

# Comparing Tafsir Methodologies in Al-Itqan, Al Burhan, and Manahil al - Irfan

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses the differences in the definition and classification of the methodology of tafsir in the three main works of 'ulum al-Qur'an, namely *Al-Burhān* (al-Zarkasyī), *Al-Itqān* (al-Suyūṭī), and *Manāhil al-'Irfān* (al-Zarqānī). This study aims to map the meeting points and differences in conceptual emphasis on the boundaries of the terms of tafsir and ta'wil as well as the direction of grouping methodological tools. The method used is library research with a qualitative-descriptive approach and comparative content analysis of primary sources. The results show that there is a similarity in the purpose of interpretation as an explanation of the meaning of the Qur'an but differs in epistemic emphasis and formulation strategies. The discussion emphasizes that the methodology of interpretation in the classical tradition is not always present as a list of modern methods, but as a structure of scientific tools that direct the practice of interpretation.

## Introduction

The study of the interpretation of the Qur'an in the last five years shows increasingly dense dynamics, both at the level of research production and the debate on interpretation approaches. Scopus-based bibliometric mapping (1974-2023), for example, recorded 904 publications, involving 1,807 authors, and a total of 35,873 citations in *the Qur'anic Studies* and Commentaries, indicating that this field continues to grow and become more competitive (Ayuni et al., 2023). This growth has academic consequences: as publications increase, the need to ensure conceptual order and methodological accuracy is also increasingly urgent so that interpretive research does not stop at summaries, but has an analytical footing that can be tested and accounted for (Ayuni et al., 2023).

However, the methodological debate on interpretation in the academic and public spaces is also strengthening, especially in the tug of war of textual and contextual approaches. A 2024 article asserts that text-based interpretation controversies alone, without considering historical-sociocultural contexts, often trigger misunderstandings and can even be exploited to justify extreme actions; while the contextual approach offers the relevance of the Qur'anic value to modern challenges but is often accused of compromising the authenticity of the text (Santono et al., 2024). A similar discourse is also seen in international studies that emphasize that a contextual approach can help the ummah follow the ethical teachings of the Qur'an according to the needs of the times without giving up the fundamental values of the Qur'an (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). This situation shows that the "method of interpretation" is not a fringe issue, but rather a node that affects the direction of argumentation, the validity of claims, and the social impact of interpretation. (Santono et al., 2024)

In the Indonesian context, the sensitivity of the interpretation methodology is also seen in socio-political themes such as non-Muslim leadership. The article QIJIS (2021) which is recorded as Sinta 1 accredited shows how different interpretation approaches can produce more conditional and contextual

conclusions regarding awliyā' verses when compared to inter-mufasir (Kholid et al, 2021). This example confirms that the accuracy of the terms, the framework of the method, and the way in which the interpretation is classified also determine the outcome (and acceptance) of the interpretation argument (Kholid et al, 2021).

Conceptually, the discussion of "interpretation methodology" in this article is understood as a tool that explains how interpretation works (principles, sources, steps, and orientation) so that interpretation can be traced to its epistemic basis and tested for consistency. The need to distinguish approaches (e.g. textual-contextual) and explain the reasons for their choice is important because non-explicit approaches tend to give rise to a reading of each other blaming each other without a clear standard of evaluation (Santono et al., 2024). At the level of approach development, offers such as *maqāṣidī tafsīr* affirm that the methodology of tafsir can be formulated as an attempt to display "divine intent" and connect Qur'anic values with contemporary contexts in a directed way, rather than simply choosing literal or extreme contexts (Wijaya & Muzammil, 2021).

In the tradition of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, the theoretical foundation of the methodology of tafsir is often referred to the master works that map the sciences of the Qur'an, including the discussion of tafsir and its devices. Therefore, this study makes *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, and *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* as primary references to read how definitions and classifications related to the methodology of interpretation are built in three important axes of the transmission of knowledge of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. (This designation departs from the academic need to trace the roots of definitions and categories, so that contemporary debate does not drift without foundation.)

A key issue that drives this research is that the term "methodology of interpretation" is often used in academic writings, but its definitions and classifications are not always consistent between references, even in the *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* tradition itself. When definitions are not mapped and classifications are not compared, interpretive research is at risk: (1) mixing up categories, (2) weak in method justification, and (3) difficult for readers to test because the categorization standards are unclear (Santono et al., 2024). This condition is becoming increasingly important to study as the productivity of research in the field of interpretation increases, because the growth of publications without sharpening the methodological framework can increase the duplication of themes and weaken their scientific contributions (Ayuni et al., 2023).

