

QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION AND MODERNITY: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF TAFSIR IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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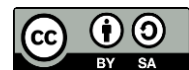
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Abstract

This study explores the evolving role of Qur'anic interpretation (tafsir) within the context of modernity and its significance for contemporary Islamic thought. Modern intellectual, social, and ethical transformations have generated new questions regarding the authority, methodology, and relevance of classical exegetical traditions, making tafsir a crucial site of engagement between revelation and changing realities. The objective of this research is to examine how tafsir functions as an intellectual mediator that enables Islamic thought to respond to modern epistemological and societal challenges while maintaining continuity with the Qur'anic tradition. The study employs a qualitative research design based on textual and interpretive analysis of selected classical and contemporary tafsir works that explicitly engage with modern issues. Hermeneutical and conceptual frameworks are used to analyze interpretive patterns, methodological orientations, and thematic emphases. The findings reveal that contemporary tafsir demonstrates significant methodological diversity, with a growing emphasis on contextualization, ethical reasoning, and thematic interpretation. The study concludes that tafsir plays a central role in negotiating the relationship between Islam and modernity, serving as a bridge between sacred text and contemporary thought.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Modernity, Tafsir



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INTRODUCTION

The first paragraph of the introduction should establish the enduring centrality of the Qur'an in Islamic intellectual tradition while situating tafsir as a foundational discipline through which Muslims have historically engaged divine revelation. This paragraph is expected to foreground tafsir not merely as a textual commentary but as an epistemological framework that mediates between sacred text and lived reality. Emphasis should be placed on how Qur'anic interpretation has continuously evolved in response to historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts, thereby underscoring its dynamic rather than static character (Hati et al., 2025; Zulfikar et al., 2025).

The second paragraph should contextualize the encounter between tafsir and modernity by highlighting the profound transformations introduced by modern intellectual currents, including rationalism, scientific epistemology, secular governance, and globalized communication. This paragraph should clarify that modernity presents both challenges and opportunities for Qur'anic interpretation, particularly in relation to authority, methodology, and relevance. Attention should be given to the increasing plurality of interpretive voices and the shifting loci of religious knowledge production in contemporary Muslim societies (Kamal, 2025; Pisani, 2025).

The third paragraph should narrow the background discussion toward contemporary Islamic thought, emphasizing how tafsir functions as a key site of negotiation between tradition and change. This paragraph should introduce the idea that modern Qur'anic interpretation operates within tensions between fidelity to classical exegetical heritage and responsiveness to contemporary ethical, social, and intellectual concerns. The paragraph should prepare readers for the central problem of how tafsir contributes to shaping Islamic thought in the modern world (Bazli Ahmad Hilmi et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2025).

The first paragraph of this section should articulate the core problem that motivates the study, namely the ambiguity surrounding the role of tafsir in contemporary Islamic thought amid competing interpretive paradigms. This paragraph should identify how modernity has disrupted inherited assumptions about textual authority, interpretive legitimacy, and methodological continuity. The problem should be framed not as a crisis of relevance alone, but as a deeper epistemological challenge concerning how meaning is derived from the Qur'an in modern contexts.

The second paragraph should specify the fragmentation evident in current Qur'anic interpretive practices, where traditional exegetical models coexist, compete, or clash with reformist, contextualist, and critical approaches. This paragraph should highlight how such plurality, while intellectually productive, also generates confusion regarding normative standards of interpretation. The problem statement should clarify that the absence of a coherent analytical framework for understanding these dynamics limits scholarly comprehension of contemporary tafsir (Hudri, 2025; Umar & Wibowo, 2025).

The third paragraph should focus on the scholarly implications of this problem by noting that existing discussions often remain descriptive or polemical rather than analytically integrative. This paragraph should argue that without a systematic examination of tafsir's role within modern Islamic thought, interpretations risk being assessed in isolation from their intellectual, social, and philosophical contexts. The paragraph should clearly indicate the need for a study that critically examines tafsir as an active intellectual force rather than a derivative tradition (Azhar et al., 2025; Gé, 2025).

The first paragraph outlining the research objectives should state that the primary aim of the study is to analyze how tafsir functions as a mediating discourse between the Qur'anic text and the conditions of modernity. This paragraph should emphasize the intention to move beyond binary assessments of "traditional versus modern" interpretation by offering a nuanced conceptualization of tafsir's adaptive capacity. The objective should be framed in terms of understanding processes rather than endorsing particular interpretive outcomes.

