koherensi metodologis. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan tiga pola utama. Pertama, kedua mufasir secara konsisten menerapkan prinsip-prinsip tersebut, yang menunjukkan relevansi normatifnya lintas konteks historis. Kedua, Nawawi al-Bantani menekankan stabilitas tekstual dan kesinambungan doktrinal melalui analisis linguistik klasik dan riwayat *tafsir* yang ditransmisikan. Ketiga, Quraish Shihab memprioritaskan relevansi kontekstual dengan menggunakan koherensi tematik dan penalaran yang berorientasi pada *maqāṣid*. Perbedaan ini menggambarkan adaptabilitas *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr* terhadap beragam orientasi penafsiran. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr* menyediakan kerangka kerja yang dinamis dan universal untuk menjaga validitas penafsiran. Penerapannya memperkuat hermeneutika *Al-Qur'an* dalam masyarakat pluralistik serta menawarkan perangkat praktis untuk memitigasi penafsiran menyimpang sekaligus mendorong praktik *tafsir* yang bertanggung jawab.

Kata kunci: Epistemological Model, Quraish Shihab, Nawawi al-Bantani, Nusantara Tafsīr, *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr*, Qur'anic Hermeneutics

INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of the Qur'an (*tafsīr*) constitutes the core of Islamic intellectual tradition, spanning a vast historical and methodological spectrum. In the contemporary era, characterized by the rapid dissemination of ideas and the rise of ideological

readings, the rise of ideologically charged and methodologically deviant Qur'anic interpretations creates an urgent need for a robust epistemological framework to ensure interpretive validity.¹ The proliferation of “deviant interpretations” (*tafsīr yang menyimpang*), often driven by a lack of exegetical competence, ideological biases, politicized readings, and the fragmentation of verses on social media, poses a significant threat to Muslim communities.² These challenges highlight an ongoing epistemological contestation within Qur'anic studies, raising fundamental questions about the boundaries of legitimate interpretation.³

Recent developments in contemporary *tafsīr* studies affirm the necessity of a paradigm shift from purely textual to contextual approaches in understanding the Qur'an in the modern era.⁴ Simultaneously, the landscape of modern interpretation is characterized by a diversity of approaches. Amer Ali identifies a spectrum of modern *tafsīr* trends, encompassing textualist, contextualist, modernist, socio-political, scientific, thematic, and feminist approaches, which collectively represent the dynamic Muslim engagement with modernity.⁵ This diversity, however,

¹ Ahmad Zainal Abidin and Thoriqul Aziz, “Qur’anic Exegesis As A Social Critique: A Study on the Traditionalist Bisri Musthofa’s *Tafsīr Al-Ibrīz*,” *Al-Jāmi’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 62, no. 1 (2024): 215–39, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2024.621.215-239>; Sulaiman Ibrahim, “Indikasi Penyimpangan Dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an,” *Jurnal Ilmiah AL-Jauhari: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Interdisipliner* 7 (2022): 103–22, <https://doi.org/10.30603/jiaj.v7i1.3481>.

² Ainita Nurussoumi, “Penyimpangan Dalam Tafsir: Kajian Unsur Al-Dakhil Dalam Tafsir Al-Qummi Karya Ali Bin Ibrahim Al-Qummi,” *Al-Tadabbur: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 06, no. 02 (2021): 294, <https://doi.org/10.30868/at.v6i02.1484>.

³ Badr al-Din al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhan Fi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an* (Kairo: Dar al-Turath, 1957), 15.

⁴ Nuraini, Waharjani, and Mohammad Jailani, “From Textual To Contextual: Contemporary Islamic Thinker Abdullah Saeed on Qur’anic Exegesis,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu’ashirah* 21, no. 1 (2024): 32, <https://doi.org/10.2373/jim.v21i1.19639>.

⁵ Amer Zulfiqar Ali, “Brief Review of Classical and Modern Tafsir Trends and Role of Modern Tafsirs in Contemporary Islamic Thought,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v3i2.87>.

also introduces significant epistemological challenges regarding the tensions between 'Living Qur'an' methodologies and philosophical hermeneutics.⁶ This spectrum is further illustrated by the burgeoning field of scientific interpretation (*tafsīr 'ilmī*), where advances in fields like astrophysics, create new contexts for understanding cosmological verses, demonstrating how evolving human knowledge continuously reshapes the interpretive landscape.⁷ It is within this complex and evolving interpretive landscape that *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr* emerges as a crucial epistemological framework, capable of providing a firm yet flexible standard of validity that can accommodate methodological diversity while preserving interpretive integrity against deviant readings.

Recent scholarship reflects a growing interest in establishing criteria for valid *tafsīr*. Classical works like al-Zarkashī's *al-Burhān* and al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān* laid the foundationnal groundwork for *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr* (the principles of exegesis).⁸ Contemporary scholars like Khalid bin 'Uthman al-Sabt have systematically formulated these principles into coherent maxims, while Abdur Rokhim Hasan has synthesized them into five core epistemological pillars.⁹ Concurrently, Indonesian scholars such as Amin Abdullah and Sahiron Syamsuddin advocate for integrating *tafsīr* with socio-

⁶ Ali Mahfuz Munawar et al., "Epistemological Distinctions between the Living Qur'an Methodology and Hermeneutics: A Theoretical Study in Contemporary Tafsir Studies," *Kalamizu: Jurnal Sains, Sosial, Dan Studi Agama* 1, no. 4 (2025): 461–76, <https://hamfara.com/kalamizu/article/view/50/43>.

⁷ Azra Ansharullah and Basusi Imamuddin, "The Comparison of Classical Tafsir And Contemporary Interpretation Regarding the Verses of Astrophysics and Cosmology in the Qur'an," *International Review of Humanities Studies* 10, no. 2 (July 27, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.7454/irhs.v10i2.1416>.

⁸ Khalid ibn Uthman al-Sabt, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir Jam'an Wa Dirasah* (Madinah al-Munawwarah: Dar Ibn 'Affan, 1415), 27.

⁹ Abdur Rokhim Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Yayasan Alumni Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu Al-Qur'an, 2020), 17.

anthropological disciplines to address modern issues.¹⁰ Furthermore, studies by Adis Duderija and Asma Afsaruddin demonstrate expanding hermeneutical horizons through gendered and ethical readings.¹¹

Despite the richness of contemporary Qur'anic studies, a clear epistemological gap remains in how *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* is theorized and applied. Existing scholarship may be broadly situated within three interrelated clusters. The first cluster consists of foundational works that systematize *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as a corpus of exegetical principles, most notably the studies of Khalid ibn Uthman al-Sabt and Hasan, which provide comprehensive identification and classification of these rules.¹² While indispensable, these studies largely treat the principles descriptively and stop short of operationalizing them as an evaluative epistemological framework. This study builds on their contributions while moving beyond their descriptive orientation by reconfiguring *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as a testable model for assessing interpretive validity across divergent *tafsīr* traditions.

