

**Thematic Qur'anic Exegesis: A Methodological Study and Its
Implications in Contemporary Islamic Education**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the method of *tafsir maudhu'i* (thematic Qur'anic exegesis) from a methodological perspective and explores its implications in contemporary Islamic education. The research is based on a qualitative approach using library research and textual analysis of relevant classical and modern scholarly works. The findings reveal that *tafsir maudhu'i* is a systematic interpretive method that focuses on collecting and analyzing Qur'anic verses related to a specific theme in order to produce a comprehensive and contextual understanding. This method is grounded in the interconnectedness of Qur'anic verses and is characterized by its openness, adaptability, and interdisciplinary nature. In the context of contemporary Islamic education, *tafsir maudhu'i* plays a significant role in bridging the gap between Qur'anic teachings and modern realities,

enabling educators and students to address current social, ethical, and intellectual challenges. Furthermore, the thematic approach contributes to the development of critical thinking, contextual understanding, and the integration of Islamic values into educational practices. Therefore, *tafsir maudhu'i* remains highly relevant as both a methodological framework in Qur'anic studies and a pedagogical tool in modern Islamic education.

Keywords: *Thematic Exegesis, Methodology, Islamic Education*

A. Introduction

The development of Qur'anic studies requires interpretive methods that are systematic and responsive to the needs of the time. One of the approaches that has gained prominence is *tafsir maudhu'i* (thematic exegesis), a method that interprets the Qur'an by collecting verses related to a particular theme and analyzing them comprehensively. This thematic approach is considered more effective in providing a holistic and contextual understanding of specific issues, particularly in addressing contemporary challenges. Therefore, the study of *tafsir maudhu'i* is essential as part of the development of interpretive methodologies capable of connecting the message of the Qur'an with the realities of modern life. In contrast to the *tahlili* method, which analyzes verses sequentially according to their order in the *mushaf*, *tafsir maudhu'i* seeks to gather verses dispersed across different surahs but unified by a common theme, in order to derive a comprehensive and integrated conclusion.

As a method of interpretation, the *maudhu'i* approach has attracted significant scholarly attention, ranging from its conceptual foundations to its practical applications and implications across academic and intellectual circles. Fazlur Rahman viewed the *tafsir maudhu'i* method as the most effective way to present to readers the coherence of the Qur'an and the unity of God's message to humanity [Rahman, 1999: 11]. He argued that this method is better suited to capturing the meaning of divine revelation in a more complete and comprehensive manner.

Furthermore, this study seeks to examine the *maudhu'i* method from historical, theoretical, and applied perspectives. Through a library research approach, it analyzes Qur'anic verses related to ecological themes using the *maudhu'i* framework. In doing so, the study aims to determine whether the *maudhu'i* method remains relevant when applied to the analysis of Qur'anic verses within specific thematic contexts.

B. Literature Review

The study of *tafsir maudhu'i* (thematic exegesis) has developed significantly within the broader field of Qur'anic studies, particularly as a response to the need for interpretive methods that are both systematic and relevant to contemporary issues. Classical foundations of thematic interpretation can be traced back to early exegetical practices, where scholars implicitly grouped verses based on shared meanings, although not yet in a formalized methodological framework. Modern scholars have played a crucial role in conceptualizing *tafsir maudhu'i* as an independent method. Fazlur Rahman (1999) emphasizes that the thematic approach is essential for understanding the coherence and unity of the Qur'an. According to him, this method allows readers to grasp the holistic message of divine revelation rather than viewing verses in isolation. This perspective highlights the Qur'an as an integrated and interconnected text. Mustafa Muslim (2000) further develops this concept by defining *tafsir maudhu'i* as a method that examines Qur'anic issues through the collection and analysis of verses related to a specific theme, whether within a single surah or across multiple surahs. His work provides an important theoretical basis for understanding how thematic interpretation operates within Qur'anic studies. In addition, Abd al-Hayy