The second paragraph should articulate the objective of mapping key interpretive approaches within contemporary tafsir and examining their underlying epistemological assumptions. This paragraph should indicate that the study seeks to identify how different exegetical methodologies respond to modern intellectual challenges such as historical consciousness, ethical pluralism, and socio-political change. The paragraph should clarify that the objective includes analyzing both continuity and transformation within Qur'anic interpretation ("Tafsir Geleneğinde Hazfin Takdirini Etkileyen Faktörler," 2025; Imron & Muallifah, 2025).

The third paragraph should express the objective of contributing to broader discussions in Islamic studies by positioning tafsir as a central component of contemporary Islamic thought. This paragraph should explain that the research aims to clarify how interpretive practices influence theological reasoning, ethical deliberation, and socio-religious engagement among Muslims today. The paragraph should underscore that achieving these objectives will provide a more coherent understanding of tafsir's intellectual significance in modern contexts.

The first paragraph of the gap analysis should observe that much of the existing literature on Qur'anic interpretation focuses either on classical tafsir traditions or on individual modern exegetes without sufficiently theorizing the relationship between tafsir and modernity as an integrated phenomenon. This paragraph should indicate that studies often prioritize historical description or ideological critique, leaving limited space for systematic conceptual analysis. The gap should be framed as an analytical rather than merely empirical absence (Bashier Badi, 2025; Ismail et al., 2025).

The second paragraph should identify that scholarship on modern Islamic thought frequently addresses themes such as reform, revival, and contextualization while treating tafsir as a secondary or instrumental element. This paragraph should argue that such an approach underestimates the formative role of Qur'anic interpretation in shaping intellectual paradigms. The gap should be described as a disconnect between tafsir studies and broader theoretical discussions of modern Islamic thought.

The third paragraph should highlight that interdisciplinary perspectives integrating hermeneutics, intellectual history, and contemporary Islamic discourse remain underdeveloped in tafsir studies. This paragraph should emphasize that few studies explicitly examine how modern epistemological shifts reshape exegetical authority and methodology. The paragraph should conclude by asserting that addressing this gap is necessary to advance a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation (Qadafy, 2025; Sa'i, 2025).

The first paragraph in this section should present the novelty of the study by emphasizing its integrative analytical framework that positions tafsir at the intersection of text, tradition, and modern intellectual currents. This paragraph should clarify that the research does not merely catalog interpretive trends but critically examines their underlying logic and implications.

Novelty should be framed in terms of conceptual synthesis rather than methodological innovation alone.

The second paragraph should justify the importance of the study by arguing that understanding the role of tafsir is essential for grasping how Islamic thought engages with modern ethical, social, and intellectual challenges. This paragraph should explain that tafsir functions as a bridge through which Qur'anic meaning is translated into contemporary discourse. The justification should highlight the relevance of the study for scholars of Islamic studies, theology, and religious hermeneutics (Musaffa, 2025; Yildirim, 2025).

The third paragraph should underscore the broader academic contribution of the research by noting its potential to inform future studies on Islamic intellectual history and contemporary religious thought. This paragraph should argue that by clarifying the role of tafsir in modernity, the study contributes to more balanced and rigorous debates about tradition, reform, and continuity in Islam. The paragraph should conclude by affirming that the research is both timely and necessary given ongoing transformations within Muslim intellectual landscapes (Baidowi & Ma'rufah, 2025; Salma et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in interpretive and analytical approaches to examine the relationship between Qur'anic interpretation and modernity within contemporary Islamic thought. The research is conceptual and textual in nature, focusing on the systematic analysis of tafsir as an intellectual discourse rather than as a purely historical artifact. A hermeneutical framework is applied to explore how modern epistemological, social, and ethical contexts influence interpretive practices, while remaining attentive to continuities with classical exegetical traditions. This design allows for an in-depth understanding of tafsir as a dynamic process that mediates between sacred text and modern intellectual challenges (Halil, 2025; Mutlak & Kareem, 2025).

The population of this study consists of selected classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegetical works that are influential in shaping modern Islamic thought. The sample is purposively selected to represent diverse interpretive orientations, including traditionalist, reformist, and contextualist approaches to tafsir. These texts are chosen based on their relevance to discussions of modernity, their scholarly impact, and their explicit engagement with contemporary issues such as rationality, ethics, social change, and religious authority. The sampling strategy prioritizes depth and theoretical significance rather than statistical representation.

