

## **TRANSFORMATION OF QUR'AN STUDY METHODOLOGY IN INDONESIA: FROM ORAL TRADITION TO WRITTEN INTERPRETATION**

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**Abstract:** Qur'anic studies in Indonesia have undergone significant methodological transformations, evolving from oral traditions to written interpretations. This study addresses the scholarly gap regarding the lack of integrated analyses that holistically examine the traditions of Qur'anic recitation, writing, and interpretation in the Indonesian context. Employing a qualitative method through desk research, this study critically engages with both primary and secondary sources, including classical and contemporary tafsir works, standardized Indonesian *mushaf* editions, and academic journal articles. The findings reveal that the evolution of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia has been shaped by the interplay between local cultures and global Islamic traditions. Oral transmission methods such as Baghdadiyah and *nagham* characterized the early phase which gradually transitioned into written forms exemplified by the production of standardized *mushaf* manuscripts such as *Mushaf Babriyyah*, *Bombay*, *Braille*, and *Sign Language* editions which aim to ensure both accessibility and authenticity. In terms of interpretation, prominent Indonesian scholars such as Abdur Rauf Singkili, HAMKA, and M. Quraish Shihab have developed context-based approaches tailored to socio-cultural realities. This study concludes that Qur'anic studies in Indonesia are dynamic, continually adapting to technological, cultural, and social changes. However, further research is necessary to explore interdisciplinary interpretive approaches involving gender, ecology, and socio-political issues. Strengthening contextual and thematic interpretations will enhance the role of the Qur'an as a responsive and transformative source of guidance for contemporary Indonesian Muslim society.

**Keywords:** Methodological Transformation; Oral Traditions; Qur'anic Studies in Indonesia; Written Interpretation

### **Introduction**

The arrival of Islam in Indonesia marked the beginning of the development of Qur'anic studies in the Nusantara region. The process of Islamization which began in the 7th and 8th centuries CE (Meliono, 2011), took place primarily through trade routes and cultural preaching (Atjeh, 1986), introducing the Qur'an to local communities through multiple methods, especially oral traditions. In its early stages, Qur'anic education was conducted orally, emphasizing memorization (*tahfiẓ*), *talaqqī*, and *mushāfahab* (Furqan, 2019), and took place in *surau*, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), and scholarly circles of *ulama* (Amirudin & Rohimah, 2020). This tradition reflects an initial approach to Qur'anic studies rooted in orality and direct transmission between teacher and student (Ma'arif, 2017). Over time, Qur'anic studies in Indonesia experienced a significant methodological transformation shifting toward written approaches (Ardiansyah et al., 2025). This transition can be observed in the practice of copying *mushaf* using local scripts such as Jawi and Pegon,

as well as the emergence of locally produced interpretive works that represent an intellectual process in understanding revelation.

This evolution demonstrates the dynamic methodological nature of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia. On one hand, the tradition remains deeply rooted in oral practices characterized by spiritual transmission; on the other hand, it is evolving toward rational, contextual, and academic written approaches (Basid & Soleh, 2024). Contributions from scholars such as Nawawi al-Bantani through *Tafsir Marah Labid* and contemporary thinkers like M. Quraish Shihab with *Tafsir Al-Misbah* are concrete examples of methodological transformation shaped by the needs of the Indonesian Muslim community (Amin, 2021). However, academic studies that holistically explore the historical trajectory of Qur'anic studies from the oral traditions to written interpretation remain relatively scarce.

Some existing studies include Cholid Ma'arif's work on Qur'anic literacy which discusses learning methods, reading comprehension, and script writing (Ma'arif, 2017). Rohimin's research on interpretive methods and principles used in classical and modern tafsir (Rohimin, 2014); and works by the Lajnah Pentashih al-Qur'an on the historical development of Qur'anic manuscripts in Indonesia (Arifin et al., 2017). While these studies provide valuable insights, none offer a comprehensive analysis that interrelates the historical dimensions of recitation, writing, and interpretation in Indonesian Qur'anic scholarship.

This underscores the need for a more integrative study that traces the historicity of the Qur'an in Indonesia by examining how it has been recited, written, and interpreted. Such a study is essential to understanding the evolution of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia and addressing the gap in scholarship that connects these dimensions (Abidin & Aziz, 2022; Amin, 2021). The topic is particularly relevant to contemporary Islamic studies and to strengthening the epistemological foundations of tafsir in the Indonesian context.

Accordingly, this paper aims to examine the trajectory of methodological transformation in Indonesian Qur'anic studies, focusing on the transition from oral traditions to written interpretations. This research is crucial for mapping the intellectual contributions of Indonesian Muslims in the broader development of Qur'anic studies and for affirming Indonesia's place within the global Islamic intellectual tradition. A historical and descriptive-analytical approach is employed to explore how local traditions engage with the Qur'anic text and shape a distinctive understanding of Islam in the archipelago.