al-Farmawi (1977) contributes significantly by systematizing the operational procedures of *tafsir maudhu'i*. He outlines clear methodological steps, including determining a theme, collecting relevant verses, arranging them according to the chronology of revelation, analyzing their interrelationships (*munasabah*), and synthesizing their meanings into a comprehensive conclusion. This structured approach has made *tafsir maudhu'i* more accessible and applicable in academic research. M. Quraish Shihab also underscores the importance of thematic interpretation, particularly in revealing the interconnectedness of Qur'anic verses. He argues that *tafsir maudhu'i* provides a more holistic and contextual understanding compared to traditional methods such as the *tahlili* approach, which interprets verses sequentially. According to Shihab, the thematic method enables a deeper engagement with the Qur'an, especially in addressing contemporary societal issues. Furthermore, Baidan (2000) examines both the strengths and limitations of *tafsir maudhu'i*. He notes that this method is practical, systematic, and capable of responding to modern challenges. However, he also highlights certain limitations, such as the potential narrowing of interpretation due to thematic restrictions and the risk of fragmenting verses that contain multiple meanings. Recent studies, such as Fauzan et al. (2019), demonstrate the continued relevance of *tafsir maudhu'i* in contemporary scholarship. These studies show that thematic interpretation can be effectively applied to various fields, including social, ethical, and environmental issues, thereby reinforcing its role as a dynamic and interdisciplinary approach within Qur'anic studies. Overall, the existing literature indicates that *tafsir maudhu'i* has evolved from a simple thematic tendency in classical exegesis into a well-established methodological framework in modern Qur'anic studies. Its ability to provide comprehensive, contextual, and relevant interpretations makes it an essential approach for understanding the Qur'an in both academic and practical contexts.

C. Research Method

The methodology of this study is designed to provide a systematic framework for examining and analyzing the *tafsir maudhu'i* method. This research employs a qualitative approach, with a primary focus on literature review and textual analysis. The study begins with the collection and critical examination of relevant literature on *tafsir maudhu'i*. The sources utilized include academic journal articles and scholarly works by Muslim intellectuals who have discussed this method. Through this approach, the study is expected to offer a comprehensive overview of the *tafsir maudhu'i* method, as well as its contribution to the understanding and application of Qur'anic teachings in the modern era.

D. Results and Discussion

1. The Definition of *Tafsir Maudhu'i*

The term *tafsir* is derived from the Arabic word *فسر* (*fasara*), which means to explain, clarify, or interpret. In the context of the Qur'an, *tafsir* refers to the effort to explain the meanings and objectives of the divine revelation contained within the holy scripture, including clarifying expressions that are unclear or ambiguous [Al-Jurnani].

Meanwhile, the term *maudhu'i* originates from the word *mawdu'*, meaning "theme or "topic." Linguistically, therefore, *tafsir maudhu'i* can be understood as an interpretive approach that focuses on a specific theme or subject within the Qur'an [Anwar, 2001].

Terminologically, *tafsir* is defined as the science that examines the Qur'an in terms of its indications (*dalalah*) of the meanings intended by Allah, to the extent

of human capability. In this sense, *tafsir maudhu'i* refers to a method of Qur'anic interpretation that organizes verses based on particular themes or issues. This method seeks to derive deeper and more comprehensive meanings by connecting verses that are dispersed across different surahs but relate to the same theme. Thus, *tafsir maudhu'i* does not interpret verses in isolation; rather, it examines the interrelationships among them within a thematic framework, resulting in a more holistic and applicable understanding of Qur'anic teachings [Shihab, 2002].

According to prominent scholars, definitions of *tafsir* further highlight its scope and purpose. Al-Zarqani defines *tafsir* as a discipline that studies the Noble Qur'an in terms of its meanings in accordance with what Allah intends, within the limits of human understanding. Ibn 'Ashur (d. 1976 CE) defines it as the science concerned with explaining the meanings of Qur'anic expressions and deriving lessons (*hikmah*) from them, whether in a concise or detailed manner. Al-Zarkashi (d. 794 AH) describes *tafsir* as the science through which the Book of Allah, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), is understood by clarifying its meanings and deriving its rulings and wisdoms.