The second cluster encompasses methodological innovations in modern and contextual *tafsīr*, which implicitly operationalize aspects of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* without explicitly theorizing them as a unified epistemological system. Nuraini et al.'s four-step operational process for contextual interpretation exemplifies

¹⁰ Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Differing Responses to Western Hermeneutics: A Comparative Critical Study of M. Quraish Shihab's and Muhammad 'Imāra's Thoughts," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 59, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 479–512, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.592.479-512>; M. Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Religious Education Based on Religious Intersubjectivity: Philosophical Perspectives and Phenomenology of Religion," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 19, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 141–64, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2022.191-11>.

¹¹ Adis Duderija, "Constructing the Religious Self and the Other: Neo-Traditional Salafi Manhaj," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 21, no. 1 (January 28, 2010): 75–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410903481879>; Asma Afsaruddin, "Martyrdom in Islamic Thought and Praxis," *Martyrdom and Terrorism*, 2014, 40–58, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/ 9780199959853.003.0003>.

¹² Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*; Khalid ibn Uthman al-Sabt, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir Jam'an Wa Dirasah*.

how socio-cultural contextual awareness and methodological coherence can guide the movement from text to contemporary application.¹³ Similarly, Saeed's hierarchy of values offers an analytical mechanism for distinguishing immutable and mutable Qur'anic norms, thereby refining the principle of understanding Qur'anic textual characteristics, particularly in ethico-legal interpretation.¹⁴ These approaches are supported in this study, yet they are critically extended by situating them within a broader meta-framework grounded explicitly in *Qawā'id al Tafsīr*.

A third cluster is represented by critical and revisionist debates that foreground tensions between textual fidelity and contextual adaptability. Thinkers such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd emphasize the historical and linguistic situatedness of the Qur'an, while Wael B. Hallaq interrogates the applicability of classical epistemologies within modern ethical and political contexts.¹⁵ Rather than aligning with either pole, this study positions *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as a meta-evaluative framework capable of assessing interpretive claims within such contestation, without collapsing into either rigid traditionalism or methodological relativism.

This epistemological lacuna becomes particularly salient in the Indonesian context, where Qur'anic interpretation unfolds amid complex interactions between classical scholarship, modern intellectual currents, and socio-political realities.¹⁶ Nusantara

¹³ Nuraini, Waharjani, and Mohammad Jailani, "From Textual To Contextual: Contemporary Islamic Thinker Abdullah Saeed on Qur'anic Exegesis."

¹⁴ Nuraini, Waharjani, and Mohammad Jailani.

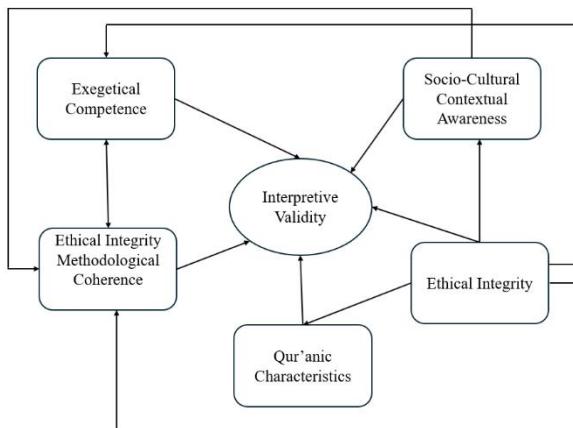
¹⁵ Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Wael B Hallaq, "Quranic Magna Carta: On the Origins of the Rule of Law in Islam," in *Magna Carta, Religion and the Rule of Law*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316178164.010>; Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "Tradition Interpreted or Colored:," in *Critique of Religious Discourse*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1z27jc8.6>.

¹⁶ Yuvianzde Bafri Zulliandi, Intan Wulansari, and Nurul Aulia, "The Transformation of Qur'an Interpretation and the Dynamics of Text Authority in Indonesia A Critical Analysis," *MIYAH: Jurnal Studi Islam* 21, no. 01 (January 8, 2025): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.33754/miyah.v21i01.1270>.

tafsīr, exemplified by figures ranging from Nawawi al-Bantani to M. Quraish Shihab, offers a fertile context for examining how *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* can function as a systematic standard that both preserves continuity with classical traditions and responds responsibly to contemporary challenges.

This study fills this gap by posing two research questions: (1) Can *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* serve as a reliable and universal epistemological benchmark for valid Qur'anic interpretation? (2) How are these principles operationalized across contrasting classical and contemporary *tafsīr* traditions, specifically in the Nusantara context? The primary novelty of this study lies in the operationalization of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as a testable epistemological model for assessing the validity of Qur'anic interpretation across divergent *tafsīr* traditions. Rather than treating these principles as a descriptive inventory of exegetical rules, this research reconstructs them into an integrated analytical framework consisting of five interdependent epistemological domains: exegetical competence, ethical integrity, textual characteristics of the Qur'an, socio-cultural contextual awareness, and methodological coherence. These domains function as analytical variables that can be systematically traced, compared, and evaluated in different *tafsīr* corpora, allowing for cross-textual and cross-historical assessment of interpretive practices. Conceptually, the model visualizes interpretive validity as the cumulative outcome of these interacting domains, offering a replicable framework applicable to other exegetical genres beyond the Nusantara context.¹⁷ This comparison is strategically chosen to elucidate the framework's adaptability and enduring relevance from the 19th-century archipelago tradition to modern Indonesian hermeneutics.

¹⁷ Sanaa Benmessaoud, Shehdeh Fareh, and Leila Abidi, "Images of the Qur'an in Western Scholarship: A Socio-Narrative Approach," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11 (2024): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.3366/E1465359108000119>.



Source: Developed by the Researchers for this study (2025)

Figure 1.
Epistemological Model of Interpretive Validity

This figure 1 illustrates interpretive validity as the cumulative outcome of interconnected epistemological domains, including exegetical competence, methodological coherence, socio-cultural contextual awareness, Qur'anic textual characteristics, and ethical integrity. Bidirectional and unidirectional relationships represent reciprocal interaction, contextual conditioning, and ethical regulation within the process of Qur'anic interpretation.

Within this analytical framework, *Marāh Labīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and *Tafsīr al-Miśbāh* by M. Quraish Shihab are situated as representative texts of the Nusantara tafsīr tradition, reflecting distinct historical phases and epistemological orientations within Indonesian Qur'anic scholarship. *Marāh Labīd* exemplifies a 19th-century archipelagic exegetical model grounded in classical Sunni authority, Arabic philological rigor, and pesantren-based transmission networks connected to the Hijaz, whereas *al-Miśbāh* articulates a contemporary Indonesian tafsīr that integrates contextual reasoning, ethical responsiveness, and socio-cultural pluralism while remaining anchored in classical exegetical principles. By examining these works through *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr* as an epistemological lens, this study contributes to the systematic mapping of Indonesian tafsīr traditions, highlighting both continuity and transformation in interpretive

authority, methodology, and normative reasoning. This positioning advances the understanding of Nusantara *tafsīr* as a coherent and intellectually productive tradition within global Qur'anic studies, rather than a derivative or peripheral extension of Middle Eastern exegetical discourse.

