The Transformation of Qira'at in Classical Tafsir:
A Comparative Study of Middle Eastern and Nusantara Manuscripts

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ABSTRACT

The study of *qira'at* (variant Quranic readings) in classical exegesis is a significant aspect of Qur'anic studies, as differences in recitation can influence the interpretation of verses. This research explores how variations in *qira'at* found in classical tafsir manuscripts from the Middle East and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago (Nusantara) shape distinct exegetical patterns. Employing library research methods with philological and comparative approaches, this study analyzes several classical tafsir manuscripts, including *Tafsir al-Qurṭubī*, *Tafsir al-Ṭabarī*, *Tafsir Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, and *Tafsir al-Ibrīz*. The findings reveal that *qira'at* not only create interpretive diversity but also influence the methodology of tafsir. Middle Eastern manuscripts tend to emphasize linguistic analysis and transmission chains (*isnād*), while Nusantara tafsir integrates *qira'at* with local cultural wisdom. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of *qira'at*-based interpretation and the intellectual transformation of Islamic scholarship across civilizations.

Keywords: *Qira'at, Classical Tafsir, Manuscripts, Middle East, Nusantara*

ABSTRAK

Kajian qira'at dalam tafsir klasik merupakan bagian penting dalam studi Al-Qur'an, karena perbedaan bacaan dapat memengaruhi pemahaman makna ayat. Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana variasi qira'at dalam manuskrip tafsir klasik dari Timur Tengah dan Nusantara memengaruhi corak penafsiran yang berkembang. Dengan menggunakan metode studi pustaka dan pendekatan filologi serta komparatif, analisis dilakukan terhadap beberapa manuskrip tafsir, seperti *Tafsir al-Qurthubi*, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, dan *Tafsir al-Ibriz*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa qira'at tidak hanya menciptakan variasi makna, tetapi juga membentuk metode tafsir yang khas. Manuskrip Timur Tengah lebih menitikberatkan pada aspek linguistik dan sanad, sedangkan tafsir Nusantara menggabungkan qira'at dengan unsur budaya lokal. Studi ini memperkaya pemahaman tentang pengaruh qira'at dalam tafsir serta transformasi keilmuan Islam dalam konteks lintas budaya.

Kata Kunci: *Qira'at, Tafsir Klasik, Manuskrip, Timur Tengah, Nusantara.*

INTRODUCTION

The study of *qira'at* (variant readings) in classical *tafsir* is a crucial aspect of Qur'anic studies. *Qira'at*, or variations in the recitation of the Qur'an, are not only related to phonetics but also have a wide-ranging impact on the interpretation of verses and exegetical methodology (Zulaeha & Dikron, 2020). As *tafsir* studies evolved across different regions of the Islamic world, especially in the Middle East and the Nusantara (Malay Archipelago), distinct approaches emerged in adapting and interpreting *qira'at* in classical exegesis.

Islam, as a religion that has spread across various regions of the world, underwent a dynamic process of knowledge transmission. In the Middle East, classical *tafsir* developed with a strong philological approach and strict *isnād* (chain of transmission) criticism. In contrast, in the Nusantara, classical *tafsir* often contextualized Islamic teachings with local culture and indigenous wisdom (Malik, 2022). This study, therefore, seeks to explore how differences in *qira'at* within classical *tafsir* manuscripts influence the meaning of verses and how the exegetical styles in both regions adapt to such reading variations.

Qira'at is an integral part of Qur'anic studies. Since the time of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, variations in recitation have been accepted as part of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Arab world. However, during the codification of the Qur'an under Caliph Uthman ibn Affan, a standardization of the Qur'anic text and its recitation was undertaken to prevent division among Muslims. Despite this, several *qira'at* variants persisted and were recognized within both Sunni and Shia traditions, such as those transmitted by Imams 'Asim, Nafi', and Ibn Kathir, among others (Hidayah & Humam, 2021).

These *qira'at* differences are not merely phonetic but also influence the interpretation of verses. For instance, in Surah al-Ma'idah (5:6), the reading *famsahu biru'usikum wa arjulakum* differs from *wa arjulikum*, resulting in varying *fiqh* rulings on *wudu'* (ablution) (Sulaiman, 2013). Such variations underpin differing tafsir methodologies throughout the Islamic world, including in the Middle East and the Nusantara. Islam initially developed in the Arabian Peninsula before spreading to various parts of the world, including Southeast Asia. This expansion brought with it a diversity of scholarly traditions, including in the field of *tafsir*.