In essence, *tafsir* seeks to make clear what is unclear, to illuminate what is ambiguous, and to simplify what is difficult to understand (Nawawi, 2002). Meanwhile, Mustafa Muslim defines *tafsir maudhu'i* as a discipline that examines specific issues in the Qur'an through the analysis of one or more surahs [Muslim, 2000].

2. The Historical Emergence of *Tafsir Maudhu'i*

The origins of *tafsir maudhu'i* can be traced back to early indications found in classical works of Qur'anic exegesis. At this stage, thematic thinking appeared in a simple form and had not yet been recognized as an independent method. Some early *mufasssirun* attempted to group verses according to themes, although not in a systematic manner. For instance, scholars such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Arabi occasionally employed a thematic approach in interpreting certain verses.

According to scholars such as Mustafa Muslim, Al-Umari, and Al-Daghāmin, some scholars argue that the elements of *tafsir maudhu'i* can be traced back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). One of the arguments supporting this view is the gradual revelation of the Qur'an. Since the Qur'an was revealed progressively in response to specific events, this process implicitly reflects a thematic dimension that later inspired the development of *tafsir maudhu'i*.

However, the more widely accepted argument is based on the Prophet's practice of interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an itself (*tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an*). This method requires the examination of multiple verses related to a particular topic, which aligns closely with the principles of thematic exegesis. Mustafa Muslim, for example, presents evidence supporting this perspective through a hadith narrated by Muhammad al-Bukhari from Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, which states: "When verse 82 of Surah Al-An'am was revealed..."

This evidence suggests that the foundational elements of *tafsir maudhu'i* were already present in early Islamic tradition, even though the method itself was only later developed into a systematic and independent approach within Qur'anic studies.

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهُمْ لَا يَلْبِسُونَ إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الْأَمْنُ وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ

Those who believe and do not mix their faith with wrongdoing (*zulm*—that is, *shirk*), for them there is security, and they are rightly guided.

The Companions became anxious and came to the Prophet, saying: “O Messenger of Allah, who among us has not committed wrongdoing?” He replied, “It is not as you think. Have you not heard the saying of Allah: ‘Indeed, associating partners with Allah (*shirk*) is a great *ظلم*?’” Thus, the wrongdoing referred to is *shirk*.

The explanation of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud clarifies that the Prophet (peace be upon him) interpreted the term *zulm* in Surah Al-An‘am verse 82 as *shirk*, as also indicated in Surah Luqman verse 13. Observing the development of *tafsir maudhu'i* works, scholars have classified them into three main categories:

- a. **Thematic exegesis focusing on terminology.** In this category, a *mufassir* examines a particular word or term in the Qur’an by collecting all verses containing that term and its derivatives. The aim is to derive the meanings (*dalalat*) of the term from a Qur’anic perspective. Examples include terms such as *ummah*, *sadaqah*, *jihad*, and *kitab*. In this approach, the focus remains on linguistic meaning rather than on a comprehensive interpretation of broader ideas and teachings. Classical works that resemble this category include texts on *Gharib al-Qur’an* and *al-As hbah wa al-Naza’ir* [Muslim, 2019: 39]. For instance, Al-Damighani (d. 478 AH), in his work *Islah al-Wujuh wa al-Naza’ir*, examined the term *khayr* and concluded that it carries eight meanings, including wealth, faith, excellence, well-being, reward, food, and victory. He supported these conclusions with relevant Qur’anic verses [Muslim, 2019: 24].
- b. **Thematic exegesis focusing on specific topics.** In this category, a *mufassir* selects a particular theme or topic within the Qur’an. The interpreter then traces this theme across various surahs, collects relevant verses, analyzes their meanings, and organizes the findings into structured discussions, often divided into chapters and subchapters (Muslim, 2019: 27). Examples of classical works related to this category include *I’jaz al-Qur’an* by Abu Bakr al-Baqillani, *al-Nasikh wa al-Mansukh fi al-Qur’an* by Abu Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Sallam, and *Ahkam al-Qur’an* by Abu Bakr al-Jassas. Modern examples include works such as *al-Insan fi al-Qur’an* and *al-Mar’ah fi al-Qur’an* by Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, *al-Akhlaq fi al-Qur’an* by Abd al-Ala al-Sabzawari, *al-Yahud fi al-Qur’an* by Muhammad Izzah Daruzah, and *al-Sabr fi al-Qur’an* by Yusuf al-Qaradawi.
- c. **Thematic exegesis focusing on a single surah.** This category is more specific than the previous one. Here, the *mufassir* analyzes the central ideas and main themes within a particular surah, often referred to as *mihwar al-tafsir al-maudhu’i*. Although classical works rarely fully represent this category, some can be associated with it, such as *al-Tafsir al-Kabir* by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606 AH) and *Nazm al-Durar fi Tanasub al-Ayat wa al-Suwar* by Al-Biqā’i (d. 885 AH). In the modern period, Muhammad al-Ghazali considered Muhammad Abdullah al-Darraz as one of the figures who contributed to this category through his work *al-Naba’ al-‘Azim*, although it focuses specifically on Surah al-Baqarah