The last five years of research have highlighted a lot of interpretive problems in social themes and textual-contextual debates, both at the conceptual level and their social implications (Santono et al., 2024). In Indonesia, studies have also shown how different interpretation approaches affect conclusions on certain actual issues (Kholid et al, 2021). However, the direction of the study generally does not focus on systematic internal comparisons regarding: (a) how the three key works of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* define tafsir (and its close terms), and (b) how each classifies the methodology/type of interpretive approach as a basic conceptual tool. This gap is what this study aims to fill, so that readers have a neat map of the differences and common points between primary references before stepping into the contemporary interpretation debate.

This study uses a library research approach with a comparative-analysis strategy. Primary data in the form of texts *Al-Itqān*, *Al-Burhān*, and *Manāhil al-'Irfān* were read to identify (1) the definition of tafsir and (2) the classification methodology/interpretation approach used by each work. Secondary data in the form of cutting-edge journal articles were used to capture the urgency of contemporary methodological interpretive problems and place research findings in the context of the latest discourse (Ayuni et al., 2023).

Against the above background, this research is urgent because it provides a more orderly conceptual foundation for the study of interpretation, especially for learners who do not have a background in Qur'an studies in order to understand and use the term "methodology of interpretation" consistently and can be tested (Santono et al., 2024). The objectives of this study are: (1) to compare the definitions of tafsir used in *Al-Itqān*, *Al-Burhān*, and *Manāhil al-'Irfān*; (2) mapping the classification

of the methodology of interpretation in the three works; and (3) explain its academic implications for the formulation of the methodology of tafsir research at the postgraduate level, so that its contribution not only enriches the theory of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* but also helps the practice of more responsible research and learning of tafsir (Ayuni et al., 2023).

## Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with the type of library research because the object of study is in the form of concepts and thought structures contained in the text, not field phenomena that require quantitative measurement. The focus of the research is directed at the comparison of the definition and classification of the methodology of interpretation as presented in the three works of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, so that the most relevant design is the descriptive-comparative analysis of the text.

The data collection technique is carried out through literature and documentation studies, namely tracing the relevant parts in *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, and *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* to obtain citations of definitions, key terms, and forms of grouping or categories used by each author when discussing their interpretation and methodological tools. The source of research data consists of primary data in the form of the three books, while secondary data is in the form of journal articles and books in Indonesian and English in the last five years which are relevant to provide context for the development of interpretive methodology discourse and help the placement of research findings in the contemporary study landscape.

The research procedure is carried out sequentially starting from the planning stage, namely establishing the comparative focus (definition and classification), determining the unit of analysis (definition formulation, methodological terms, and categorization/classification structure), and preparing a data recording format. The next stage is data collection through intensive reading and systematic recording of relevant parts in primary sources. Next, the data was analyzed using content analysis by reducing the data to select representative quotes, grouping findings based on themes (e.g., the source base of interpretation, how interpretation works, or orientation/pattern), and then comparing the similarities and differences between books. The final stage is the drawing of conclusions in the form of mapping common points and the main differences in the definition and classification of interpretation methodologies, with their implications for strengthening the methodological framework of interpretation research at the postgraduate level. This study does not use correlation tests or statistical tests because it does not process numerical variables but examines the conceptual structure in the text qualitatively.

## Result

This research shows that the three books of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*—*Al-Itqān*, *Al-Burhān*, and *Manāhil al-'Irfān* have the same purpose in the discussion of tafsir as an effort to explain the meaning of the Qur'an through linguistic tools, history, and rules, but show differences in the emphasis on the definition and use of the term *tafsīr-ta'wīl* and how to organize the methodological tool. In contemporary literature that narrates the distinction of terms, *ta'wīl* is often explained as a meaning that is not directly expressed, while *tafsīr* is understood as a broader explanation by considering the historical-cultural context (Markos & Aqilah, 2023). A comparative summary of the definitions, term limits, and methodological grouping characters of the three books is presented in the table:

Table 1: Summary of the comparison of the methodology of interpretation

Books	Tafsir (core definition)	Ta'wil (core definition)	Characteristics & direction of classification
Al-Burhān(Az-Zarkasyī)	Understanding the Qur'an, explaining its meaning, exploring the law/wisdom.	Closer to dirāyah/istinbāṭ (the reasoning of scholars).	The nuances of uṣūl-fiqh are strong; the