This study contributes to the field of Qur'anic studies by reconceptualizing *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as an operational epistemological framework rather than a merely descriptive set of exegetical principles. By modeling interpretive validity through interrelated analytical domains, the study offers a replicable structure for evaluating diverse *tafsīr* traditions across historical, methodological, and ideological contexts. This approach advances comparative *tafsīr* scholarship by enabling systematic assessment of interpretive accountability without privileging a single exegetical orientation.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative comparative hermeneutical design, selected for its ability to illuminate how interpretive meaning was constructed, negotiated, and justified within different epistemological and historical settings.¹⁸ The design was particularly suited to Qur'anic studies, where exegetical reasoning was shaped not only by textual engagement but also by the intellectual traditions, socio-cultural environments, and methodological commitments of the exegete. Rather than determining which interpretation was "correct," the design facilitated a systematic and balanced comparison of interpretive practices, allowing the study to trace the epistemic logic that underpinned each exegete's approach. By foregrounding comparison rather than evaluation, the design provided a structured way to examine how interpretive authority was articulated, how methodological choices were justified, and how exegetes responded to the interpretive challenges posed by complex Qur'anic passages.

¹⁸ John W. Creswell; Cheryl N. Poth, "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches - John W. Creswell, Cheryl N. Poth - Google 图书," *SAGE Publications*, 2017.

The primary units of analysis consisted of exegetical treatments of selected Qur'anic verses and thematic clusters that exhibited interpretive complexity. These included legal ethical passages that required engagement with normative reasoning, socially contested verses that demanded sensitivity to shifting cultural contexts, and verses with polysemous linguistic structures that invited multiple layers of semantic interpretation. The selection of these units was purposive and guided by three criteria: first, the presence of explicit methodological reasoning that revealed the exegete's interpretive logic; second, demonstrable engagement with classical interpretive tools such as Arabic linguistics, *qirā'āt*, and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, as well as contextual tools such as socio-cultural analysis and thematic coherence; and third, relevance to broader debates on textual authority, interpretive legitimacy, and the negotiation of contextual meaning. These criteria ensured that the selected units provided a rich basis for examining how interpretive principles were operationalized in practice.

The study drew on two *tafsīr* works as its primary data sources: *Marāh Labīd li Kashf Ma 'nā al-Qur'ān al-Majīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāh* by M. Quraish Shihab. These works were intentionally selected to represent contrasting temporal settings and methodological orientations within the Nusantara *tafsīr* tradition. *Marāh Labīd* reflected a transmission-oriented exegetical model grounded in classical linguistic sciences, inherited scholarly authority, and the interpretive conventions of pre-modern Islamic scholarship. In contrast, *al-Miṣbāh* exemplified a contemporary contextualist approach that systematically integrated socio-cultural analysis, thematic coherence, and ethical reasoning.¹⁹ The juxtaposition of these two works allowed the study to examine how the same

¹⁹ Abur Hamdi Usman, Mohd Farid Ravi Abdullah, and Azwar Azwar, "Qawā'Id Al-Tafsīr: The Application of Syntax, Morphology, and Rhetoric By M. Quraish Shihab (B. 1944)," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 9, no. 1 (2024): 25–37, <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan. v9i1. 16266>.

epistemological principles were applied across different historical settings, intellectual climates, and interpretive priorities.

Data analysis followed an operational framework derived from the five epistemological pillars of *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr* as synthesized by Hasan, with reference to al-Sabt and Shihab. Each pillar served as a distinct analytical category with clearly defined indicators. The first pillar, Exegetical Competence, was assessed through the exegete's use of Arabic linguistics, *qirā'āt*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and related sciences that demonstrated mastery of the technical foundations of *tafsīr*.²⁰ The second pillar, Ethical Integrity, was examined through indicators such as scholarly neutrality, the treatment of divergent opinions, and the avoidance of speculative or desire-driven interpretation.²¹ The third pillar, Understanding Qur'anic Characteristics, focused on engagement with *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* verses, recognition of textual layering, and sensitivity to semantic plurality.²² The fourth pillar, Socio-Cultural Contextual Awareness, was evaluated through the incorporation of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *munāsabah*, and contemporary social realities.²³ The fifth pillar, Methodological Coherence, assessed the consistency with which interpretive methods such as *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* and thematic analysis were applied.²⁴

Exegetical excerpts from both *tafsīr* works were coded according to these categories, enabling a structured comparison of how each epistemological pillar was operationalized. The coding process allowed the study to identify patterns of convergence, such as shared commitments to foundational interpretive

²⁰ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*; Khalid ibn Uthman al-Sabt, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir Jam'an Wa Dirasah*; M Quraish Shihab, *Kaidah Fafsir* (Lentera Hati Group, 2013).

²¹ Shihab, *Kaidah Fafsir*.

²² Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*.

²³ Abd. Kholid, Abu Bakar, and Mukhammad Zamzami, "Rereading the Indonesian Interpretation of the Qur'an on Awliyā': The Cases of Hamka and M. Quraish Shihab" 9, no. 1 (2021): 37–72, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v9i1.7567>.

²⁴ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*; Khalid ibn Uthman al-Sabt, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir Jam'an Wa Dirasah*.

principles, as well as divergence, such as differing emphases on textual stability versus contextual adaptability.

The findings were analytically bounded to the selected texts and interpretive cases, ensuring that conclusions remained grounded in the empirical material. Although the framework demonstrated applicability across distinct historical contexts, the study did not claim universal generalization to all *tafsīr* traditions. Digital or computational approaches to Qur'anic interpretation were intentionally excluded from the empirical analysis and reserved for future research, thereby maintaining methodological consistency and preserving the integrity of the qualitative hermeneutical design.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

This section presents the findings regarding the application of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as an epistemological framework for valid Qur'anic interpretation, focusing on the five main pillars and their manifestations in *Tafsīr Marāh Labīd* and *al-Miṣbāh*.

Overview of the Epistemological Framework

Qawā'id al Tafsīr constitutes a normative epistemological framework that defines the boundaries of valid Qur'anic interpretation by regulating how meaning is legitimately derived from the divine text. Its epistemological foundation is articulated through five core criteria systematically outlined in Table 1, namely the competence of the *mufassir*, ethical integrity and sound disposition, knowledge of the Qur'an's unique characteristics, awareness of the socio-cultural context, and methodological coherence. While *tafsīr* primarily derives its authority from disciplined engagement with the textual source, *ta'wīl* involves the interpreter's reflective inner experience; together, these principles function as the analytical lenses of this study, ensuring interpretive validity and mediating between revelation and human understanding. This framework is applied comparatively to *Tafsīr Marāh Labīd* and *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāh*, selected for their complementary classical and contemporary interpretive orienta-

tions, in order to examine the adaptability and normative strength of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* across different epistemological and socio-historical contexts.