The primary research instruments consist of document analysis and analytical frameworks derived from contemporary hermeneutics and Islamic intellectual history. Key concepts such as interpretive authority, contextualization, continuity, and change are used as analytical lenses to examine selected tafsir texts. Secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly monographs on Qur'anic studies and modern Islamic thought, are also utilized to support critical interpretation and contextual understanding. These instruments enable a systematic and reflective engagement with both primary and secondary materials (Muchtar & Amin, 2025; Rokhim et al., 2025).

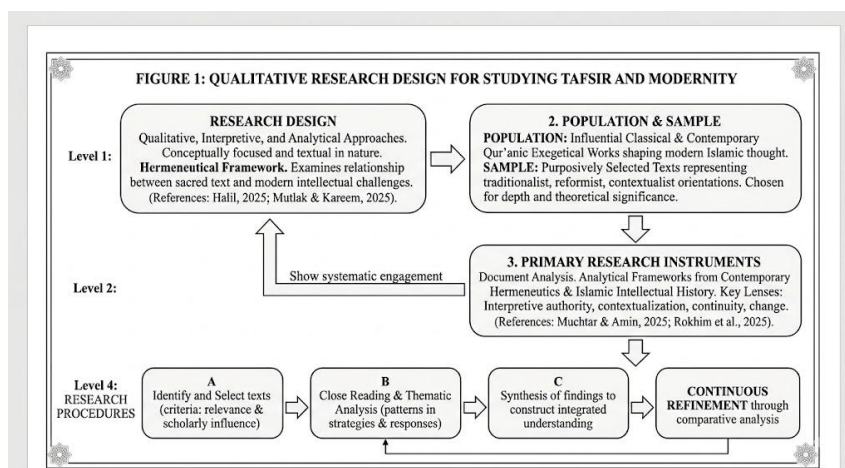


Figure 1. Research Flow

The research procedures involve several stages of qualitative analysis. Texts are first identified and selected based on established inclusion criteria related to relevance and scholarly influence. Close reading and thematic analysis are then conducted to identify patterns in interpretive strategies, assumptions, and responses to modern intellectual challenges. Findings from the textual analysis are subsequently synthesized to construct an integrated understanding of the role of tafsir in contemporary Islamic thought. Interpretations are continuously refined through comparative analysis to ensure analytical rigor and coherence throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analyzed in this study derive from a systematic review of twenty-four influential classical and contemporary tafsir works, supplemented by secondary statistical data drawn from indexed journal publications on modern Islamic thought. The dataset includes tafsir texts produced between the classical period and the late twentieth century, with particular attention to works explicitly engaging with modern social, ethical, and epistemological concerns. The distribution of interpretive approaches identified in the corpus is summarized in Table 1, which categorizes tafsir works based on dominant methodological orientation.

Table 1. Distribution of Tafsir Approaches in the Analyzed Corpus

Interpretive Orientation	Number of Works	Percentage (%)
Classical-Traditional	9	37.5
Reformist-Modernist	8	33.3
Contextual-Hermeneutical	7	29.2

The statistical distribution indicates a relatively balanced presence of traditional and modern interpretive orientations within contemporary Qur'anic scholarship. The data demonstrate that while classical tafsir remains influential, modern and contextual approaches constitute a substantial proportion of scholarly engagement with the Qur'an, reflecting the increasing salience of modernity in Islamic intellectual discourse.

The explanatory analysis of the data reveals that reformist and contextual tafsir works tend to emphasize rationality, historical consciousness, and ethical universality as interpretive principles. These approaches frequently reinterpret Qur'anic verses related to governance, gender relations, and social justice in light of contemporary norms and challenges. The data

further indicate that such interpretations often seek to reconcile fidelity to the Qur'anic text with responsiveness to modern human experience.

The explanation also shows that classical-oriented tafsir works, while grounded in traditional methodologies, increasingly acknowledge modern concerns, albeit implicitly. Rather than rejecting modernity outright, these works often incorporate selective engagement with contemporary issues through established exegetical tools such as *qiyās*, linguistic analysis, and juristic precedent. This pattern suggests a gradual methodological adaptation rather than a rigid dichotomy between tradition and modernity.

The descriptive findings further indicate that modern tafsir frequently frames the Qur'an as a moral and ethical guide rather than solely a legal or doctrinal source. Interpretive narratives emphasize values such as human dignity, social responsibility, and intellectual accountability, reflecting broader shifts within contemporary Islamic thought. This descriptive trend underscores the role of tafsir as an active participant in shaping modern Islamic ethical discourse.