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research to trace the dynamic methodological evolution of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia. Data were collected through a critical review of both primary and secondary sources including classical and contemporary tafsir works, standardized Qur'anic manuscripts, institutional documents, and relevant academic journal articles (Adlini et al., 2022). Primary sources consist of tafsir books such as *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, and *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*. Secondary sources include previous scholarly research, reference books, and articles published in reputable journals such as *SUHUF*, *MUSHAF*, and *QIST*.

Data were analyzed using content analysis, employing a theme-based manual coding technique. The researcher systematically identified conceptual patterns across the selected texts and grouped them into thematic categories, such as methods of recitation, manuscript writing styles, and interpretive approaches. The analysis focused on tracing the

transformation of methodological frameworks from oral to written traditions in the context of Qur'anic studies. To ensure thematic consistency, the researcher utilized reference management tools such as Zotero and Mendeley to organize and tag literature sources. Inclusion criteria for literature selection were: sources focusing on the methodology of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia (covering aspects of recitation, manuscript writing, and interpretation) and works authored by credible scholars or institutions, such as the Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf al-Qur'an (LPMQ), academic universities, or journals indexed in Sinta 1-3 (Fadli, 2021). Exclusion criteria included popular or descriptive literature lacking a clear methodological foundation, as well as non-Indonesian tafsir texts with no direct relevance to the local context. To maintain validity, the study applied source triangulation, comparing data from tafsir books, academic studies, and institutional publications. Meanwhile, reliability was strengthened through peer cross-checking and re-examination of the narrative findings against the original sources. These steps ensure that the results of this analysis are academically sound and scientifically accountable.

### Modalities of Qur'anic Engagement in the Indonesian Context

The study of the Qur'an in Indonesia, particularly in relation to recitation, should not be understood merely as a religious activity. Rather, it represents a socio-cultural practice that is deeply embedded in the everyday lives of Muslim communities across the archipelago. The tradition of Qur'anic recitation ranging from *halaqah* system in Islamic boarding schools to technology-based learning methods reflects a dynamic cultural response to changing times, as well as the embodiment of religious values within the social structure (Supriadi et al., 2022). The diversity of teaching and learning methods indicates that Qur'anic recitation practices are not monolithic, instead, they are shaped by local contexts, communal values, and the educational orientations specific to different social settings (Benmessaoud et al., 2024; Rizvi, 2021).

A notable example is the phenomena of *Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an* (MTQ), which functions not merely as a competitive recitation event but as a cultural festival imbued with symbolic meaning and expressions of religious identity (Rahtikawati & Abdullah Afifi, 2021). MTQ serves as a collective space that integrates religious, aesthetic, and social elements, reinforcing a sense of spiritual solidarity within the community. The practice of Qur'anic recitation in Indonesia emphasizing elements such as *tajwid*, *qira'at*, and melodic rhythm demonstrates an ongoing dialectic between tradition and modernity, as well as between scholarly authority and local cultural expression (Gade, 2004). As such, Qur'anic recitation in Indonesia can be examined as part of the broader construction of Muslim social culture, wherein sacred values are practiced, preserved, and transmitted across generations within a dynamic and evolving social context.

### Qur'anic Studies and Recitation Practices

In Indonesia, Qur'anic learning encompasses a wide range of practices, including recitation, writing, and interpretation. Historically, the early methods of Qur'anic education were primarily oral. This learning typically took place in *langgar* or *surau* (small prayer halls near homes), where teachers would read the Hijaiyah letters aloud, and students would follow by repeating the recitation while pointing to the corresponding letters. This

instructional method is known as the *Baghdadiyah* method which aimed to help students complete their recitation of the Qur'an fluently (Atjeh, 1986; Muhammedi, 2018; Steenbrink & Abdurrahman, 1994).

Over time, Qur'anic recitation pedagogy in Indonesia has evolved significantly. Indonesian Muslims have developed various aspects of Qur'anic literacy beyond simple letter or sound recognition (Supriyadi & Julia, 2019), including improved recitation techniques, memorization (*tahfiz*), and translation skills (Steenbrink & Abdurrahman, 1994). In terms of letter recognition, multiple instructional methods have emerged, including Baghdadiyah and Qira'ati, supported by textbooks such as *Hidayatussiby* and *Tajwid Aplikatif al-Fadl* (Buhaiti & Sari, 2021). Newer recitation methodologies have also been developed, such as *Tilawati*, *Yanbu'a*, and *Ummi* which reflect the continuing efforts of Indonesian Muslims to improve Qur'anic recitation, incorporating elements such as rhythm (*nagham*) and variant readings (*qirā'āt*).

### ***Rhythm in Qur'anic Recitation***

One notable aspect of Qur'anic recitation is the use of rhythm and melody. The art of Qur'anic recitation can involve musical stylization, where verses are recited melodically (Samhani et al., 2022). This practice began with the adoption of recitational melodies from Mecca and Egypt. Although historical accounts vary regarding the exact timeline, it is generally acknowledged that melodic recitation, or *nagham*, began to spread in Indonesia around 1966 CE, when Egyptian officials sent expert Qur'an reciters (*qārī'* plural *qurrā'*) to Indonesia to perform in mosques during Ramadan (Daneshgar, 2021).