Table 1.
Five Epistemological Pillars of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr*

Epistemological Pillar	Core Principle/Definition	Key Arabic Maxim
Exegetical Competence	The <i>mufassir</i> must master the science of <i>tafsīr</i> and related disciplines required to extract the meaning of the Qur'an.	كُلُّ مَنْ فَسَرَ الْقُرْآنَ فَعَلَيْهِ يَعْلَمُ التَّفْسِيرَ ²⁷
Ethical Integrity	The <i>mufassir</i> must possess integrity, avoid bias and personal desires, and be courageous in expressing the truth.	كُلُّ مَا جَاءَ إِنْ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابُ عَيْرٌ مُصْدَقٌ وَلَا مُكَذَّبٌ ²⁸
Qur'anic Characteristics	The <i>mufassir</i> must understand the unique characteristics of the Qur'an, such as <i>muḥkamāt</i> and <i>mutashābihāt</i> , as well as <i>zāhir</i> and <i>bāṭin</i> .	دَلَالَةُ الْقُرْآنِ إِمَّا مُحْكَمَاتٌ وَإِمَّا مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ ²⁹
Socio-Cultural Contextual Awareness	Qur'anic interpretation must be based on the social and cultural context of the society where Qur'anic values are applied.	دَلَالَةُ الْقُرْآنِ مَبْنِيَّةُ عَلَى السَّيَاقِ ³⁰
Methodological Coherence	The <i>mufassir</i> must use correct methodology, including interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an and the Sunnah.	الْقُرْآنُ يُقْسِرُ بَعْضُهُ بَعْضًا ³¹

Source: Adapted from Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir* (2020) and al-Sabt, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir* (1415 H).

1. Exegetical Competence (*Kompetensi Mufasir*)

Exegetical competence constitutes a foundational requirement for valid Qur'anic interpretation. A *mufassir*'s ability to engage deeply with Qur'anic language is essential, necessitating continuous scholarly work on Qur'anic stylistics (*uslūb*) and

linguistic structures.²⁵ In this regard, *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr* functions as a normative framework that formulates the rules required by exegetes to understand Qur'anic verses accurately and systematically.²⁶ These rules include mastery of Qur'anic linguistic features such as *isim ḥamīr*, *nakirah* and *ma'rifah*, repetition, interrogative forms, and conditional constructions, which are crucial to avoid semantic deviation at both literal (*haqīqī*) and figurative (*majāzī*) levels.²⁷

Classical scholarship consistently emphasizes this linguistic and methodological competence. Al-Suyūtī outlined comprehensive requirements for mufassirs, including mastery of Arabic, *qirā'āt*, *uṣūl al-dīn*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*, *fiqh*, *hadīth*, and *al-mawhibah*.²⁸ Similar emphases are found in Khalid ibn Uthman al-Sabt, who stressed Arabic-based methods of *istinbāt* and *istidlāl*,²⁹ and Hasan, who argued that the quality of interpretation is directly determined by the mufassir's mastery of the sciences of *tafsīr*.³⁰ M. Quraish Shihab likewise affirmed that valid interpretation requires competence across multiple interrelated disciplines.³¹

Beyond technical expertise, exegetical competence also entails ethical and spiritual dimensions. Al-Haralli conceptualized esoteric interpretation as *fahm al-Qur'ān*, grounded in

²⁵ Ahmad Nurul Kawakip, "Kaidah Kebahasaan Dalam Memahami Al Qur'an," *Religia* 14, no. 1 (2017): 45–55, <https://doi.org/10.28918/ religia. v14i1.32>.

²⁶ Andri Nirwana, "Qawa'id Tafsir Dan Ushul Tafsir Siti Aisyah Dalam Kitab Sahih Muslim," *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu'ashirah* 18, no. 2 (2021): 152–60, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/yjr4n>.

²⁷ Rahmat Dani, Kadar M. Yusuf, and Alwizar, "Kaidah-Kaidah Kebahasaan Dan Aplikasinya Dalam Menafsirkan Al-Qur'an," *Al-Jadwa: Jurnal Studi Islam* 3, no. 1 (2023): 45–61, <https://doi.org/10.38073/ aljadwa.v3i1.1087>; Ahmad Fawaid, "Kaidah Mutarādīf Al-Alfāz Dalam Al-Qur'an," *Keilmuan Tafsir Hadist* 5 (2015): 144–56, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15642 mutawatir.2015.5.1.142-157>.

²⁸ Abdurrahman bin Abu Bakr Jalaluddin as-Suyuthi, *Al-Itqān Fi Uloom Al-Qur'an* (Mesir: al-Haiah al-Mishriyah li al-Kitab, 1349).

²⁹ Khalid ibn Uthman al-Sabt, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir Jam'an Wa Dirasah*.

³⁰ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*.

³¹ Shihab, *Kaidah Fafṣir*.

ma'rifatullāh through the divine names, comprehensive mastery of the Qur'anic text, and self-purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*).³² Conversely, the lack of Arabic proficiency, disregard for interpretive rules, and ideologically driven readings have been identified as major causes of Qur'anic misinterpretation.³³ In contemporary contexts, even emerging tools such as Natural Language Processing (NLP) require strong epistemological and ethical grounding to contribute meaningfully to Islamic education, *da'wah*, and research.³⁴

Indicators of Exegetical Competence in *Tafsīr Marāh Labīd*

Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani explicitly warned that interpreting the Qur'an without mastery of foundational principles (*uṣūl*) and Arabic grammar (*nahw*) leads one away from divine guidance.³⁵ His *Tafsīr Marāh Labīd* demonstrates strong indicators of exegetical competence through extensive engagement with classical authorities such as al-Bayḍāwī, al-Khāzin, and al-Nasafī. Nawawi integrates *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, multiple *qirā'āt*, and authenticated *ḥadīth* traditions, often selecting readings aligned with Shāfi'i legal reasoning. Written in Arabic, the work occupies a distinctive position in the Nusantara context, bridging classical scholarship and emerging modern concerns.³⁶

³² Abdul Waris Marsyam, "Kaidah-Kaidah Pemahaman Esoteris Al-Qur'an Abu Al-Hasan Al-Haralli," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 12, no. 1 (2022): 24–51, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2022.12.1.24-51>.

³³ M Sholihah, "Sebab-Sebab Misinterpretasi Dalam Al-Qur'an," *FALASIFA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 2016, <https://ejournal.uas.ac.id/index.php/falasifa/article/view/15>.

³⁴ Muhammad Ardiyanto Maulana et al., "Optimizing Qur'an Interpretation with Natural Language Processing Through Critical Review and Practical Implications," *Solo International Collaboration and Publication of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 3 (2025): 501–14, <https://doi.org/10.61455/sicopus.v3i03.358>.

³⁵ Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani, *Marah Labid Li Kasyf Ma'na Al-Qur'an Al-Majid*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Daral-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1997).

³⁶ Erlan Dwi Cahyo, "Ushul Tafsir and Qawaid Tafsir Nusantara: A Review Of Nawawi Al Bantani's Book Of Tafsir Marah Labid," *Syariati:*

Indicators of Exegetical Competence in *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāh*

M. Quraish Shihab underscores the necessity of Arabic mastery for mufassirs, a principle reflected in his extensive linguistic analysis throughout *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāh*.³⁷ His tafsīr emphasizes thematic coherence (*munāsabah*), semantic analysis, and psychological insight to render Qur'anic meanings accessible and socially relevant, particularly within the Indonesian context. Shihab further employs *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* to highlight the broader objectives of revelation, combining *al-ma'thūr* and *al-ra'y* within a *tahlīlī* presentation style and an *al-adab al-ijtīmā'i* orientation.³⁸

2. Ethical Integrity

Ethical integrity constitutes a core requirement for valid Qur'anic interpretation. A mufassir is required to demonstrate humility, avoid intellectual arrogance, and refrain from interpreting the Qur'an based on personal desires or sectarian interests. While subjectivity in interpretation is unavoidable, it is only acceptable when it operates within established tafsīr principles and is genuinely oriented toward truth-seeking rather than ideological agendas.³⁹ One of the key ethical maxims governing interpretive neutrality, particularly regarding external sources is the principle that reports from the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) are "neither to be confirmed nor denied." This principle safeguards the integrity of the Qur'anic message while allowing cautious use of historical narratives that do not contradict Islamic teachings.⁴⁰

Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Hukum 8, no. 2 (2023): 153–62, <https://doi.org/10.32699/syariati.v8i2.4249>.

³⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Tafsir Al-Misbah*, vol. 11 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2005), 320.

³⁸ M Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, vol. I (Jakarta: Lentara Hati, 2002).

³⁹ Izzuddin Washil, "Problem Subjektifitas Dalam Tafsir Bi Al-Ma'tsur, Tafsir Bi Al-Ra'yi, Dan Tafsir Bi Al-Isyarah," *Diya Al-Afkār* 4, no. 01 (2016), <https://syekhnurjati.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/diya/article/view/777/591>.

⁴⁰ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*.

Ethical Stance in *Tafsīr Marāh Labīd*

Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani exemplifies ethical integrity through his consistent neutrality in jurisprudential matters. In his interpretation of Sūrat al-Mā' idah: 6 concerning the washing or wiping of the feet during ablution, Nawawi presents multiple juristic views despite his adherence to the Shāfi'i school, indicating a prioritization of scholarly objectivity over sectarian bias.⁴¹ His selective use of *Isrā' īliyyāt*, guided by the prophetic principle of "neither confirming nor denying," is evident in his interpretation of the story of Qābīl and Hābīl.⁴² Moreover, his treatment of *Ṣifāt* verses employing *ta'wīl* without fully abandoning *tafwīd* reflects a *wasaṭī* (moderate) theological stance that avoids both rigid literalism and excessive rationalism.

Ethical Principles in *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ*

M. Quraish Shihab places strong emphasis on *adab al-mufassir*, repeatedly cautioning against intellectual arrogance and the distortion of Qur'anic meanings. He identifies four essential qualities of *al-rāsikhūn fi al-'ilm*: *taqwā* (piety), humility, *zuhd* (ascetic restraint), and *mujāhadah* (discipline against personal desire), highlighting the inseparability of ethical and epistemic integrity in *tafsīr*. Similar to Nawawi, Shihab cautiously incorporates *Isrā' īliyyāt*, including in his interpretation of Sūrat al-Mā' idah: 27 concerning Qābīl and Hābīl, demonstrating critical engagement rather than uncritical acceptance.⁴³ His interpretations of sensitive issues such as gender relations and interfaith engagement consistently reflect an ethics of care grounded in prophetic compassion. This is evident in his contextual reading of Sūrat al-Mā' idah: 51, which allows for peaceful and constructive relations with the People of the Book in worldly affairs, rejecting absolutist prohibitions.

⁴¹ Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani, *Marah Labid Li Kasyf Ma'na Al-Qur'an Al-Majid*.

⁴² Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani.

⁴³ Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani.

3. Understanding Qur'anic Characteristics

A thorough understanding of the Qur'an's distinctive characteristics is essential to prevent interpretive errors and to ensure valid exegesis.⁴⁴ These characteristics include the distinction between *muhkamāt* (clear and definitive verses) and *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous or multi-layered verses), the function of *qirā'āt* (variant readings) as mutually explanatory, and the recognition of both *zāhir* (apparent) and *bātin* (inner) dimensions of meaning.⁴⁵

Treatment in *Tafsīr Marāh Labīd* and *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāh*

Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani explicitly elaborates the concepts of *muhkam* and *mutashābih* in his interpretation of Sūrat Al-‘Imrān: 7. He defines *muhkam* as a meaning that strongly inclines toward its apparent sense based on rational evidence (*dala‘il aqlī*) or clear textual proof, whereas *mutashābih* refers to meanings lacking definitive indicators for either literal or inner interpretation, thereby requiring *tawaqquf* (suspension of judgment).⁴⁶ Nawawi systematically incorporates *qirā'āt* into his exegesis, explicitly acknowledging that differences in *qirā'āt* may lead to differences in *tafsīr*, as exemplified in his discussion of Sūrat al-Mā'idah: 6.⁴⁷ Although he often favors readings aligned with Shāfi‘ī legal rulings, he consistently selects *sahīh qirā'āt* that conform to the ‘Uthmānic codex.⁴⁸ His engagement with the ten *qirā'āt* is particularly prominent in legal verses. In addition, Nawawi preserves the Qur'an's textual specificity by distinguishing between legislative and narrative passages and

⁴⁴ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*.

⁴⁵ Hasan.

⁴⁶ Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani, *Marah Labid Li Kasyf Ma'na Al-Qur'an Al-Majid*.

⁴⁷ Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani.

⁴⁸ Abdul Rohman et al., “The Influence of Al-Qira'at Al-Asyr on the Exegesis of Legal Verses in Tafsir Marah Labid by Nawawi Al-Bantani: A Historical and Analytical Study,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Raushan Fikr* 13, no. 2 (2024): 437–50, <https://doi.org/10.24090/jimrf.v13i2.11957>.

applying tools such as *‘ām–khāṣṣ* (general–specific) and *nāsikh–mansūkh* (abrogation).⁴⁹

M. Quraish Shihab similarly applies the distinction between *muhkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*, explaining that *muhkamāt* verses possess meanings so clear that they require minimal elaboration, whereas *mutashābihāt* verses contain interpretive ambiguity.⁵⁰ His exegesis places strong emphasis on polysemy (the multiplicity of meanings within a single lexical item) and intertextuality (the interconnectedness of Qur’anic verses), arguing that meaning unfolds contextually without undermining the sanctity of the text.⁵¹ This linguistic sensitivity enables a dynamic engagement with verses of similar or overlapping meanings and demonstrates that Shihab consciously adopts *Qawā‘id al-Tafsīr* employed by earlier exegetes, albeit with contemporary analytical tools.⁵²

4. Socio-Cultural Contextual Awareness

Socio-cultural contextual awareness is a core principle of valid Qur’anic interpretation, grounded in the understanding that meaning emerges through interaction between language, context, and the interpreter’s conceptual framework.⁵³ As the Qur’an functions as a practical guide for human life, its divine norms must be meaningfully connected to social realities and cultural settings. This principle is encapsulated in the maxim, “*The meaning of the Qur’an is based on context*”.⁵⁴ Classical scholarship further emphasizes that meaning should be derived hierarchically first through *sharī‘ah*, then cultural usage, and finally

⁴⁹ Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani, *Marah Labid Li Kasyf Ma’na Al-Qur’ān Al-Majid*.

⁵⁰ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, Lentera Hati, vol. 7 (Jakarta, 2005).

⁵¹ Shihab.

⁵² Usman, Abdullah, and Azwar, “*Qawā‘id Al-Tafsīr: The Application of Syntax, Morphology, and Rhetoric By M. Quraish Shihab (B. 1944)*.”