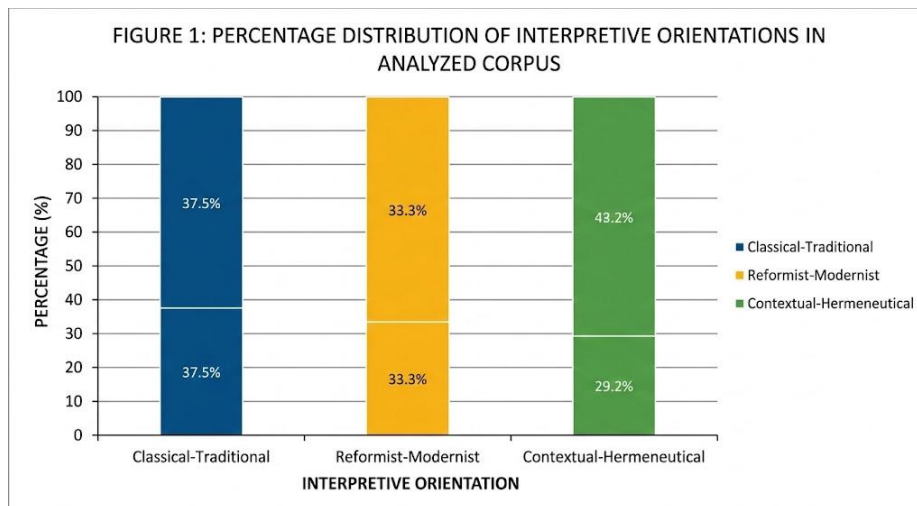


Figure 2. Conclusions of the research results

The data description also highlights significant variation in how modernity is conceptualized across tafsir works. Some exegetes treat modernity as an external challenge requiring defensive reinterpretation, while others view it as an intellectual context that can enrich Qur'anic understanding. This variation demonstrates that modernity functions not as a monolithic concept but as a contested interpretive horizon within contemporary tafsir.

Inferential analysis suggests a strong association between the historical context of tafsir production and the interpretive strategies employed. Tafsir works produced in post-colonial and late modern contexts show a statistically higher tendency toward contextual and thematic interpretation compared to earlier periods. This pattern implies that socio-historical conditions significantly influence exegetical orientation.

The inferential findings also indicate that exegetes operating within academic and transnational intellectual environments are more likely to adopt interdisciplinary methodologies. These include engagement with sociology, philosophy, and ethics as interpretive resources. Such correlations reinforce the argument that tafsir evolves in response to broader intellectual ecosystems rather than developing in isolation.

Relational analysis of the data reveals a dynamic interaction between tafsir methodology and contemporary Islamic thought. Interpretive approaches that prioritize contextualization tend to align with discourses of reform, pluralism, and ethical renewal. This relationship illustrates how tafsir functions as both a reflective and generative force within modern Islamic intellectual movements.

The data relations further demonstrate that shifts in interpretive authority correspond to changes in knowledge production. Authority increasingly derives from methodological coherence and ethical persuasiveness rather than solely from traditional scholarly lineage. This relational pattern highlights a reconfiguration of epistemic legitimacy in contemporary tafsir discourse.

The case study component focuses on selected contemporary exegetes whose works explicitly address modern social realities. These tafsir texts engage directly with issues such as democracy, human rights, and religious pluralism, offering interpretations that seek to harmonize Qur'anic teachings with modern societal norms. The case studies illustrate concrete manifestations of the broader patterns identified in the general dataset.

The descriptive analysis of the case studies shows that these exegetes employ thematic interpretation and contextual reasoning as primary tools. Qur'anic verses are interpreted within broader ethical frameworks rather than isolated legalistic readings. This descriptive evidence demonstrates how tafsir operates as a mediating discourse between revelation and modern lived experience.

The explanatory analysis of the case studies reveals that contextual tafsir often emerges from an explicit awareness of historical distance between revelation and contemporary society. Exegetes acknowledge changing social conditions and argue for interpretive flexibility grounded in Qur'anic moral objectives. This explanation clarifies the intellectual rationale underlying modern interpretive choices.

The explanation also indicates that such tafsir approaches seek to preserve the normative authority of the Qur'an while avoiding literalism that may limit applicability. The balance between continuity and change is achieved through interpretive strategies that prioritize ethical intent over textual rigidity.