From 1966 to 1993 CE, a significant number of Qur'ans printed in the Middle East were introduced to Indonesia, accompanied by popular melodies such as *Banjakah*, *Mayya*, *Rabky*, *Hijaz Sikah*, *Dukkah*, and *Jiharkah*, representing the influence of Meccan recitational culture (Hasan, 2021). From Egypt, *maqamat* like Bayati, *Shoba*, *Rast*, *Sikah*, *Hijaz*, and *Nahawand* were introduced (Masrurin, 2018). In line with these developments, in 1950 CE, the Indonesian religious organization Nahdlatul Ulama established Jamiyyah Qurra' wal Huffaz (JQH) to support and institutionalize Qur'anic recitation, with Kyai Yusuf Rahmat Dawud as one of its founders (Barir, 2016; Masrurin, 2018).

The cultural significance of *nagham* extends beyond aesthetics. It serves as a form of spiritual and artistic education (Kandasi & Sukmayadi, 2024), and helps shape an Islamic identity that is not only textual but also emotional and musical. When recited in melodic tones, the Qur'an can convey the emotional depth and meaning of its verses to listeners. Socially, *nagham* has elevated the status of *qārī'* and *qārī'ah* (male and female reciters), particularly through events such as the Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ), which began on a national level in 1968. Qur'anic reciters with advanced melodic skills often hold respected positions in society and serve as symbols of both religious devotion and cultural achievement (Basuki & Federspiel, 1996; Iryana et al., 2022).

### ***Qirā'at Studies in Indonesia***

The study of the Qur'an in Indonesia also includes the science of *qirā'āt*, or canonical variant recitations passed down from early Islamic scholars. *Qirā'āt* refers to the differing modes of pronunciation of Qur'anic verses, transmitted through authentic narrations from the Prophet Muhammad (Amnesti & Thobroni, 2021). In Indonesia, the most commonly used *qirā'ah* is the narration of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim, which is the standard

recitation referenced in most printed *muṣḥaf* editions. Other *qirā'āt*, such as the seven canonical recitations (*qirā'āt sab'ah*), are rarely practiced due to their complexity (Bensala et al., 2024; Radiansyah & Shakeer, 2023; Syah et al., 2024). Scholars such as KH. Ahsin Sakho have made efforts to make these more advanced *qirā'āt* accessible by removing strict entry requirements and encouraging wider study (M. I. Akbar, 2024). Despite these efforts, alternative *qirā'āt* beyond Ḥaḥṣ and 'Āṣim remain largely unfamiliar to the general Muslim population in Indonesia (Bensala et al., 2024). Nonetheless, select Islamic boarding schools and *tahfiz* institutions do teach other *qirā'āt*, such as Warsh 'an Nāfi' and Qālūn, as part of preserving classical Islamic knowledge.

*Qirā'āt* instruction in Indonesia has both academic and practical dimensions. Events like MTQ regularly feature recitation with various applications of *tajwid* and *qirā'āt* (Ardiansyah et al., 2025). In recent years, Islamic universities have increasingly incorporated *qirā'āt* studies into their curricula (Achmad et al., 2022), including research on the philological and theological implications of these variant recitations. Thus, *qirā'āt* studies in Indonesia not only preserve a rich interpretive tradition but also enhance Muslim understanding of the Qur'an's linguistic and interpretive diversity.

### Historical Development of Qur'anic Manuscripts in Indonesia

The writing of the Qur'an in Indonesia constitutes a distinct field within the broader discourse on the development of local *muṣḥaf* traditions. Prior to the establishment of standardized Indonesian *muṣḥaf* editions, personal copies belonging to scholars or local religious leaders were commonly used in the study and transmission of the Qur'an (Zaini & Azharani, 2021). These early *muṣḥaf* editions were often imported from abroad. Following the advent of printing technology in the Islamic world, printed *muṣḥafs* such as the Bahriyyah Mushaf from Turkey and the Bombay Mushaf from India gained wide circulation among Indonesian Muslims (Kuswandi et al., 2024; Lim, 2024; Muhammad, 2022). Nevertheless, in its early stages, Indonesia remained dependent on foreign imports and faced limitations in producing *muṣḥafs* that reflected the local socio-cultural context.

The Bahriyyah Mushaf was published by a Turkish printing house named Bahriyyah. According to Ali Akbar, a researcher at the Research and Development Agency of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, a copy of the Bahriyyah Mushaf is preserved in the Bayezid Devlet Kütüphanesi (State Library of Bayezid) under collection number V 4119 M (Gallop, 2023). This edition was printed around 1910–1911 CE. It is referred to as Bahriyyah (derived from *baḥr*, meaning “sea”) because of its historical association with the Turkish naval forces (Abbas & Nisa, 2023). This *muṣḥaf* has distinctive features. Each juz consists of exactly 20 pages, with every page corner ending in a complete verse. The first page includes Surah al-Fātiḥah, while the second begins QS. Al-Baqarah and continues up to verse 5. Both pages feature decorative illumination (Muhammad, 2022). The layout comprises 15 lines per page. In terms of orthography, the *madd ṭabī'i* is not marked with a *sukūn*, *idgham* is not marked with a *shaddah*, and *iqḥab* lacks the small *mīm* symbol. The script reflects a blend of Rasm 'Uthmānī and Imlā'ī styles in select words. Additionally, the *ba'* *ḍamir* (pronoun *ba'*) is not annotated with an upright *kasrah* or an inverted *ḍammah* (Muhammad, 2022). This Bahriyyah Mushaf eventually served as a model

manuscript for local printing presses in Indonesia, particularly the well-known Kudus Minaret Press (Percetakan Menara Kudus), which continues to use its format to this day.