⁵³ Abd Aziz and Saihu Saihu, “*Interpretasi Humanistik Kebahasaan: Upaya Kontekstualisasi Kaidah Bahasa Arab*,” *Arabiyatuna : Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 3, no. 2 (2019): 299, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v3i2.1000>.

⁵⁴ Hasan, *Qawā‘id at-Tafsīr, Qa’idah-Qa’idah Tafsir Al-Qur’ān*.

linguistic convention.⁵⁵ M. Quraish Shihab operationalizes this principle through *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *munāsabah*, and *siyāq*, reflecting a mature contextual sensitivity.⁵⁶

Contextual Interpretation in *Tafsīr Marāh Labīd* and *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāh*

Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani demonstrates contextual awareness in his interpretation of Sūrat al-Mā'idah: 51. While this verse is often read restrictively, Nawawi concludes that maintaining good social relations with the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) in worldly affairs is permissible, indicating a practical understanding of social coexistence grounded in context.⁵⁷

M. Quraish Shihab likewise interprets Sūrat al-Mā'idah: 51 contextually, arguing that the prohibition is not absolute and does not encompass all meanings of *awliyā'* (allies or friends). He permits peaceful coexistence and positive social relations with non-Muslims living among Muslims, particularly within Indonesia's pluralistic society.⁵⁸ Shihab further applies *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* and sociological reasoning to align Qur'anic interpretation with contemporary realities. His contextual approach is also evident in narrative interpretations, such as his retelling of the story of Prophet Moses to draw lessons relevant to modern Indonesian society.⁵⁹

5. Methodological Coherence

A proper interpretive methodology is strategically crucial in determining the truth and validity of a *tafsīr*. The fundamental principle is that "the Qur'an's verses interpret each other."⁶⁰ Khalid bin Abd al-Rahman As-Sabt further elaborates on this,

⁵⁵ Khalid ibn Uthman al-Sabt, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir Jam'an Wa Dirasah*.

⁵⁶ Shihab, *Kaidah Fafsir*.

⁵⁷ Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani, *Marah Labid Li Kasyf Ma'na Al-Qur'an Al-Majid*.

⁵⁸ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, 2002.

⁵⁹ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, 2005.

⁶⁰ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 197.

emphasizing “interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an” and “interpreting the Qur'an with the Sunnah.”⁶¹

Treatment in *Tafsīr Marāh Labīd*

Shaykh Nawawi uses the *tahlīlī* (analytical) method, systematically analyzing each verse according to the order of verses and surahs. This is complemented by detailed linguistic and *qirā'āt* analysis. He consistently applies the principles of *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* (interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an) and *tafsīr bi al-Hadīth* (interpreting with Hadith), cross-referencing verses (e.g., interpreting Sūrat al-Fātihah, verse 4, with Sūrat al-İnfīṭār, verse 19) and integrating prophetic traditions.⁶² Nawawi also incorporates *tafsīr isyārī* (allusive/symbolic interpretation), as seen in his exegesis of *bismillāh* at the beginning of Sūrat al-Fātihah, demonstrating a multi-faceted methodological approach.⁶³

Treatment in *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāh*

M. Quraish Shihab demonstrates methodological coherence by interpreting Sūrat al-Mā'idah: 51 through cross-referencing with other Qur'anic verses, such as Sūrat al-Āhzāb: 12, al-Mumtahanah: 1, and al-Mumtahanah: 8. Shihab employs an eclectic methodology, integrating various disciplines including linguistics, hadith, legal theory, and contemporary reasoning. Crucially, his methodological framework is profoundly shaped by *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law), which serves as a teleological guide for interpretation. This approach resonates with the classical scholarship of Ibn Ashur, who systematically argued that the ultimate purpose of interpretation is to discern and realize the broader moral and ethical goals of the Sharia.⁶⁴ By applying *maqāṣid*, Shihab ensures that

⁶¹ Khalid ibn Uthman al-Sabt, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir Jam'an Wa Dirasah*, 130.

⁶² Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani, *Marah Labid Li Kasyf Ma'na Al-Qur'an Al-Majid*.

⁶³ Muhammad ibn Umar Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Bantani, 1:7.

⁶⁴ Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *Treatise on Maqāṣid Al-Shari'ah*, trans. Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi (Slangor: The Other Press, 2006), 89.

his methodological coherence is not merely procedural but also purpose-driven, aligning with the dynamic spirit of *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr*.

Comparative Analysis and Synthesis of Findings

The comparative analysis demonstrates that Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and M. Quraish Shihab despite their different historical contexts (19th century versus 20th–21st centuries) and interpretive orientations (traditional transmission-based versus contemporary contextualist) consistently apply the five epistemological pillars of *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr*.⁶⁵ While both exegetes rigorously adhere to these principles, their concrete applications differ significantly, reflecting distinct methodological emphases.⁶⁶ Nawawi's *Marāh Labīd* prioritizes stability and orthodoxy through mastery of classical linguistic sciences, transmitted *qirā'āt*, and a *tahlīlī* method, whereas Shihab's *al-Mişbāh* emphasizes contextual adaptability, ethical responsiveness, and *maqāṣid*-based reasoning to address contemporary socio-religious realities. These patterned similarities and differences are summarized comparatively in Table 3, which functions as a synthesis of the study's main findings and provides the empirical basis for the subsequent discussion.⁶⁷

Table 2.
Comparative Application of *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr* in
Marāh Labīd and *al-Mişbāh*

Epistemological Pillar	Tafsīr <i>Marāh Labīd</i> (Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani)	Tafsīr <i>al-Mişbāh</i> (M. Quraish Shihab)
Exegetical Competence	Mastery of <i>uṣūl al-tafsīr</i> and Arabic	Mastery of Arabic; emphasis on <i>munāsabah</i> ,

⁶⁵ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*.

⁶⁶ Ulya Fikriyati and Ah Fawaiid, "Saving Lives and Limiting the Means Five Indonesian Tafsīr Views," *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 1 (2022): 167–98, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.601.167-198>.

⁶⁷ Ilyas Supena, "Epistemology of Tafsīr, Ta'wīl, and Hermeneutics: Towards an Integrative Approach," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)* 14, no. 1 (2024).

Ethical Integrity	linguistics; reliance on classical <i>tafsīr</i> and transmitted <i>qirā'āt</i> .	semantic analysis, and <i>maqāṣid</i> -based interpretation.
Qur'anic Characteristics	Neutrality in fiqh; selective use of <i>Isrā'īliyyāt</i> ; <i>wasaṭī</i> stance on <i>ṣifāt</i> verses.	Emphasis on <i>adab al-mufassir</i> ; ethics of care; <i>taqwā</i> and humility in interpretation.
Socio-Cultural Contextual Awareness	Detailed treatment of <i>muḥkamāt</i> — <i>mutashābihāt</i> ; integration of <i>qirā'āt</i> ; use of <i>'ām</i> — <i>khāṣṣ</i> and <i>nāsikh</i> — <i>mansūkh</i> .	Application of <i>muḥkamāt</i> — <i>mutashābihāt</i> ; emphasis on polysemy and intertextuality.
Methodological Coherence	Contextual reading allowing positive relations with <i>Ahl al-Kitāb</i> in worldly affairs.	Active recontextualization for Indonesian pluralism using sociological readings and <i>maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i> .
	<i>Tahlīlī</i> method; <i>tafsīr al-Qur'ān</i> bi <i>al-Qur'ān</i> and <i>bi al-Hadīth</i> ; selective use of <i>isyārī</i> .	Eclectic and thematic methodology; systematic cross-referencing of verses; interdisciplinary integration.