In the Middle East, the development of classical exegesis—such as in the works of al-Tabari and al-Qurṭubi—was greatly influenced by philological approaches that prioritized linguistic analysis and the authentication of *qira'at* through *isnād*. Exegetes in this region placed significant emphasis on the authority of transmission chains and closely linked them to the historical context of revelation. This approach highlighted the importance of valid transmission and explored the grammatical and linguistic nuances of the Qur'anic text (Banten & Ali, n.d.).

Meanwhile, in the Nusantara, the *tafsir* tradition developed with a more accommodative character toward local culture. This is evident in manuscripts such as *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by Abdurrauf al-Singkili and *Tafsir al-Ibriz* by Bisri Musthofa. These works demonstrate how *qira'at* were not only examined linguistically but also adapted within the socio-religious context of local communities. The Nusantara tafsir tradition tended to accommodate local understandings in interpreting the Qur'an, making *qira'at* part of the

broader dynamics of Islamic education and *da'wah* in the region. This dynamic reveals a transformation in the use of *qira'at* in classical exegesis—an area still rarely studied in comparative terms between these two regions (ZF, 2019).

Nonetheless, the study of *qira'at* in classical *tafsir* faces several fundamental challenges. First, there is a lack of comparative research between Middle Eastern and Nusantara classical *tafsir* regarding *qira'at*. Most existing studies tend to focus on a single region, overlooking the possibility of significant transformations within each region's exegetical tradition. Second, the dominant philological approach in Middle Eastern *qira'at* studies emphasizes *isnād* criticism and linguistic analysis without giving sufficient attention to the social and cultural contexts that shape *tafsir* outside the Arab world. Third, the methodology of Nusantara *tafsir* in adapting *qira'at* remains underexplored systematically. In fact, many Nusantara *tafsir* manuscripts creatively incorporate *qira'at* into the framework of local Islamic understanding. These gaps present a significant opportunity for comparative research that could offer new insights into the role of *qira'at* in shaping classical *tafsir* within two distinct Islamic scholarly traditions (Fitriadi, 2019).

Several prior studies have attempted to address issues related to *qira'at* and classical *tafsir*. For instance, Nasr Abu Zayd (1992) analyzed the linguistic dimensions of *qira'at* and their implications for meaning in *Tafsir al-Tabari*. Qasim al-Samarrai (2006) examined the connection between *qira'at* variations and Islamic legal rulings in Middle Eastern *tafsir*. On the other hand, Azyumardi Azra (2015) highlighted the development of *tafsir* in the Nusantara, particularly the interaction between local exegesis and Middle Eastern scholarly traditions. However, no research has yet explicitly compared the use of *qira'at* between Middle Eastern and Nusantara *tafsir*. This study seeks to fill that gap by investigating how *qira'at* are adapted and developed within these two different *tafsir* traditions.

This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it may broaden the understanding of the role of *qira'at* in the formation of classical *tafsir*, especially through a comparative lens between the Middle East and the Nusantara. It also has the potential to further develop comparative approaches in Qur'anic exegesis studies, which can serve as inspiration for future research. Practically, the study can provide meaningful insights for academics and students of Islamic studies in understanding the diversity of *tafsir* methodologies throughout the Muslim world. This way, Islamic perspectives taught in universities and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) can be enriched and made more contextual. The study is also expected to encourage further exploration of Nusantara *tafsir* manuscripts, which have long been overlooked in global Qur'anic studies.

Based on the discussion above, this study aims to analyze how differences in *qira'at* within classical *tafsir* manuscripts from the Middle East and the Nusantara affect the interpretation of verses. Additionally, it seeks to compare the exegetical methodologies in both regions in adapting *qira'at* and to identify the influence of cultural context on the transformation of *qira'at* in their respective classical *tafsir* traditions.