**Figure 1.** Bahriyyah Mushaf

In addition to the Bahriyyah Mushaf, another important Qur'anic text widely used in early Indonesian Islamic communities was the Bombay Mushaf (Mustopa et al., 2019). As its name suggests, this *mushaf* traces its origins to India, particularly to the city of Bombay (now Mumbai). The introduction of the Bombay Mushaf to the Indonesian archipelago began with a key figure: Haji Azhari bin Kemas, who is regarded as the pioneer of Qur'an printing in the region, initiating the first printed *mushaf* in 1854 CE. His efforts were reportedly inspired by the Qur'an printing activities in India, which had adopted typesetting technologies earlier than most regions in Southeast Asia (Muhammad, 2022). Later, in 1930 CE, a new phase of Bombay Mushaf dissemination occurred when a group of Arab-Indonesian businessmen including Abdullah bin Afif from Cirebon began printing and distributing the *mushaf* locally (Muhammad, 2022). This development highlights a long-standing dependency on imported Qur'anic texts, as the production of locally standardized *mushaf* had not yet been significantly established. These early efforts marked the beginning of the Qur'an's transition in Indonesia from handwritten copies and oral transmission toward mechanized reproduction and mass accessibility. The Bombay Mushaf, along with the Bahriyyah edition, thus played a foundational role in shaping Indonesia's Qur'anic literacy in the colonial and early post-colonial periods.





Figure 2. Mushaf Bombay

Historically, the Bombay Mushaf was one of the most popular Qur'anic texts among Indonesian Muslims. Its popularity was largely due to its bold, legible script, which despite being densely spaced was perceived as easy to read. In addition, its use of opaque, low-cost paper made it affordable and accessible to all segments of society. The Bombay Mushaf also came in large physical dimensions which further enhanced its appeal as a respectful and dignified object, especially for laypeople (Arifin et al., 2017).

Alongside the Bahriyyah Mushaf, the Bombay edition became one of the earliest and most widely used printed Qur'ans in the Indonesian archipelago. These two *mushaf* served as primary references for Qur'anic recitation, study, and memorization during the formative period of modern Islamic education in Indonesia (Pink, 2023). However, despite their wide circulation, the lack of a nationally standardized Qur'anic text remained a concern. Scholars and institutions began to emphasize the need for Indonesia to develop its own *mushaf* standard to ensure textual consistency, orthographic accuracy, and alignment with local religious and linguistic contexts (Gade, 2004). This historical trajectory demonstrates that a *mushaf* is not merely a textual object but also a symbolic representation of religious identity, epistemic authority, and the shaping of the community's religious habitus. The development and circulation of printed *mushaf* such as the Bombay and Bahriyyah editions were instrumental in forming the visual, ritual, and scholarly frameworks through which Indonesian Muslims engaged with the Qur'an.

### *Urgency of Standardizing Indonesian Qur'an*

The majority of scholars agree that the written preservation of the Qur'an must follow certain established principles to maintain its authenticity and uniformity. There are several core reasons underlying the necessity for a standardized *muṣḥaf*, particularly in the Indonesian context. *First*, the Rasm 'Uthmānī (Uthmanic orthography) is the writing system that was collectively endorsed by the Prophet's Companions (Madzkur, 2012). *Second*, *muṣḥaf* writing must conform to Rasm 'Uthmānī, rather than using Rasm *Imlā'ī* (modern Arabic orthography), which lacks uniformity in certain aspects of diacritical and orthographic representation (Widyaningsih & Niam, 2024). *Third*, adhering to Rasm 'Uthmānī is viewed as a safeguard for the textual authenticity of the Qur'an (Syayfi et al., 2024). *Fourth*, this rasm is also considered a prerequisite for the acceptance of a particular mode of recitation (*qirā'ah*) (Effendi, 2021).

In light of these considerations, the Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf al-Qur'an (Qur'an Verification Committee), under the coordination of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Indonesia, convened a series of national scholarly meetings (Musyawarah Kerja Ulama al-Qur'an, abbreviated as Muker). These meetings aimed to discuss and formalize the need for a nationally standardized Qur'an. As a result, during the 9th Muker held in February 1983, the idea to produce a Standard Indonesian *Muṣḥaf* materialized. This initiative produced three official editions of the standardized Qur'an, each with specific purposes and designations (Harun, 2016), namely (1) The Standard Usmani Mushaf, intended for general use by the sighted; (2) The Bahriyyah Mushaf, designed for those who have memorized the Qur'an (*ḥuffāẓ*); and (3) and The Braille Mushaf, intended for visually impaired readers. All three editions share four standardized elements, those are the style of writing (rasm), use of diacritical marks (*ḥarakāt*), punctuation, and *waqf* (pause) symbols (Arifin et al., 2017).