Source: *Findings of this study (2025)*.

Discussion

The findings presented above illuminate how the five epistemological pillars of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* are concretely operationalized in two distinct yet authoritative works of Nusantara exegesis. These empirical observations, however, extend beyond mere descriptive cataloguing of methodological practices. They invite a deeper, integrative analysis concerning the nature, function, and broader implications of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as a dynamic epistemological framework. This discussion section, therefore, synthesizes the comparative findings to interpret their significance within three interconnected domains: (1) the theoretical conception of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as a mediating meta-framework between textual fidelity and contextual relevance; (2) its practical utility in fostering normative dialogue across intra-Muslim

interpretive communities and in engagement with inter-civilizational hermeneutics; and (3) its critical role as an epistemic safeguard in the contemporary landscape, especially against the challenges posed by digital fragmentation and ideological reductionism. By situating the specific exegetical patterns of Nawawi al-Bantani and M. Quraish Shihab within these larger epistemological and socio-historical contexts, the following discussion elucidates why *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* remains a vital, robust, and adaptable paradigm for ensuring the validity and integrity of Qur'anic interpretation across time and space.

1. *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* as a Dynamic Epistemological Framework

Beyond descriptive comparison, these findings indicate that *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* function not as rigid procedural checklists but as dynamic epistemological instruments capable of harmonizing textual fidelity with contextual awareness.⁶⁸ As illustrated in the comparative analysis, the same normative pillars generate distinct yet equally valid interpretive trajectories, positioning the framework between uncritical traditionalism and radical hermeneutical deconstruction. In this respect, *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* offers a more grounded alternative to approaches that seek to dismantle inherited interpretive paradigms entirely, such as those proposed by Arkoun,⁶⁹ while still allowing meaningful engagement with modernity. The flexibility demonstrated by both Nawawi's classical precision and Shihab's contextual responsiveness confirms that the framework accommodates legitimate interpretive plurality without compromising its normative foundations.

2. Methodological Coherence: Diversity within Unity

The findings on methodological coherence reveal a crucial insight: coherence does not necessitate uniformity. The diversity of modern *tafsīr* trends identified by contemporary scholarship, ranging from textualist to feminist approaches, demonstrates that

⁶⁸ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*.

⁶⁹ Muhammad Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Saqi Books, 2003).

methodological coherence does not necessitate methodological uniformity. What makes an interpretation methodologically coherent, according to *Qawā'id al Tafsīr*, is not its adherence to a particular school but its internal consistency, transparency, and fidelity to foundational sources.

For example, while a textualist exegesis like Nawawi's *Marāh Labīd* demonstrates coherence through meticulous linguistic analysis and transmission-based knowledge, a contextualist approach like Shihab's *al-Miṣbāḥ* achieves coherence through thematic analysis and *maqāṣid*-based interpretation. Similarly, the feminist *tafsīr* of scholars like Amina Wadud, while challenging patriarchal interpretations, maintains methodological coherence by employing "conventionnal principles of *tafsīr*, such as *tafsīr* of the Qur'anic verses in light of other Qur'anic verses and the sunna of the Prophet."⁷⁰ This illustrates that *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* can accommodate diverse methodological orientations while ensuring they remain within the bounds of valid interpretation.

The consistent application of *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* and *tafsīr bi al-Sunnah* by both exegetes, alongside their chosen analytical methods (*tahlīlī*, eclectic), demonstrates a shared commitment to internal textual consistency and reliance on fundamental sources. These practices are hallmarks of methodological coherence, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in the divine text and prophetic tradition. This indicates that although the specific methods employed may vary (from a more linear *tahlīlī* to a multi-disciplinary eclectic approach), the fundamental commitment to methodological coherence—ensuring internal consistency and fidelity to primary sources—remains constant across different interpretive orientations. This is a crucial core for understanding the rigor of valid *tafsīr*.

⁷⁰ Azra Ansharullah and Basusi Imamuddin, "The Comparison of Classical Tafsir And Contemporary Interpretation Regarding the Verses of Astrophysics and Cosmology in the Qur'an."

3. The Evolution of Methodological Approaches

The evolution of methodological approaches, from traditional *tahlīlī* to more eclectic and thematic interpretations, indicates an ongoing effort in Islamic scholarship to refine interpretive tools. This evolution now encompasses scientific methodologies, where the rigorous application of linguistic analysis and intertextuality to verses concerning natural phenomena, as demonstrated in studies on Qur'anic astrophysics, represents a new form of methodological coherence.⁷¹ This approach, when conducted within the bounds of *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr*, maintains fidelity to the text while engaging with empirical data, showcasing the framework's capacity to accommodate even scientifically-oriented exegesis.

This methodological coherence is further refined by the application of *Fiqh al-Marātib* (Understanding Hierarchies) for grasping the Qur'an's universal objectives (*Maqāṣid al-Qur'ān*) and *Fiqh al-Awlāfiyyāt* (Understanding Priorities) for implementing its context-specific injunctions (*Maqāṣid al-Shari'ah*), ensuring interpretations remain both textually faithful and contextually relevant.⁷² This demonstrates dynamism and intellectual vitality within the field of *tafsīr*, showing its capacity for self-correction and adaptation.

The contrast between Nawawi's more traditional *tahlīlī* method and Shihab's eclectic *al-Adab al-Ijtima'i* style, which incorporates contemporary reasoning, shows a clear trend in *tafsīr* studies. This evolution suggests that methodological coherence is not static but adapts to intellectual and social developments, allowing for a more comprehensive and relevant understanding of the Qur'an without abandoning its core principles, and ensuring that diverse methodological approaches remain grounded in the tradition's foundational sources rather than in

⁷¹ Fikriyati and Fawaid, "Saving Lives and Limiting the Means Five Indonesian *Tafsīr* Views."

⁷² Benmessaoud, Fareh, and Abidi, "Images of the Qur'an in Western Scholarship: A Socio-Narrative Approach."

external hermeneutics that may seek to fragment the text's inherent unity and scriptural authority.⁷³

4. Implications for Intra-Muslim and Inter-Civilizational Dialogue

The broader implications of this framework are significant for both internal Islamic discourse and external engagement. In intra-Muslim discourse, the shared epistemological criteria. In particular, the commitment to methodological coherence despite diverse applications enables diverse interpretive communities, including literalist, mystical, and rationalist orientations, to evaluate interpretations using a common normative language, thereby fostering constructive dialogue and mitigating sectarian polemics. This common ground is crucial in an era of increasing ideological fragmentation.