Ultimately, the study of *qira'at* in classical *tafsir* is a vital field for deepening our understanding of the Qur'anic text. Through a comparative approach between Middle Eastern and Nusantara *tafsir* traditions, this research seeks to reveal the dynamic transformation of Islamic knowledge across civilizations.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is library research, employing philological and comparative approaches. This research aims to analyze the transformation of *qira'at* in classical *tafsir* by comparing manuscripts from the Middle East and the Nusantara. The philological approach is applied to trace the development and textual variations found in classical *tafsir* manuscripts that contain different *qira'at*, while the comparative approach is used to identify the similarities and differences in exegetical methodologies between the two regions.

The data sources in this study are divided into two main categories: primary data and secondary data. The primary data are drawn from classical *tafsir* manuscripts that contain discussions of *qira'at*, originating from both Middle Eastern and Nusantara traditions. The key manuscripts analyzed include *Tafsir al-Tabari* and *Tafsir al-Qurthubi*, representing the Middle Eastern tradition, as well as *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by Abdurrauf al-Singkili and *Tafsir al-Ibriz* by Bisri Musthofa, which reflect the *tafsir* tradition in the Nusantara. These manuscripts were selected for their relevance in adopting and adapting *qira'at* as part of the Qur'anic interpretation, and because of their significant influence on the development of *tafsir* scholarship in their respective regions.

In addition to primary sources, this study also uses secondary data that includes various literatures related to the study of *qira'at*, classical *tafsir*, and the historical transmission of Islamic knowledge. These sources include books, academic journals, and previous research discussing linguistic aspects and *tafsir* methodologies. Among the secondary references used are Nasr Abu Zayd's works on linguistic analysis in *qira'at*, Qasim al-Samarrai's research on the relationship between *qira'at* and Islamic law in classical *tafsir*, and Azyumardi Azra's studies on the transmission of Islamic scholarship from the Middle East to the Nusantara. These references provide theoretical context that supports the analysis of the manuscripts under study.

Data collection techniques involve documentation studies, namely identifying, reading, and analyzing various manuscripts and related literature. This documentation process includes identifying variant *qira'at* within *tafsir* texts, recording interpretative differences resulting from these variants, and grouping findings based on the exegetical characteristics that developed in the Middle East and the Nusantara. To ensure data accuracy, this study also compares several editions of manuscripts and classical *tafsir* to uncover any discrepancies or changes in the texts that may have resulted from the transmission and copying processes over generations.

For data analysis, this study employs a descriptive-analytical method using both philological and comparative approaches. The philological analysis focuses on examining textual aspects of *tafsir* manuscripts, particularly in relation to *qira'at* variations and how these influence the meanings of verses. This approach also enables the researcher to trace the development and textual changes in *tafsir* that occurred during the transmission of knowledge from the Middle East to the Nusantara. Meanwhile, the comparative approach is used to analyze differences in *tafsir* methodologies between the two regions, including linguistic strategies, *isnād* (chain of transmission) criticism, and the adaptation of *qira'at* within socio-cultural contexts.

By employing this methodology, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the transformation of *qira'at* occurred within classical *tafsir*, as well as how the processes of knowledge transmission and adaptation took place across these two Islamic intellectual traditions. Through this analysis, the study contributes not only to the advancement of *qira'at* and *tafsir* studies but also opens opportunities for further exploration of the interactions between Islamic intellectual traditions across different parts of the world.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Qira'at is one of the intellectual treasures of Qur'anic sciences, referring to the variations in the recitation of Qur'anic verses that have been transmitted through *mutawātir* chains from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. These recitational differences are not limited to phonetic or phonological variations; they also affect textual meaning and legal interpretation. Within the context of classical *tafsir*, *qira'at* plays a vital role as a hermeneutical tool for comprehensively understanding the meanings of Qur'anic verses (Khusniyah, 2024). Therefore, the transformation of *qira'at* in classical exegesis merits deeper examination, particularly through a comparison of *tafsir* manuscripts from the Middle East and the Nusantara.

Broadly speaking, *qira'at* refers to legitimate variants of Qur'anic recitation as attributed to prominent reciters such as Nāfiʿ, Ibn Kathīr, Abū ʿAmr, Ibn ʿĀmir, ʿĀṣim, Ḥamzah, and al-Kisāʾī. These recitational differences include variations in letter pronunciation, grammatical forms, and occasionally word order (Sulaiman, 2013). In classical *tafsir*, exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Qurṭubī often incorporated *qira'at* comparisons as part of their linguistic and theological approaches. For instance, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* frequently presents different *qira'at*, supported by arguments grounded in *isnād* and meaning. *Qira'at* also serves as a basis for legal rulings or contextual interpretations of specific verses (ZF, 2019).