In terms of structure, the Standard Indonesian Mushaf contains all 114 surahs, divided into 30 juz, comprising 60 *ḥizb* (each *ḥizb* containing four *rub'*), and a total of 6,236 verses (Al-Dani, 1994). From a scriptural standpoint, the standard *muṣḥaf* refers to the 1960 edition published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which had earlier relied on the orthographic conventions of the Bombay Mushaf (Hanafi, 2019). The official diacritical system used in Indonesia was established through the Second Muker in 1976, which compared various *ḥarakāt* styles used internationally, then selected the forms that were most familiar and accepted by the Indonesian public (Arifin et al., 2017).

The fundamental reason behind this standardization effort was to address the practical needs of the Indonesian Muslim community: a uniform *muṣḥaf* that was “easy to read, understand, and consistent nationwide” (Nadhiroh & Supriansyah, 2024). It also served as a crucial step in promoting Qur'anic literacy, preventing misreadings, and overcoming inconsistencies caused by varied and unregulated textual traditions. Although initially limited to the three main formats (Usmani, Bahriyyah, and Braille) (Arifin et al., 2017), in early 2021, the Ministry of Religious Affairs introduced a new format, the Mushaf Qur'an Isyarat (MQI), designed for deaf users using sign language notation. This expansion reflects Indonesia's growing commitment to inclusive access to the Qur'an across diverse segments of society.

### ***Indonesian Standard Muṣḥaf***



The Bahriyyah Mushaf, used primarily by Qur'an memorizers (*ḥuffāẓ*), originates from Turkey and was later popularized in Indonesia by figures such as KH. Ahmad Damanhuri of Malang (Nuha, 2021). When examined using the six canonical rules of Rasm 'Uthmānī, this *muṣṣhaf* does not fully conform to the standard (Hizbullah et al., 2016). It applies only one rule, namely the *badal* rule (letter substitution). Scholars have therefore classified it as a hybrid of Rasm 'Uthmānī and Rasm Imlā'ī, meaning that while certain words follow traditional 'Uthmānī orthography, others conform to simplified spelling conventions (A. Akbar, 2020). In terms of diacritical marks (*ḥarakāt*), the Bahriyyah Mushaf uses the same system as the *Standard 'Uthmānī Mushaf*, and this system is also adopted in the *Braille Standard Mushaf* (Hanafi, 2019).

The *Braille Standard Mushaf* developed by the Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf al-Qur'an is a specialized version designed for blind or visually impaired readers. It uses Braille (an embossed six-dot cell pattern) arranged in two vertical columns, resembling the configuration of a domino tile (Jaeni, 2020). Beyond its tactile writing system, this *muṣṣhaf* has distinct features in terms of *rasm*, punctuation, and *waqf* marks (Jaeni, 2015). Unlike earlier Braille Qur'ans from Jordan, Egypt, and Pakistan (which used Rasm Imlā'ī), Indonesia's Braille Standard Mushaf adopts Rasm 'Uthmānī, following the resolution of the Third Ulama Conference in 1977. However, certain complex parts are written using Imlā'ī rules to ensure ease of comprehension for readers (Shalihah, 2022).

In terms of *ḥarakāt* and punctuation, the Braille Standard Mushaf places vowel markers (*syakl*) after the consonants, while signs such as *tashdīd* are written before the consonants they affect (Madzkur et al., 2024). Compared to the Bahriyyah Mushaf, the Braille version does not place a *ḥarakah* before letters of *mad*, and it incorporates extended vowels using *ḥarakāt ishba'iyah*, aligning with the conventions of the Standard 'Uthmānī Mushaf (Madzkur et al., 2024).

Regarding *tajwīd*-related punctuation, the Braille Mushaf only includes two key signs (Nur Adzam Rasdi et al., 2021). The use of *tashdīd* to indicate *idghām* applies only when the two words occur within a single verse; it is not used when *idghām* spans the end of one verse and the beginning of another. For *waqf* marks, the Braille Standard Mushaf uses the same system as the 'Uthmānī version, though it simplifies some compound *waqf* symbols into singular ones. As a result, the visual and structural presentation of the Braille Mushaf differs significantly from the Standard 'Uthmānī Mushaf (Jaeni, 2020).

Collectively, these three mushaf—'Uthmānī, Bahriyyah, and Braille—not only illustrate differences in orthography and format but also reflect Indonesia's commitment to inclusive Qur'anic literacy. They ensure that Qur'anic access and understanding extend to various communities, including *ḥuffāẓ*, the visually impaired, and individuals with special needs. To further illustrate the technical differences and accessibility scope of each version, the following section includes a comparative table of the three manuscripts (Nureni et al., 2024).