In inter-civilizational contexts, its balance between methodological rigor and contextual sensitivity resonates with universal hermeneutical concerns. This resonance facilitates more nuanced and productive engagement with Western biblical scholarship and comparative theology, moving beyond simplistic comparisons or defensive postures. The framework provides a structured vocabulary from within the Islamic tradition to discuss issues of textual authority, historical context, and ethical application that are central to hermeneutics across religious traditions.⁷⁴

5. *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* in the Contemporary Digital Landscape

The relevance of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* is acutely felt in the contemporary digital landscape. In an environment marked by viral fatwās and AI-generated interpretations, *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* serves as an essential epistemic safeguard. It provides

⁷³ Nuraini, Waharjani, and Mohammad Jailani, "From Textual To Contextual: Contemporary Islamic Thinker Abdullah Saeed on Qur'anic Exegesis."

⁷⁴ Ilham Mundzir, "The Progressiveness of Quranic Interpretation in the Fatwa of Muhammadiyah on Female Circumcision," *IJIMS: Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 12, no. 2 (2022): 285–311, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v12i2>.

clear, academically grounded criteria, including rigorous methodological coherence, to distinguish authoritative, scholarly exegesis from unscholarly, ideologically driven, or algorithmically generated readings that may lack methodological rigor or ethical integrity.⁷⁵

Furthermore, the framework acts as a critical tool to counter misrepresentative narratives and externally imposed interpretive frames that often simplify or distort the complexity of the Qur'anic text and its interpretive traditions. By insisting on competencies like methodological coherence alongside linguistic mastery and contextual awareness, *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* raises the threshold for what constitutes a serious interpretation, thereby protecting the discourse from reductionism and sensationalism prevalent in digital media.⁷⁶

6. Resonance with Contemporary Hermeneutical Models

The findings of this study resonate with and are reinforced by contemporary developments in *tafsīr* scholarship. Approaches such as Abdullah Saeed's hierarchy of Qur'anic values provide a practical example of how the classical principles embedded in *Qawā'id al Tafsīr*, particularly methodological coherence and socio-cultural contextual awareness, can be operationalized through modern models to address contemporary ethical and social challenges while preserving theological integrity.⁷⁷

Similarly, the successful coexistence of diverse yet methodologically coherent *tafsīr* trends, including textualist, contextualist, and feminist approaches, within the boundaries implicitly defined by these principles demonstrates that epistemological pluralism can be productively regulated. This regulation ensures both creative diversity and scholarly accountability in interpretation, preventing the field from splintering into incompatible solitudes or collapsing into unprincipled relativism.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*.

⁷⁶ Fikriyati and Fawaid, "Saving Lives and Limiting the Means Five Indonesian *Tafsīr* Views."

⁷⁷ Supena, "Epistemology of *Tafsīr*, *Ta'wil*, and Hermeneutics: Towards an Integrative Approach."

⁷⁸ Hasan, *Qawa'id at-Tafsir, Qa'idah-Qa'idah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*.

While this study establishes the applicability of *Qawā‘id al Tafsīr* across classical and contemporary Nusantara tafsīr, certain limitations highlight productive avenues for future inquiry. The analysis is focused on two seminal but specific tafsīr works. Expanding the analytical corpus to include other interpretive traditions, such as Sufi (*isyārī*), philosophical, modern Salafi, or emerging transnational digital tafsīr, would allow for a more comprehensive stress-testing of the framework's universal adaptability and its limits.⁷⁹

Perhaps the most pressing frontier lies in applying *Qawā‘id al Tafsīr* to emerging genres and technologies. Applying this framework to scientific exegesis (*tafsīr ‘ilmī*) would test its capacity to engage with natural science paradigms. More urgently, developing criteria based on these principles to evaluate AI-assisted interpretation and machine-generated tafsīr is crucial. Such research would not only test the framework's contemporary relevance but also contribute to the ethical governance of religious knowledge in the digital age.⁸⁰

Based on these findings, *Qawā‘id al Tafsīr* should be advanced as an applied evaluative framework across research, education, and religious practice. For Qur'anic studies, it functions as a normative analytical tool for comparative and interdisciplinary inquiry across schools, periods, and media. In educational settings, particularly universities and pesantren, it should be integrated into curricula to train students in critically assessing interpretations and distinguishing legitimate diversity from epistemologically flawed readings. For practitioners in religious literacy and digital knowledge governance, the framework offers ethical and methodological guidance for evaluating online Qur'anic content and for the responsible

⁷⁹ Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*.

⁸⁰ Hazim Fouad, “Unveiling the Innovators—A Glimpse on Sufi-Salafi Polemics,” *Religions* 11, no. 3 (March 20, 2020): 144, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11030144>.

development of AI-based interpretive tools, thereby strengthening intellectual integrity in the digital public sphere.⁸¹

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* constitutes a viable and robust epistemological framework for assessing the validity of Qur'anic interpretation. Through a comparative analysis of *Tafsīr Marāh Labīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāh* by M. Quraish Shihab, the findings show that consistent adherence to its five core principles—exegetical competence, ethical integrity, understanding of Qur'anic characteristics, socio-cultural contextual awareness, and methodological coherence—supports theological consistency, intellectual rigor, and ethical relevance across diverse historical contexts and interpretive orientations.

Importantly, these principles do not operate as rigid procedural checklists. Instead, they function as dynamic epistemological instruments that harmonize textual fidelity with contextual adaptability. In this capacity, *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* serves as a mediating framework between rigid traditionalism and unrestrained relativism, sustaining interpretive continuity while enabling meaningful engagement with contemporary socio-religious realities. The comparative findings further indicate that although Nawawi and Shihab apply the same epistemological pillars, their manifestations vary according to scholarly orientation and historical context, confirming the framework's ability to accommodate legitimate interpretive plurality without compromising its normative foundations.

The relevance of *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* is reinforced by its resonance with contemporary *tafsīr* scholarship. Approaches such as Abdullah Saeed's value-hierarchy model illustrate how classical principles can be operationalized to address modern hermeneutical challenges while preserving theological integrity. Likewise, the coexistence of diverse yet methodologically cohe-

⁸¹ Peter Heath, "Creative Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis of Three Islamic Approaches," *Arabica* 36, no. 2 (1989): 173–210, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157005889X00043>.

rent *tafsīr* trends, including textualist, contextualist, and feminist approaches, demonstrates that epistemological pluralism can be regulated within clear normative boundaries.

This study is limited by its focus on two *tafsīr* works which, although representative of classical Nusantara and contemporary Indonesian exegesis, do not capture the full spectrum of Qur'anic interpretive traditions. The analysis also prioritizes selected epistemological pillars and illustrative cases rather than offering an exhaustive verse-by-verse application. These limitations, however, open productive avenues for future inquiry. Expanding the analytical corpus to include Sufi, philosophical, Salafi, or transnational digital *tafsīr* traditions would allow for a more comprehensive assessment of the framework's adaptability. Applying *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* to emerging genres such as scientific exegesis (*tafsīr 'ilmī*) and AI-assisted interpretation would further test its relevance in rapidly evolving epistemic environments.

Based on these findings, several practical recommendations can be advanced. For Qur'anic studies researchers, *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* should be employed as an explicit analytical tool in comparative and interdisciplinary studies. For *tafsīr* educators, the framework should be integrated into higher education curricula as an applied evaluative methodology, enabling students to distinguish valid interpretive diversity from epistemologically flawed readings. For practitioners involved in religious literacy and knowledge governance, *Qawā'id al Tafsīr* can inform ethical and methodological guidelines for digital religious content, including online *fatwās* and AI-generated interpretations.

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