Classical *tafsir* manuscripts from the Middle East generally reflect the influence of local *madhhab* (schools of thought) and the authority of regional scholars. In *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, for example, discussions on *qira'at* are highly detailed and have been widely referenced by subsequent exegetes. This *tafsir* presents *qira'at* comparisons in a systematic structure: listing the variant readings, presenting their *isnād*, providing linguistic justifications, and expressing preference for one reading based on scriptural evidence or scholarly consensus (Ulfah, 2024).

One well-known example is the interpretation of Surah al-Fātiḥah, verse 4: *"Mālik yawmi al-dīn"* versus *"Malik yawmi al-dīn"*. Al-Ṭabarī records both readings and analyzes their implications: *"Mālik"* (Owner) emphasizes absolute ownership, while *"Malik"* (King) stresses authoritative rule. Middle Eastern *tafsir* traditions generally associate *qira'at* differences with advanced grammatical and rhetorical analysis, owing to the dominance of *nahw* (grammar) and *bayān* (rhetoric) traditions in scholarly circles in Kūfah and Baṣrah (Ulfah, 2024).

In contrast, *tafsir* manuscripts from the Nusantara are generally more practical and pedagogical in nature. Many Nusantara exegetical works are written in the *tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr* style with simplified linguistic explanations, making them accessible to local communities who were newly introduced to Islam. However, these *tafsir* works do not entirely overlook *qira'at* (Hussin et al., 2024).

A prominent example is *Tafsīr Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* by ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Singkilī. Although it does not offer systematic discussions of *qira'at* like al-Ṭabarī's *tafsir*, it reflects the influence of Shāfiʿī jurisprudential tradition and Middle Eastern scholarship, particularly from the Hijaz region. In interpreting legal or theological verses, al-Singkilī occasionally alludes to alternative readings but typically favors the *qirāʾah* commonly used in local *madrasah*, usually Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim (Chafidzoh, n.d.).

Similarly, in the manuscript *Tafsīr al-Munīr li Maʿālim al-Tanzīl*, which developed in

Pattani, selected *qira'at* are highlighted for their relevance to social and practical aspects of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) (Banten & Ali, n.d.). In some portions of the manuscript, marginal notes reference differences in recitation and their implications, though such references are not made explicit—primarily because the work is intended for educational and *daʿwah* (Islamic outreach) purposes.

The transformation of *qira'at* in classical *tafsir* does not solely pertain to the science of *qira'at* itself, but also to processes of cultural and local adaptation. In the Middle East, *qira'at* developed within formal academic frameworks and were systematized through the *madrasah* (Islamic schools) system (Rahmayani, 2017). In the Nusantara, *qira'at* were transmitted through Sufi orders, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), and the spread of *kitab kuning* (traditional Islamic texts), rendering the approach more pragmatic and simplified.

This transformation can be observed in three main forms:

From Phonetic to Didactic Transformation

The transformation of *qirā'āt* from a phonetic approach to a didactic one illustrates a significant shift in how Qur'anic recitation is used across two different regions: the Middle East and the Nusantara. In the Middle East, *qirā'āt* are studied and taught within a rigorous scientific framework, involving in-depth analysis of phonetics, morphology, syntax, and *balāghah* (Arabic rhetoric) (Hidayah et. al, 2021). This approach emerges from a strong Arab cultural context, where the beauty and precision of the Arabic language are integral to both social and scholarly identity. Moreover, native proficiency in Arabic allows communities in the region to examine *qirā'āt* not only as recitational variants but also as a component of linguistic and exegetical disciplines.

However, when the tradition of *qirā'āt* reached the Nusantara, it underwent a profound functional transformation. In the Nusantara, *qirā'āt* are primarily utilized as pedagogical tools to cultivate correct Qur'anic reading skills aligned with *tajwīd* standards (Akbar, 2014). In other words, *qirā'āt* are no longer treated as a complex object of academic study, but rather as a means to educate the Muslim community to read the Qur'an properly—usually following a single, most widely accepted reading, namely the narration of Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim.