**Table 1.** Comparative Overview of Key Features of the *Uthmānī*, *Bahriyyah*, and *Braille Muṣṣhaf*

No.	Aspect	Uthmānī Muṣṣhaf	Bahriyyah Muṣṣhaf	Braille Muṣṣhaf
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1.	Writing System	Rasm ‘Uthmānī (6 standardized rules)	A hybrid of Rasm ‘Uthmānī and Imlā’ (only for substitutions)	Rasm ‘Uthmānī with specific adaptations for tactile reading)
2.	Harakāt	Based on <i>tajwīd</i> standards; placed above/below letters	Identical to Ottoman standards	Positioned after the letter (except <i>tashdīd</i> ; placed before)
3.	<i>Waqf</i> Signs	Comprehensive, multi-symbol system	Same as Ottoman tradition	Simplified; one symbol per sign
4.	<i>Tajwīd</i> Signs	Complete ( <i>idghām</i> , <i>iqḷāb</i> , etc.)	Identical to Ottoman tradition	Limited to <i>idghām</i> (restricted use) and <i>tashdīd</i>
5.	Writing Medium	Standard ink on paper	Standard ink on paper	Braille (raised dots)
6.	Accessibility	General readership	Students and <i>ḥuffāz</i> (Qur’an memorizers)	Visually impaired individuals
7.	Publisher	LPMQ and national Islamic publishers	KH. Ahmad Damanhuri, Islamic Boarding School	LPMQ, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia
8.	Primary Purpose	General recitation and formal use	To support memorization processes	Facilitating Qur’anic literacy for the blind

These three, as shown in table 1 above, *muṣḥaf* represent key milestones in Indonesia’s endeavor to ensure inclusive and comprehensive access to the Qur’an. Each type serves a specific segment of the Muslim community, reflecting the country’s commitment to diversity in Qur’anic literacy and pedagogy. In addition to the Braille Mushaf, recent developments have introduced a fourth official variant: the Signed Qur’an Manuscript (MQI). This version is specifically designed for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) community and reflects an ongoing pursuit of equitable religious access for all.

The Signed Qur’an Manuscript (MQI), developed by the Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf al-Qur’an (LPMQ), addresses the educational and spiritual needs of individuals with hearing and speech impairments. This group is often marginalized in Islamic literacy efforts (Kuswandi et al., 2024). The MQI is tailored to the communicative and cognitive needs of DHH users. It incorporates visual-kinesthetic learning strategies that bridge Qur’anic text with sign communication, enabling a more inclusive approach to the sacred text. A notable feature includes a visual guide to *ḥurūf hijā’iyyah* (Arabic letters) adapted for

sign-based pedagogy. The existence of such diverse Indonesian Standard Mushaf, each grounded in scholarly deliberation and contextual adaptation, demonstrates Indonesia's ongoing dedication to the study and transmission of the Qur'an. This includes not only recitation (*tilāwah*), but also writing (*kitabab*), translation (*tarjamah*), and interpretation (*tafsīr*), marking a significant transformation in Qur'anic methodology across time and audience.

### Transformation of Qur'anic Interpretation in Indonesia

The interpretation of the Qur'an in Indonesia has undergone significant developments across centuries, both in terms of delivery, thematic focus, and exegetical style. The earliest known written tafsir in the region dates back to the 16th century, evidenced by a manuscript on the interpretation of QS. al-Kahf: 9, discovered in Aceh (Latif, 2020). A century later, a more comprehensive exegetical work appeared: *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by Abdur Rauf Singkili. This work is widely recognized as the first complete tafsir of all 30 juz in the archipelago, setting a significant precedent for later exegetical traditions. It remained a primary reference in Indonesian Qur'anic scholarship for several centuries. Scholars generally agree that *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* was a translation and adaptation of *Tafsīr al-Bayḍawī*, and was later followed by similar efforts such as the translation of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Husna et al., 2023; Syamsu, 2018).

In the 19th century, another important work emerged: *Tafsīr al-Munīr* by Imam Nawawi al-Bantani, an Indonesian scholar based in Mecca. Although authored by a native of Indonesia, the tafsir was introduced in Mecca, reviewed by scholars in Mecca and Medina, and later printed in Indonesia. *Tafsīr al-Munīr* is notable for being the first Indonesian-authored tafsir in Arabic during the 19th century. The work is concise and methodical, incorporating linguistic, socio-historical, cultural, and rational approaches to interpretation. It also integrates elements of *fiqh*, *kalām*, Arabic grammar, and *tasawwuf*, offering a multifaceted contribution to the modern exegetical landscape (Ihsan et al., 2024). In the same century, a brief tafsir in Malay-Jawi titled *Farā'id al-Qur'ān* was written by KH. Mahfudh bin Abdullah al-Tarmasi. Though short and article-like in structure, KH. Mahfudh's contribution is significant due to his role in the international scholarly network of Mecca (Gusmian, 2021).