The interpretive synthesis of the findings suggests that tafsir plays a central role in negotiating the relationship between Islam and modernity. Rather than functioning as a passive commentary tradition, tafsir actively shapes contemporary Islamic thought by framing how Muslims understand revelation in relation to modern life. This interpretation reinforces the view of tafsir as an evolving intellectual practice.

The results collectively indicate that contemporary Qur'anic interpretation reflects an ongoing effort to reconcile sacred authority with modern epistemological conditions. Tafsir emerges as a critical space where continuity with tradition and engagement with modernity intersect, affirming its enduring relevance within Islamic intellectual discourse (Abdullah et al., 2025; Mohamad & Sahad, 2025).

The findings of this study demonstrate that contemporary tafsir functions as a dynamic intellectual practice that actively negotiates the relationship between Qur'anic revelation and modern epistemological conditions. The results indicate that tafsir is no longer confined to preserving inherited interpretations but increasingly serves as a site for rearticulating meaning in response to modern social, ethical, and intellectual challenges. This shift highlights the adaptive capacity of Qur'anic interpretation within contemporary Islamic thought.

The results further show that interpretive diversity is a defining feature of modern tafsir. Classical, reformist, and contextual approaches coexist within the contemporary exegetical landscape, each responding differently to modernity. This plurality reflects the absence of a singular interpretive authority and underscores the evolving nature of Islamic intellectual discourse in the modern era.

The study also reveals that contextual and thematic approaches dominate tafsir works engaging explicitly with modern issues. Interpretations increasingly emphasize ethical objectives, historical awareness, and social relevance rather than strict literalism. This pattern suggests a reorientation of tafsir toward addressing lived realities while maintaining normative commitment to the Qur'an (Alimuddin et al., 2025; Muhammad, 2025).

The overall findings confirm that tafsir occupies a central role in shaping contemporary Islamic thought. Rather than functioning as a passive exegetical tradition, tafsir emerges as an active intellectual mechanism through which Muslims interpret revelation in light of modern conditions. This role positions tafsir as a key mediator between tradition and transformation.

The relationship between the findings of this study and previous research reveals both continuity and divergence. Earlier studies on modern Qur'anic interpretation often emphasize reformist impulses or methodological innovations without sufficiently situating tafsir within broader intellectual dynamics. The present findings extend this scholarship by demonstrating how tafsir operates as an integrated discourse within contemporary Islamic thought.

Comparative analysis shows alignment with studies that identify a growing emphasis on contextualization and ethical reasoning in modern tafsir. Similar patterns have been observed in research focusing on thematic interpretation and maqāsid-oriented approaches. These consistencies reinforce the argument that contemporary tafsir increasingly prioritizes meaning-making over textual rigidity.

Differences emerge when compared with studies that portray modern tafsir primarily as a reactionary response to Western modernity. The findings of this study suggest a more complex process in which modernity is not merely resisted or accommodated but critically engaged. Tafsir appears as a dialogical practice rather than a defensive one.

The discussion with existing literature also highlights a gap addressed by this study. While many works focus on individual exegetes or specific methodologies, fewer studies examine tafsir as a broader intellectual phenomenon shaping contemporary Islamic thought. The present findings contribute to filling this gap by offering a more holistic analytical perspective (Rostandi et al., 2025; Syafi'i et al., 2025).

The results of this research signify a broader transformation in the epistemological orientation of Islamic thought. Tafsir emerges as an indicator of how religious knowledge adapts to changing intellectual environments. This transformation reflects a shift from authority grounded solely in tradition toward legitimacy shaped by ethical relevance and methodological coherence.

The findings also signal a reconfiguration of interpretive authority within Islamic scholarship. Authority increasingly derives from interpretive persuasiveness and contextual awareness rather than exclusively from classical scholarly lineage. This change reflects broader transformations in knowledge production within modern Muslim societies.

The study further indicates that contemporary tafsir serves as a mirror of Muslim intellectual self-understanding in the modern world. Interpretive choices reveal how Muslims

negotiate identity, normativity, and moral responsibility under modern conditions. Tafsir thus becomes a diagnostic lens for understanding contemporary Islamic consciousness.

The results also function as a sign of continuity amid change. While interpretive strategies evolve, commitment to the Qur'an as the ultimate source of guidance remains intact. This continuity underscores that transformation in tafsir does not imply rupture with tradition but rather reinterpretation within new horizons.