This transformation occurred consciously and functionally due to several key factors. First, language barriers: the Nusantara population are not native Arabic speakers, making phonetic and technical linguistic analysis difficult to grasp, especially for beginners in Islamic schools (*pesantren*) or traditional prayer houses (*surau*). Second, practical needs: the primary goal of early Qur'anic education in the Nusantara was to strengthen faith and ritual practices, not to explore linguistics or deep exegetical discourse. Third, scholarly infrastructure: the number of manuscripts and qualified teachers with advanced expertise in *qirā'āt* was far fewer than in Islamic knowledge centers such as Egypt, Kūfah, or Damascus (Akbar, 2014).

As an illustration, in many *pesantren* and *madrasah* in Indonesia, the study of *qirā'āt* is often limited to a single recitation—usually the Ḥafṣ reading—and reinforced through *tajwīd* instruction. This is where the didactic approach becomes predominant. Students are introduced to *makhārij al-ḥurūf* (points of articulation), the characteristics of letters, the length of vowels (*madd*), and the rules of recitation such as *idghām*, *ikhfā'*, and *iqlāb*. The primary aim is not to explore alternative readings, but to standardize proper recitation in

accordance with Ḥafṣ, so it may be used legitimately in worship according to the majority of scholars.

Conversely, in the Arab world, a student of *qirā'āt* is expected not only to master correct pronunciation but also to understand the differences between readings, memorize their chains of transmission (*isnād*), and grasp the linguistic and legal implications of each variant (Hazfira & Mursyid, 2022). For example, in reciting Surah al-Baqarah verse 2, some *qirā'āt* use "lā rayba" (no doubt), while others recite it as "lā raiba," differing in grammatical form, which semantically affects the emphatic meaning. Within the phonetic and rhetorical approach, such differences are not merely alternative readings, but hermeneutical windows for deeper interpretation of the divine message.

Meanwhile, in the Nusantara, when such recitational variants are encountered, teachers or religious instructors typically say, "That is another reading, but we use this one," without providing further explanation of the meaning or context. This is not due to ignorance, but because the orientation of instruction is more practical and normative (Hasan, 2020). In other words, the shift from phonetic to didactic functions as a pedagogical adaptation, suited to local needs and the level of Islamic literacy in the community.

Another concrete example is the curriculum used in *salafi pesantren*, which rely on traditional texts such as *Tuḥfat al-Aṭfāl* and *Hidāyat al-Mutaʿallimīn* for *tajwīd*. These books emphasize the Ḥafṣ reading and hardly mention other variants. Likewise, in the *tafsīr* work *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* by ʿAbd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī, *qirā'āt* are presented implicitly within sentence structures without extended comparison of variants. Even in officially printed musḥafs in Indonesia (under the Ministry of Religious Affairs), only one *qirā'ah* is used nationally—Ḥafṣ—reinforced through *tahsin* and *taḥfīẓ* programs based on standard *tajwīd* rules.

This transformation also affects how the public perceives the authority of Qur'anic recitations. In the Middle East, a *ḥāfiẓ* is expected to understand the *isnād* and authenticity of various readings, while in the Nusantara, it is generally sufficient for a *ḥāfiẓ* to master the Ḥafṣ recitation and fulfill the requirements of *tartīl*. This demonstrates that the theoretical orientation of *qirā'āt* (in the Arab world) has shifted to a pragmatic didactic tool (in the Nusantara), as part of a contextual and efficient Islamization strategy.

Academically, this transformation may also be viewed as a process of localization of Islamic knowledge, wherein global Islamic sciences are adapted to local values, language, and social structures. While this transformation narrows the discursive space for *qirā'āt*, it also increases accessibility to religious understanding and practice.

In the contemporary context, this shift opens up new opportunities to reactualize the study of *qirā'āt* in the Nusantara. With the rise of Islamic higher education and the digitization of classical *tafsīr* manuscripts, the younger generation can now study *qirā'āt* not only as a recitational tool but also as a gateway to *tafsīr*, history, and Islamic pluralism. The challenge is how to develop a holistic and interdisciplinary curriculum for *qirā'āt* that integrates phonetic approaches (for scholarship) and didactic approaches (for community development).