[Al-Darraz, 1997: 89]. Meanwhile, Sayyid Qutb, in his renowned work *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, is often regarded as producing one of the most comprehensive examples of this third category of *tafsir maudhu'i*.

3. The Foundations of *Tafsir Maudhu'i*

Tafsir maudhu'i is grounded in both the textual nature of the Qur'an and the needs of society. Several key foundations of this method include:

- a. **The Interconnectedness of Verses.** The Qur'an, as a sacred text, does not consist of isolated verses; rather, each verse is interconnected with others. By grouping verses based on specific themes, *tafsir maudhu'i* is able to uncover deeper meanings within the text, thereby helping believers understand the message of Allah in a comprehensive manner [Shihab, 2002].
- b. **The Principle of Openness.** *Tafsir maudhu'i* is open to diverse interpretations depending on context and circumstances. This approach provides space for *mufasssirun* to respond to contemporary challenges and to explain Qur'anic teachings in ways that are relevant to present realities, without being strictly confined to traditional or conventional interpretations. This perspective is supported by scholars such as Sayyid Qutb (1973).
- c. **An Interdisciplinary Approach.** The *tafsir maudhu'i* method encourages integration across various fields of knowledge, such as social sciences, law, and ethics. This allows interpreters to examine Qur'anic verses from multiple perspectives, resulting in richer and more contextually relevant interpretations for contemporary society, as highlighted by Amin Ahsan Islahi Farahi (1997).

4. Urgency of *Tafsir Maudhu'i*

Tafsir maudhu'i holds significant importance in both academic and practical contexts, as reflected in the following points:

- a. **Addressing Contemporary Challenges.** In dealing with complex issues such as pluralism, human rights, and social justice, *tafsir maudhu'i* offers a more adaptive and responsive approach. By examining Qur'anic verses related to these issues, Muslims can derive relevant guidance to navigate the challenges of modern life, as emphasized by Muhammad Shahrour (1990).
- b. **Promoting Social Awareness.** *Tafsir maudhu'i* contributes to building social awareness within Muslim communities by emphasizing values such as justice, brotherhood, and compassion. By referring to verses that support these values, society can foster harmonious and respectful relationships, both among Muslims and with non-Muslims, as discussed by Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai (1986).
- c. **Strengthening Islamic Identity.** In the context of globalization and modernization, *tafsir maudhu'i* helps Muslims strengthen their identity and deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings. By providing clear and relevant explanations of Islamic values, this method contributes to the formation of a strong and adaptive identity in the face of ongoing change, as noted by Ahmad von Denffer (1998).

