

**DYNAMICS OF TASKS OF INTERPRETATION SOURCES: ANALYSIS OF
METHODOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MA'TSŪR, RA'YI, AND ISYĀRĪ**Rima Aulia Maftukha¹, and Fikri Hidayat El Izat²¹Ma'had Aly Walindo Pekalongan, Indonesia²Ma'had Aly Walindo Pekalongan, Indonesia**Corresponding Author:**

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2026**Abstract**

Quranic exegesis is a scientific discipline that explains the meaning of the words of the Quran so that they can be understood by humans and become a means of understanding Divine revelation in terms of law, faith, and practical guidance. The process of interpretation is based on various sources, which are traditionally divided into three types: tafsir bi al-ma'tsur, tafsir bi ar-ra'yi, and tafsir isyārī. Tafsir bi al-ma'tsur emphasizes authentic narrations from the Quran, Sunnah, and the atsar of the Companions as the main foundation, while tafsir bi ar-ra'yi uses ijtiḥad and logical reasoning that remain based on the rules of sharia. Tafsir isyārī emphasizes the inner meaning and spiritual experience of Sufi exegetes, while still respecting the apparent tafsir. Each approach has its own characteristics, advantages, and challenges, which influence the form and focus of the resulting interpretation. This diversity of methods reflects the dynamics of Quranic interpretation, which is responsive to historical, social, and scientific contexts. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating sources, scientific principles, and a balanced understanding of the external and internal dimensions to produce a valid and meaningful interpretation.

Keywords: Al-Qur'an, Isyārī, Ma'tsur, Ra'yi, Tafsir

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INTRODUCTION

The Quran is the word of Allah SWT, revealed through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is written in Arabic with the correct meaning (Khallaf, n.d.). The Quran contains guidance not only for worship but also for various aspects of life. Therefore, Muslims must understand it before practicing it. Some words contain signs, symbols, and expressions that require contemplation and study to accurately grasp their meaning (Fauziah & Putri, 2022).

Quranic interpretation is an attempt to explain the words and intentions intended by Allah SWT. Interpretation must be carried out carefully and cautiously, as errors can impact religious practice. Therefore, competent, credible, and meticulous interpreters are needed to minimize errors (Fauziah & Putri, 2022). Interpretation plays a crucial role in Islam because it helps people understand the profound meaning of the Quran. In addition to affirming the position and purpose of teachings, interpretation also serves as a practical-religious guide and meets the daily needs of the community. Through interpretation, the sublime meaning of the Quran can be revealed, like the pearls and jewels hidden within it (Yusron, 2022).

Quranic interpretation during the classical period, encompassing the Companions, Tabi'in, and Tabi'ut Tabi'in up to the 4th century AH, predominantly used tafsir bi al-ma'tsur. This method relies on authentic narrations of the Quran, the hadith of the Prophet PBUH, and the explanations of the Companions and Tabi'in. Therefore, it is considered the most authoritative because it relies on the primary sources of Islamic teachings (Sari, 2023). The Middle Ages, or Golden Age, the transition from the Umayyad to the Abbasid Dynasty, was marked by a great emphasis on knowledge. From the 8th to the 13th centuries, Islamic civilization led in science, medicine, mathematics, trade, and industry, earning it the title "Golden Age of Islamic History" (Abiyusuf et al., 2025). Entering the 19th and 20th centuries, modernization and globalization encouraged contextual and relevant interpretation of the Quran. Contemporary approaches rely not only on language and narration but also consider socio-cultural conditions, such as Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement method, which connects the historical context of verses with societal needs to maintain the relevance of moral messages (Romadhon, 2025).

The development of the science of tafsir (interpretation) parallels the need for Muslims to gain a clearer and more applicable understanding of the Quran in everyday life. Within this dynamic, three main methods serve as the foundation for interpreting the Qur'an: tafsir bi al-ma'tsūr (based on narrations), tafsir bi al-ra'yi (based on rational ijtihad), and tafsir bi al-isyārī (based on signs or spiritual meanings). Each method has its own unique characteristics, epistemological basis, and advantages and limitations. A thorough understanding of these three methods of tafsir is crucial for academic researchers, as each contributes to enriching the science of tafsir. The background, perspective, and socio-cultural context of the interpreter influence the results of the interpretation. Therefore, studying various tafsir methods is crucial for assessing their approach, relevance, and validity in facing contemporary challenges (Faizah et al., n.d.).