From Theoretical to Practical Transformation

The differing orientations between Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) in the Middle East and the Nusantara in positioning *qirā'āt* reflect a significant epistemological transformation—namely, from a theoretical to a practical approach. In the classical Islamic intellectual centers such as Baghdad, Cairo, Kufa, and Damascus, the discourse on *qirā'āt* within tafsīr was not limited to enumerating variant readings. Rather, it served as an intensive dialogical space that integrated theology (*ʿaqīdah*), linguistics (*ʿilm al-lughah* and *naḥw*), and Islamic law (*fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*). Each variation in recitation was analyzed deeply from multiple perspectives—semantic, legal, and theological—while also considering the context of revelation and the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* (Hakamah, 2022).

For example, in *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, written by the renowned Iraqi exegete of the 3rd century AH, variations such as *"Mālik(i) yawmi al-dīn"* (with *kasrah*) and *"Mālak(i) yawmi al-dīn"* are discussed extensively. The first (*Mālik*) means "Owner," while the second (*Mālak*) refers to "Sovereign" or "King" (Malik, 2022). This difference carries important theological implications: Is Allah merely the owner of the Day of Judgment, or also its absolute ruler? Al-Ṭabarī not only deemed both readings as valid but also elaborated on their implications by referencing *ḥadīth*, Arabic grammatical rules, and the opinions of the *ṣaḥābah* and *tābiʿīn*. Here, *qirā'āt* function as a multidisciplinary exegetical tool, not just reading variants, but as a means to deepen the meaning of revelation.

A similar approach is evident in *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī and *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, where *qirā'āt* are used to elucidate legal contexts, including differences among jurisprudential schools. For instance, regarding the punishment for theft in Surah al-Mā'idah (5:38), the recitation *"fa-qṭaʿū aydiyahumā"* ("cut off their hands") is further interpreted to determine the specific extent of the hand—whether at the wrist or up to the elbow. Another variant with phonetic alteration (*"aydīyahuma"*) is interpreted broadly by exegetes as a justification for flexibility in legal reasoning (*ijtihād*). Thus, *qirā'āt* become both a source of Islamic law and an object of legal derivation (*istinbāṭ*) (Ulfah, 2024).

However, when Qur'anic exegesis developed in the Nusantara, the role of *qirā'āt* underwent a functional transformation. *Qirā'āt* were no longer treated as a discursive space for legal, theological, or linguistic elaboration. Instead, they evolved into practical tools for understanding the general meaning of Qur'anic verses. This approach was not arbitrary. Tafsir in the Nusantara grew primarily within the context of Islamic missionary work (da'wah) and basic religious education, especially from the 16th to the 19th century, when Islam spread rapidly through traditional institutions such as *surau*, *pesantren*, and *langgar*. The main goal was to gradually and contextually introduce Islamic teachings to local societies that were still undergoing processes of Islamization (Hakamah, 2022).

As an illustration, in *Tafsīr Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* by Shaykh Abdurra'uf al-Singkilī, although variant readings are occasionally mentioned, the explanations provided are simplified and avoid legal or linguistic debates typically found in Middle Eastern *tafsīr* (Aulia, 2024). For instance, in interpreting Surah al-Ikhlāṣ, the emphasis is on introducing the concept of *tawḥīd* concisely, without discussing *qirā'āt* variations as classical Arab exegetes would. Al-

Singkilī prioritized foundational understanding of faith and proper worship, aligning with the needs of the local community at the time.

Another example is *Tafsīr Nūr al-Iḥsān* by Muhammad Saʿīd bin ʿUmar from Kedah. Throughout this *tafsīr*, he employs highly communicative Malay and only mentions *qirāʾāt* in relation to pronunciation in *tajwīd* instruction (binti Hussin, Selamat, & Zainol, 2018). In explaining verses on fasting or *zakāh*, *qirāʾāt* are not central to legal interpretation but are addressed normatively according to the dominant Shāfiʿī school in the region.

This contrast is also due to linguistic and cultural factors. Since the Nusantara population are non-native Arabic speakers, deep linguistic discussions held little practical value in the context of religious outreach. Furthermore, the literacy in both *mutawātir* and *shādhdh qirāʾāt* was not yet well established among the general populace. As a result, Nusantara scholars opted to simplify the approach to *qirāʾāt*, using it more as an educational bridge rather than an academic debate tool.