Books	Tafsir (core definition)	Ta'wil (core definition)	Characteristics & direction of classification
			ijtihād/istinbāt device stands out.
<b>Al-Itqān</b> (Al-Suyūṭī)	The general definition is similar; the compendium of <i>the 'ulūm al-Qur'ān</i> apparatus for tafsir.	The term multi-meaning ta'wil (various uses)	Compilative-encyclopedic; Summarize & organize many themes.
<b>Manāhil al-'Irfān</b> (Az-Zarqānī)	Explain the meaning of the Qur'an according to human ability (epistemic sign).	In the tradition of muta'akhhirīn: turning away from the meaning of zahir because of the evidence.	More systematic-modern; argumentative and pedagogical in tone.

**Source:** processed from primary sources *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (al-Zarkasyī), *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (al-Suyūṭī), and *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (al-Zarqānī), as well as supporting literature of Markos, Arrasyid, & Aqilah (2023)

In terms of methodological classification, the results of the study show that contemporary studies generally use an operational framework to read the "manhaj" of interpretation, especially based on interpretive sources (e.g. bi al-ma'thūr/riwāyah and bi al-ra'y/dirāyah) (Toedien & Alwizar, 2024) and based on presentation methods such as ijāmālī, tahlīlī, maudhu'ī, and muqāran (Toedien & Alwizar, 2024) In particular, the findings on primary objects indicate: *Al-Itqān* appears compilative-encyclopedic, *Al-Burhān* serves as the foundation for mapping the discipline of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, and *Manāhil al-'Irfān* emphasizes a systematic presentation that is close to the needs of modern readers; *Manāhil*'s orientation as a work that starts from the issue of epistemology of revelation and responses to accusations/criticism discussed in the study (Haromaini, 2021).

## Discussions

The findings in Table 1 show that the "methodology of interpretation" in the classical works of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* does not always present as a uniform list of modern methods but often appears as the author's way of arranging scientific tools to support interpretation. Therefore, a comparison of the definitions and boundaries of the term *tafsīr-ta'wīl* is important: the distinctions prevalent in contemporary literature (ta'wīl as an unexpressed meaning; tafsīr as a broader and contextual explanation) help non-specialist readers grasp why the three books differ in nuances when positioning the roles of riwāyah, dirāyah, and rule (Markos & Aqilah, 2023).

Furthermore, the use of operational classification frameworks (based on sources: riwāyah/dirāyah; and based on methods: ijāmālī-tahlīlī-maudhu'ī-muqāran) makes comparative mapping more consistent and verifiable, while keeping the reading of the three books relevant to contemporary academic needs (Toedien & Alwizar, 2024; Yahya et al., 2022) Thus, the novelty of this research lies in a comparative mapping that links the structure of definitions in the three major references of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* with an operational classification framework, so that the reader obtains a concise but argumentative picture of the methodological direction of each book.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that *Al-Burhān*, *Al-Itqān*, and *Manāhil al-'Irfān* have the same goal in explaining tafsir as an attempt to understand the meaning of the Qur'an but show a difference in emphasis on the limits of the term *tafsīr-ta'wīl* and the way of arranging its methodological apparatus. *Al-Burhān* tends to emphasize a methodological character that is close to the dirāyah/istinbāt device, *Al-Itqān* appears as a compendium that gathers and synthetizes the various themes of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, while *Manāhil al-*

*ʿIrḥān* emphasizes epistemic signs "according to human ability" and a more systematic presentation of modern academic needs. These findings confirm that the methodology of interpretation in the *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān tradition* does not always present as a uniform list of modern methods, but rather as a conceptual structure that directs the work of interpretation.

Based on these results, this study suggests that students and novice researchers first determine the working definition and limits of the term *tafsīr-taʿwīl* used and choose a clear classification framework (e.g. based on *riwāyah/dirāyah* sources or based on presentation methods), so that the reading of the tafsir literature is more consistent and verifiable. This study also suggests that the teaching of interpretation methodology at the postgraduate level includes comparative mapping exercises based on primary references, so that students understand that the difference in methods is not only a matter of labels but also related to the strategy of structuring the scientific apparatus and the epistemic limits of interpretation.

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