Regarding the development of tafsir in the 20th century, scholars differ in their periodization. Nikmah outlines three major views on this matter. Islah Gusmian, building upon Federspiel's earlier framework, proposes a tripartite division. The *first period* (early 1900s to 1960s), characterized by simple exegetical writings. The *second period* (1970s–1980s), marked by a rise in legalistic interpretations. The *third period* (1990s onward), associated with methodological innovations and academic specialization (Nikmah, 2021).

In the first period (1900s–1960s), tafsir works were categorized into three types, those are interpretations of selected surahs, selected juz, and full 30 juz commentaries (Amin, 2021). Some of these were collaborative efforts. Notable examples include *Al-Burhan: Tafsīr Juz 'Amma* by H. Abdul Karim, *Al-Hidayah: Tafsīr Juz 'Amma* by A. Hassan, and *Tafsīr al-Qur'an* al-Karim by H. Mahmud Yunus. The second period (1970s–1980s) showed greater emphasis on legal verses (*āyāt al-ahkām*), although many works still mirrored the style of the first period. Key publications include *Tafsīr al-Azhar* by HAMKA, *Samudra*

*al-Fatihah* by Bey Arifin, and *Konten Surah Yasin* by Mahfudin Sahli. The third period (1990s onward) witnessed a surge of creativity and methodological expansion in Indonesian Qur'anic interpretation. Many academic dissertations began focusing specifically on Qur'anic studies (Bakar & Haqqi, 2022), often employing the thematic method (*tafsir mawdu'i*), which organizes interpretation around particular subjects or concepts. Notable works from this period include *Tafsir bil Ma'tsur: Pesan Moral Alquran* by Jalaluddin Rakhmat, *Menyelami Kebebasan Manusia: Sebuah Studi Kritis terhadap Konsepsi Al-Quran* by Muchasin, and *Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Harmoni Al-Quran* by M. Quraish Shihab (Amin, 2021).

### **Indonesian Style of Qur'anic Interpretation**

The urgency of developing a distinctly Indonesian style of Qur'anic interpretation arises from the fact that Qur'anic verses are often delivered in general, universal terms. According to M. Quraish Shihab, one effective method of interpretation is to contextualize the Qur'an through the literary and cultural framework of the local community, an approach initially introduced by Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905). This method seeks to elucidate Qur'anic guidance in ways that are directly relevant to everyday societal experiences. Consequently, the Qur'an becomes a responsive source of solutions for various contemporary social phenomena.

Without intentional adaptation to the local context, the universal messages of the Qur'an may remain abstract or inaccessible. This may explain why certain religious practices in Indonesian society appear disconnected from explicit Qur'anic sources. For instance, the declining practice of *zakāt* in some Indonesian communities can be attributed to the limited interpretive courage to redefine *zakāt* assets in accordance with modern Indonesian realities. Many still adhere to *zakāt* categories modeled exclusively after the socio-economic context of early Arab society (Dewi & Muhammad, 2022).

Hamka strongly advocated for a distinctive Indonesian interpretation of the Qur'an, often referred to as *adabi ijtima'i* or a sociocultural-ethical approach. In the introduction to his *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, he explained that the work was composed in response to the new realities of Indonesia as a Muslim-majority country that was eager to rediscover religious guidance and gain a deeper understanding of the Qur'an. Therefore, the tafsir avoids sectarian polemics and does not promote rigid adherence to a single school of thought. Instead, Hamka seeks to clarify the meanings of verses, translate Arabic terms into accessible Indonesian, and provide readers with the space to reflect and interpret independently.

### **Systematic Approaches to Qur'anic Interpretation**

The development of systematic Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia has given rise to various works that emphasize specific surahs or provide full coverage of the Qur'an. One example of focused interpretation is found in exegetical works on Sūrah al-Fāṭihah, including *Tafsir al-Qur'anul Karim, Surat al-Fatihah* (Jakarta, Widjaja, 1955) by Muhammad Nur Idris, and *Rahasia Ummul Qur'an atau Tafsir Surat al-Fatihah* (Jakarta, Institut Indonesia, 1956), along with other similar works (Aisa, 2024).

In addition to partial commentaries, systematic interpretation of the entire Qur'an has also emerged. One early example is *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim Bahasa Indonesia* by Mahmud Yunus, completed in 1938. Later, A. Hassan published his work *Tafsir al-Furqan Tafsir al-Qur'an*, initially released in sections. In 1958, Hamka produced a full 30-juz commentary

titled *Tafsir al-Azhar*. This tafsir originated from his dawn lectures at the al-Azhar Mosque in Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta. He began writing from Surah al-Kahfi, juz 15, in 1962. However, on January 27, 1964, Hamka was arrested by the Old Order government (Pemerintah Orde Lama) on charges of political subversion. Ironically, his two-year imprisonment became a productive period, during which he completed the commentary for all 30 juz. The work was eventually published in 1967.