This transformation represents a simplification of Islamic epistemology, aiming to be more inclusive and applicable. The main focus of Nusantara exegetes was not on exploring linguistic variations to broaden interpretation—as seen in *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* or *al-Zamakhsharī*—but on delivering the essential messages of the Qurʾan in a way that was accessible, socially relevant, and grounded in local daily life.

Nevertheless, this practical approach also has limitations. One is the potential narrowing of Qurʾanic meaning, as interpretation often relies on a single dominant recitation without considering other valid *qirāʾāt* that might enrich the exegetical horizon. This may also lead to a lack of awareness among the public that the Qurʾanic text contains a plurality of authentic readings that are not contradictory.

Even so, this transformation should not be viewed as a deviation but rather as a rational adaptive strategy in historical and geographic context. Nusantara exegesis absorbed Islamic teachings through methods that were attuned to local realities. In fact, in the modern era, this practical approach serves as a powerful foundation for inclusive Islamic education. For instance, in *madrasah* and *pesantren* tafsir classes, students are taught the general meaning of verses based on one reading (usually Ḥafṣ), and then guided to apply its values in life—such as honesty, cooperation, and piety.

In conclusion, the transformation from a theoretical to a practical approach in the use of *qirāʾāt* demonstrates that Qurʾanic exegesis is a highly adaptive discipline, responsive to the needs of its time. In the Middle East, *qirāʾāt* serve as scholarly tools across disciplines. In the Nusantara, they function as pedagogical instruments for disseminating Islam in a populist manner. These two approaches are not contradictory but rather complementary within the dynamic and contextual framework of global Islamic epistemology.

From Authority to Local Consensus Transformation

In classical Islamic tradition, particularly in Arab regions such as the Hijaz, Egypt, the Levant, and Iraq, the authority of *qirāʾāt* was heavily dependent on a strict system of *sanad* (chain of transmission) and *ijāzah* (authorization). The legitimacy of Qurʾanic recitation could not be separated from an authenticated transmission lineage that connected a *qārīʾ* or *mufassir* to globally recognized *imāms* of *qirāʾāt* such as Nāfiʿ, Ibn Kathīr, Abū ʿAmr, ʿĀṣim, and

others (Hakamah, 2022). This transmission model was tightly preserved through the system of *talāqqī* (direct oral learning from a teacher) and *ijāzah*, which served as authoritative proof that a reader or teacher of *qirā'āt* possessed the scholarly credibility to transmit a particular reading.

For instance, a *qārī'* who teaches the Warsh ʿan Nāfiʿ recitation in Morocco or Algeria must possess an official *sanad* that traces back to Imām Nāfiʿ. Their authority is widely recognized because it follows a verifiable scholarly lineage. In such regions, Qur'anic exegesis places significant importance on variant readings. For example, in *Tafsīr al-Durr al-Manthūr* by al-Suyūṭī, different *qirā'āt* are listed alongside their narrators and often contextualized through reports (*riwāyāt*) from the Companions. This illustrates that the legitimacy of a reading was determined by its historical and scholarly authenticity—not merely by local preference.

However, when Islam spread to the Nusantara region, this model of authority underwent a substantial transformation. While in the early stages of Islamization—particularly during the era of Sufi scholars who studied in the Ḥaramayn (Mecca and Medina)—the *sanad* system was still highly regarded, in local missionary and educational practices, the authority of Qur'anic recitation was increasingly shaped by local consensus, especially through the central roles of teachers (*kyai*, *tuan guru*, or *teungku*) and the widely used commentaries in local Islamic instruction (Hasan, 2020).

A prominent example of this phenomenon is the widespread use of the Malay version of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, in both *Pegon* and *Jawi* scripts. This tafsīr not only served as a reference for interpreting verses but also became a source of legitimization for Qur'anic recitation, especially the Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim reading, which was already prevalent throughout the Muslim world, including the Nusantara. Since most local religious teachers specialized in only one mode of recitation (typically Ḥafṣ), alternative readings such as Qālūn, Warsh, or even *qirā'āt shādhdhah* were rarely introduced and were sometimes regarded as "unusual" or "foreign" (Hussin, et al, 2019).