5. Operational Procedure of the *Tafsir Maudhu'i* Method

Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawi, in his book *Al-Bidayah fi al-Tafsir al-Mawdu'i*, provides a detailed explanation of the steps involved in applying the *tafsir maudhu'i* method. These steps include:

- a. Determining the theme or issue to be studied.
- b. Collecting all relevant Qur'anic verses related to the theme.
- c. Arranging the verses according to the chronological order of revelation, accompanied by knowledge of *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation).

- d. Understanding the *munasabah* (correlation) between the verses within their respective surahs. Developing a systematic outline of the discussion.
- e. Complementing the analysis with relevant hadiths.
- f. Conducting a comprehensive analysis by reconciling verses with similar meanings, and harmonizing between general (*'am*) and specific (*khas*), absolute (*mutlaq*) and restricted (*muqayyad*), as well as resolving apparent contradictions so that they converge into a unified understanding [al-Farmawi, 1977: 61].

For example, a *mufassir* may examine verses that are absolute (*mutlaq*), such as: “Allah has permitted trade and forbidden usury (riba)” (Al-Baqarah: 275). And compare them with verses that are restricted (*muqayyad*), such as: “O you who believe, do not consume usury multiplied many times over” (Ali ‘Imran: 130). If a *mufassir* were to rely solely on the restricted verse while ignoring the absolute one, they might conclude that only excessive, compounded usury is prohibited, whereas lesser forms are permissible. Such an interpretation would be inaccurate, as the meaning of absolute verses does not always follow restricted ones, and vice versa.

Therefore, proper interpretation requires attention to the historical context and the stages through which Qur’anic rulings were revealed. In this case, the restricted verse refers to the earlier practice of usury during the pre-Islamic (*Jahiliyyah*) period, while the later absolute verse establishes a broader prohibition of both minor and major forms of usury. This is further reinforced in the Qur’an: “Those who consume usury will not stand except as one stands who is being beaten by Satan into insanity” (Al-Baqarah: 275).

By understanding the مراحل (stages) through which the Qur’an established its rulings, a *mufassir* can avoid errors in interpretation. According to M Quraish Shihab, the systematic framework proposed by al-Farmawi results in two main forms of the *tafsir maudhu’i* method. First, the interpretation of a single surah by explaining its general and specific objectives, as well as the interconnections among its various themes, so that they form a unified whole. Second, the collection of verses from different surahs that address a particular issue, followed by a comprehensive explanation that provides a coherent answer to the central theme under discussion [Shihab, 1992: 117].

6. Advantages and Disadvantages of the *Tafsir Maudhu’i* Method

Like any scientific approach, the *tafsir maudhu’i* (thematic interpretation) method has both strengths and limitations. The following points summarize several scholarly views, particularly from Nashruddin Baidan (2000, pp. 165–168):

- a. Advantages of the *Tafsir Maudhu’i* Method
 - **Responsive to Contemporary Challenges.** Human problems continue to evolve along with the development of society. The *maudhu’i* method serves as an interpretive approach capable of addressing these evolving challenges. Through thematic studies, it seeks to provide solutions to real issues faced by society.
 - **Practical and Systematic.** This method is organized in a practical and systematic way, making it easier to analyze and resolve specific problems based on Qur’anic guidance.

- **Dynamic in Nature.** The thematic approach allows Qur’anic interpretation to remain dynamic and relevant to the demands of each era. It creates the impression that the Qur’an continuously guides and nurtures human life across all social levels.
 - **Holistic Understanding.** By focusing on specific themes, this method enables a more comprehensive and unified understanding of Qur’anic verses. Such depth of understanding is often difficult to achieve through other interpretive methods.
- b. Disadvantages of the *Tafsir Maudhu’i* Method
- **Fragmentation of Verses.** A single Qur’anic verse may contain multiple themes (e.g., prayer and zakat mentioned together). When focusing on one topic, parts of the verse may be excluded, which can reduce the completeness of the interpretation.
 - **Limitation of Interpretation.** By adhering to a specific theme, the interpretation of a verse becomes restricted to that theme alone. In reality, a single verse may carry multiple layers of meaning like a gem reflecting light from various angles. Thus, thematic limitation may overlook other important dimensions of meaning.