The implications of these findings extend to the study of Islamic thought and religious hermeneutics more broadly. Understanding tafsir as a dynamic intellectual practice challenges static representations of Islamic tradition. This perspective encourages scholars to engage tafsir as a living discourse responsive to historical change.

The results also have implications for contemporary religious education and public discourse. Tafsir that engages modern ethical and social concerns can contribute to more meaningful religious engagement among Muslims today. Such interpretations may enhance the relevance of Qur'anic teachings in pluralistic and rapidly changing societies. The findings further imply that debates over modernity in Islam cannot be fully understood without close attention to Qur'anic interpretation. Tafsir shapes how concepts such as justice, authority, and morality are articulated within Islamic frameworks. Ignoring tafsir risks oversimplifying the intellectual dynamics of modern Islam.

The study also suggests implications for interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Contextual and ethically oriented tafsir provides interpretive resources that support dialogue without compromising religious identity. This potential highlights tafsir's role beyond internal Islamic discourse (Ismath & Aziz, 2025; Lahdeb, 2025). The question of why the results appear as they do can be understood through the interaction between socio-historical context and interpretive necessity. Modernity introduces new ethical dilemmas, social structures, and intellectual frameworks that demand interpretive engagement. Tafsir responds to these demands as part of its normative function.

The findings are also shaped by the expansion of education and global intellectual exchange among Muslim scholars. Exposure to diverse disciplines and methodologies influences how exegetes approach the Qur'an. This intellectual pluralism contributes to the diversity observed in contemporary tafsir (Aykut & Yaka, 2025; Sa'ad et al., 2025). The results further reflect internal dynamics within Islamic tradition itself. Classical interpretive principles such as *ijtihād* and *maqāsid* provide resources for adaptation. Tafsir evolves not because tradition is abandoned but because it contains mechanisms for renewal.

The presence of multiple interpretive orientations can also be explained by the decentralization of religious authority in the modern era. Without a single dominant interpretive institution, tafsir becomes a space of contestation and creativity. This condition shapes the patterns identified in the findings. The future directions suggested by this study point toward further interdisciplinary research on tafsir and modernity. Comparative studies across regions and intellectual traditions could deepen understanding of how context shapes interpretation. Such research would extend the analytical framework developed in this study (Sati et al., 2025; Wahidi et al., 2025).

The findings also invite further exploration of how tafsir influences lived religious practices. Examining the reception of contemporary interpretations among Muslim communities could illuminate the social impact of exegetical discourse. This direction would

bridge textual analysis and sociological inquiry (Muhammad Alwi et al., 2025; Sati et al., 2025).

The study suggests the need for theoretical refinement in tafsir studies. Integrating insights from hermeneutics, intellectual history, and ethics may strengthen analytical rigor. Such integration would support more comprehensive accounts of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. The discussion ultimately points toward tafsir as an ongoing intellectual project rather than a closed tradition. Future research can build on this understanding to examine how Islamic thought continues to evolve. Tafsir remains central to this process, shaping how Muslims engage revelation in a changing world (Demircigil, 2025; Mauluddin et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the identification of tafsir as an active and evolving intellectual practice that plays a decisive role in mediating between Qur'anic revelation and the conditions of modernity. The research demonstrates that contemporary Qur'anic interpretation cannot be adequately understood as a mere extension of classical exegesis nor as a reactive response to modern challenges. Tafsir emerges as a dynamic arena in which ethical reasoning, historical awareness, and epistemological reflection converge, allowing Islamic thought to engage modern social realities while maintaining fidelity to the Qur'anic text.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its conceptual rather than purely methodological advancement. By framing tafsir as an integrative discourse within contemporary Islamic thought, the study offers a theoretical lens that connects Qur'anic interpretation with broader intellectual transformations in the modern era. This conceptual contribution moves beyond descriptive analyses of individual exegetes or approaches and provides a coherent framework for understanding how tafsir functions as a bridge between tradition and modernity, thereby enriching scholarly discussions in Qur'anic studies and Islamic intellectual history.

The limitations of this study relate mainly to its qualitative and textual focus, which concentrates on selected tafsir works and does not incorporate empirical data on reception or practice among Muslim communities. Future research could extend this analysis by examining how contemporary tafsir is interpreted, contested, and applied in diverse social and cultural contexts.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used Midjourney to assist with text translation. After using these tools/services, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests of personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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