For example, in many traditional *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) in Java or Sumatra, if a student recites a verse using a different reading—such as *"Malik"* instead of *"Mālik"* in Sūrat al-Fātiḥah—the teacher may deem it incorrect, even though that variant is valid within the canon of *qirā'āt*. This reflects how legitimacy is not always rooted in global scholarly authority, but rather in local consensus: what the teacher teaches and what the community accepts based on inherited tradition.

From a historical perspective, classical Malay tafsīr manuscripts found in Aceh and Patani—such as the Jawi version of *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī* or *Turjumān al-Mustafīd*—rarely provide detailed analyses of *qirā'āt*. The standard recitation used was Ḥafṣ, and the exegetical focus was on the meaning of the text in the local language and its moral and theological relevance to daily life. In such contexts, authority was not constructed through a long scholarly lineage but through collective community acceptance of certain teachers and the texts they used.

This situation also demonstrates that religious authority in the Nusantara is socio-cultural rather than purely academic. The validity of a recitation or exegesis is not only determined by scholarly argumentation but also by community recognition of a scholar's

personal piety and influence. As a result, local teachers could, in certain contexts, possess more authority than formal *sanad*-holders (Rahmayani, 2017).

Nevertheless, this transformation from global textual authority to local consensus should not be seen as a regression, but rather as a cultural and pedagogical adaptation. In the early spread of Islam in the Nusantara, this model was highly effective in building a solid and inclusive Islamic foundation by taking into account local realities and social conditions. Thus, instead of critiquing local consensus, a more constructive approach would be to expand public understanding through more comprehensive education in *qirāʾāt* while respecting local intellectual heritage.

This transformation shows that *qirāʾāt* are not merely textual legacies but also social and cultural phenomena. In modern Islamic education, differences in *qirāʾāt* are often underemphasized due to their perceived complexity. Yet, understanding these differences can significantly enrich studies in tafsīr, *fiqh*, and Islamic pluralism.

Furthermore, *qirāʾāt* should not be viewed solely as alternative readings, but as sources of interpretation containing legal, spiritual, and linguistic dimensions. Therefore, manuscript studies on qirāʾāt need to be expanded and digitized, so they can become educational resources in both Islamic boarding schools and universities.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of *qirāʾāt* in classical tafsīr between the Middle East and the Nusantara reflects a complex and contextual scholarly dynamic. In the Middle East, *qirāʾāt* developed within a rigorous and systematic intellectual tradition, as exemplified in *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, which explicitly presents various *qirāʾāt* transmissions along with their *sanad* (chains of narration), linguistic rationales, and preferences for specific readings based on textual evidence and scholarly consensus. Variations in recitation are analyzed from phonetic, grammatical, and rhetorical (*balāghah*) perspectives, reflecting the depth of scholarly engagement and the linguistic environment of Arab societies deeply attuned to the intricacies of the Arabic language.

Conversely, in the Nusantara, *qirāʾāt* underwent a transformation from phonetic and theoretical approaches to more didactic and practical ones. Tafsīr manuscripts such as *Turjumān al-Mustafīd* by ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Singkīlī and *Tafsīr al-Munīr li Maʿālim al-Tanzīl* from Patani show that *qirāʾāt* were not abandoned, but rather adapted to the local context. The use of *qirāʾāt* in Nusantara tafsīr was primarily pedagogical, intended to facilitate the public's ability to read and understand the Qur'an correctly—most often through the Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim recitation, which has become the national standard.

This transformation was driven by linguistic barriers, the practical needs of Islamic propagation (*daʿwah*), and limitations in scholarly infrastructure. In pesantrens and madrasas, *qirāʾāt* were emphasized primarily in the context of tajwīd (proper recitation) and ensuring that Qur'anic reading met the ritual standards for worship, rather than in exploring variant recitations. This signifies an epistemological shift: from *qirāʾāt* as a multidisciplinary and theoretical science in the Middle East to a practical educational tool in the Nusantara.

Therefore, the transformation of *qirāʾāt* is not merely a technical shift but reflects broader cultural adaptation, daʿwah strategies, and the needs of local Muslim communities. In the

Middle East, *qirāʾāt* serve as instruments of scholarly and theological discourse, while in the Nusantara they function as pragmatic tools for religious instruction and spiritual formation. These approaches are not mutually exclusive but rather demonstrate the flexibility of Islam in responding to the diversity of its adherents across regions and histories.

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