The development of systematic tafsir continued in the following decades through the works of M. Quraish Shihab, a prominent Indonesian Qur'anic scholar. His interpretive approach combines two main models (Aisyah, 2025). *First*, the thematic method, which organizes interpretation based on specific topics or societal issues (Syukkur, 2020). This method is evident in several of his books such as *Membumikan Al-Qur'an: Fungsi dan Peran Wahyu dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat* (1992), *Lentera Hati: Kisah dan Hikmah Kehidupan* (1994), and *Wawasan Al-Qur'an* (1996), among others. *Second*, comprehensive interpretation, which involves systematic commentary on the entire Qur'an from beginning to end (Ainun et al., 2023). This model is represented in his magnum opus *Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan dan Kesesuaian Ayat-Ayat al-Qur'an*. The distinction between these two approaches lies in their structure. The thematic method responds to specific contemporary issues by grouping relevant verses under a unifying theme, while the comprehensive method interprets the verses sequentially according to the standard arrangement of the *Uthmani mushaf*. The following section provides a comparative table outlining these two models of Indonesian Qur'anic interpretation in terms of approach, scope, and characteristic features.

**Table 2.** Models and Systematics of Qur'anic Interpretation in Indonesia

No	Scholar	Title of Work	Year	Approach/ Method	Characteristics /Systematics
1	Muhammad Nur Idris	<i>Tafsir al-Qur'anul Karim, Surah al-Fatihah</i>	1955	Thematic (focus on Surah al-Fatihah)	Emphasizes selected verses, presented systematically
2	KH. Mahfud bin Abdullah al-Tarmasi	<i>Rahasia Ummul Qur'an atau Tafsir Surat al-Fatihah</i>	1956	Thematic (focus on Surah al-Fatihah)	Explores the depth and status of al-Fāṭiḥah as the “mother of the Book”
3	Mahmud Yunus	<i>Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim Bahasa Indonesia</i>	1938	<i>Tafsir Tablithi</i> (complete 30 juz)	Among the earliest complete Qur'anic commentaries written in Indonesian
4	A. Hassan	<i>Tafsir al-Furqan</i>	Published per juz	<i>Tafsir Tablithi</i> (complete 30 juz)	Released in stages, adopts a rationalist interpretive approach



5	Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA)	<i>Tafsir al-Azhar</i>	1962–1967	<i>Tafsir Tablith</i> (complete 30 juz)	Originated from public lectures; completed during imprisonment; stylistically literary and context-sensitive
6	M. Quraish Shihab	<i>Membumikan Al-Qur'an, Wawasan Al-Qur'an, Lentera Hati</i>	1992–1996	Thematic	Responds to contemporary socio-religious issues; organized around thematic clusters
7	M. Quraish Shihab	<i>Tafsir al-Mishbah</i>	2000s	<i>Tafsir Tablith</i> (complete 30 juz)	Sequential interpretation based on Ottoman manuscript order; communicative, contextual, with linguistic depth

These developments, as shown in table 2 above, reflect the dynamic nature of Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia, both in terms of models and methodology. As the country with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia continues to encounter diverse challenges and contexts that shape its religious discourse. Consequently, the approaches and frameworks used to interpret the Qur'an will evolve in tandem with the shifting needs of Indonesian Muslim society.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the methodological transformation of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia which has evolved significantly from oral tradition to written interpretation. This transformation encompasses three key domains: recitation, writing, and interpretation of the Qur'an. Oral traditions such as the Baghdadiyyah method, Qira'ati, and the practice of *nagham* reflect the deep internalization of Qur'anic values within the cultural life of Indonesian Muslim communities. In the realm of writing, the transition from early mushaf such as the Bahriyyah and Bombay editions to the standardized Indonesian Mushaf including Braille and Sign language versions demonstrates both national and communal efforts to preserve textual authenticity while ensuring inclusive access across diverse groups.

In terms of interpretation, the contributions of archipelagic scholars such as Abdur Rauf Singkili, HAMKA, and M. Quraish Shihab illustrate a continuous effort to contextualize the Qur'anic message within Indonesia's unique socio-cultural realities. Indonesian tafsir has progressed not only in terms of methodological orientation (e.g.,

*tahlili*, thematic, and systematic approaches) but also in adopting contextual and communicative styles that respond to contemporary issues with reflective local insight.

Despite its findings, this study has certain limitations, particularly in addressing interdisciplinary aspects of tafsir, such as gender analysis, eco-theological readings, and socio-political interpretations, which were not the primary focus. Moreover, the relationship between the Qur'anic text and Indonesia's diverse local cultures still requires deeper thematic exploration. Future research should be directed toward strengthening thematic interpretations grounded in local contexts and present-day challenges, using hermeneutic and participatory approaches. Such efforts are essential to reaffirm the role of the Qur'an as a dynamic and solution-oriented source of guidance for Indonesian Muslims culturally, socially, and spiritually in the modern era.

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**Alniatul Fadilah:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Resources, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft, and Writing. **Abu Bakar:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Visualization, Validation, and Writing. **Nafi' Mubarak:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Transliteration and Proofreading. **Ibrahim Nasrullah Kholid:** Proofreading and review-editing.

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

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