7. Environmental Interpretation: An Applied Model Of Tafsir Maudhu’i

As an example of the application of *tafsir maudhu’i*, the work of Mujiyono Abdillah is noteworthy, particularly his dissertation published بعنوان *Agama Ramah Lingkungan: Perspektif Al-Qur’an* (2001, p. 32). In this work, he explores environmental concepts within the Qur’an through a thematic approach. He identifies that the Qur’an introduces environmental concepts using various terms, including:

- Al-‘Alamin (all species)
 - al-sama’ (space-time/sky)
 - al-ard (earth)
 - al-bi’ah (environment)
- a. Al-‘Alamin (All Species)

The term *al-‘alamin* appears 73 times in the Qur’an, either in possessive constructions (*idafah*) or phrase structures. According to Mujiyono Abdillah, not all occurrences refer exclusively to all species; some refer specifically to rational beings (humans). This differs from the view of Sirajuddin Zar, who argues that the term refers only to human beings.

Abdillah further explains that when *al-‘alamin* appears in a possessive phrase such as *Rabb al-‘alamīn* (Lord of the worlds), or in combination with prepositions like *li*, *‘an*, or *‘ala*, it generally denotes all species not just humans. Out of the 73 occurrences:

- 46 refer to all species
- 5 appear in prepositional constructions
- 41 occur in the phrase *Rabb al-‘alamin*

Examples of verses where *al-‘alamīn* refers to all creation include:

- QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 251
- QS. Ali ‘Imran [3]: 37, 106

- QS. Al-‘Ankabut [29]: 6
- QS. Ash-Shaffat [37]: 79

In these contexts, the term clearly refers to the universe as a whole, encompassing both biotic and abiotic entities humans, animals, plants, microorganisms, and even minerals.

Thus, the Qur’an introduces the concept of the environment through the comprehensive term *al-‘alamin*, which may carry different meanings depending on the context. However, in the phrase *Rabb al-‘alamin*, it consistently signifies Allah as the Lord of all existence.

This analysis demonstrates how *tafsir maudhu’i* can systematically explore a specific theme such as the environment by gathering and analyzing related verses, resulting in a deeper and more contextual understanding of Qur’anic teachings.

b. Al-Sama’ (the Cosmic Space/Universe)

The term *al-sama’* is used in the Qur’an to describe the universe or cosmic space. Its plural form is *al-samawat*. In total, the word *al-sama’* and its derivatives appear 387 times in the Qur’an 210 times in the singular form (*mufrad*) and 177 times in the plural form. Etymologically, the word *al-sama’* and its derivatives originate from the root *sama-yasmu-sumuwan wa samā’an*, which conveys meanings such as “to rise,” “to elevate,” or “something that is high.” Terminologically, *al-sama’* and its derivatives refer to the sky, the universe, outer space, and even the concept of space-time

c. Al-Ard (the Earth)

The term *al-ard* (the earth) appears in the Qur’an 463 times, either independently or in combination with other particles. Its usage in the Qur’an reflects two main semantic variations. First, it refers to the earth as an already-formed planetary environment, with the connotation of land as a space where organisms and microorganisms exist, a habitat for human life, and a domain of geological phenomena. Second, it denotes the earth in the process of becoming that is, the stages of its creation and formation. For the purpose of formulating an environmental concept, the first meaning referring to the fully formed earth is more relevant, as it helps clarify and emphasize the notion of the environment. Meanwhile, the second meaning, which relates to the process of creation, is more appropriately used in philosophical discussions concerning the origin and formation of the earth.

E. Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the *tafsir maudhu’i* method plays a crucial role in understanding the contents of the Qur’an. As an interpretive approach, this method is capable of effectively transmitting the meanings contained in Qur’anic verses to its readers. Through its thematic framework, readers are able to comprehend specific issues (themes) in a more comprehensive and integrated manner. Moreover, its theoretical foundation lies in the interconnectedness of Qur’anic verses and in its capacity to address contemporary challenges through a contextual approach.

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