Several previous studies have tended to discuss tafsir bi al-ma'tsūr, tafsir bi al-ra'yi, and isyārī tafsir separately or in a descriptive-historical manner. However, studies specifically analyzing the methodological distinctions of the three within the framework of the epistemology of interpretation and their implications for the validity of interpretation are still relatively limited. Therefore, this article attempts to offer a comparative-critical analysis of the dynamics of interpretive source retrieval by highlighting the differences in epistemological foundations, methodological boundaries, and the legitimacy issues of each method.

This research aims to analyze the urgency of interpretive source studies in the discipline of Tafsir, examine the development of interpretive methods from the classical to the contemporary era, and examine the methodological differences between tafsir bi al-ma'tsūr, bi al-ra'yi, and bi al-isyārī and their relevance in the context of modern Islamic scholarship. Although these three methods have been frequently studied in various tafsir literature, a discussion that integrates them

comprehensively within the framework of historical development while linking them to current contextual relevance still requires a more in-depth and systematic study.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach using a library research design to explore and analyze various scholarly perspectives on the interpretation of the Qur'an. Library research is considered appropriate because the study focuses on examining theoretical concepts, scholarly arguments, and methodological frameworks contained in written sources rather than empirical field data. The research utilizes descriptive-analytical and comparative methods to systematically examine three major approaches in Qur'anic exegesis: *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur*, *tafsir bi al-ra'yi*, and *tafsir bi al-isyari*. Through the descriptive-analytical method, the study explains the conceptual foundations, epistemological basis, and methodological characteristics of each interpretative approach. Meanwhile, the comparative method is applied to identify similarities, differences, and distinctive contributions of these three methods within the broader discourse of Qur'anic studies.

Data were collected from a wide range of relevant literature, including classical tafsir books, contemporary academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and scholarly documents discussing the methodology of Qur'anic interpretation. Previous studies indicate that *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur* relies on authoritative narrations such as the Qur'an, hadith, and the opinions of the companions, whereas *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* emphasizes rational analysis and scholarly reasoning, and *tafsir bi al-isyari* highlights spiritual and symbolic meanings often associated with Sufi interpretations (Faizah, Sa'diyah, & Hidayat, 2024; Huda, 2024). Each method contributes to enriching the understanding of the Qur'an while also presenting certain methodological limitations depending on the interpreter's epistemological orientation (Anwar, 2023; Duwila, Khikmah, & Rosyida, 2024).

The data analysis in this study employs content analysis techniques. This technique is used to interpret textual data, classify relevant information, and identify major themes related to the concepts, characteristics, and methodological implications of the three interpretative approaches. Through this process, the study aims to obtain a deeper and more systematic understanding of how these methods function and how they can contribute to contextualizing Qur'anic teachings within the framework of Islamic religious education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tafsir is understood as a science that functions to explain the meaning of the words of the Qur'an so that they can be understood by humans. This definition positions tafsir as a means to understand Divine revelation, particularly in explaining legal aspects, faith, and various other practical guidelines (Salsabilla et al., 2025). In this interpretive process, sources of tafsir are various references used by commentators as a basis for understanding and explaining the verses of the Qur'an, which are then incorporated into their tafsir works (Fauziah & Putri, 2022). In the treasury of Islamic interpretation, three main sources are recognized as the basis for understanding and explaining the Qur'an: *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur*, *tafsir bi ar-ra'yi*, and *tafsir bi al-isyari*. Each approach has its own unique characteristics, while also offering advantages and facing different challenges (Rahayu & Alwizar, 2024). Islamic scholars have established two main foundations that must be used by every Muslim in various religious matters, namely the *naqli* and *aqli* foundations. These two foundations are important, especially when explaining and proving the truth and strengthening beliefs in the realm of monotheism or faith. In addition, both are also used in the process of legal *istinbath*, namely the exploration and determination of evidence in the discipline of Islamic jurisprudence, as well as in efforts to interpret the Qur'an (Melini et al., 2018). Abd al-Wahab Fayd explained that there are five main sources of interpretation that have been used by commentators. These five sources are considered original

sources, namely the main foundation in every activity of interpreting the Qur'an. In the tradition of interpretation, scholars arrange the levels of sources of interpretation based on their priority. The most important order is (1) the Qur'an itself; (2) the hadith of the Prophet; (3) the opinions of the Companions and Tabi'in; (4) linguistic rules; and (5) ijtihad based on valid arguments (Manaf, n.d.).

The resulting forms of interpretation of the Qur'an can be broadly divided into three:

1. Tafsir bi al-Ma'tsur

Tafsir bi al-Ma'tsur is a model of Quranic interpretation based on authoritative sources. These sources include the interpretation of the Quran with the Quran, the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the opinions of the Companions. This approach places authentic narration as the primary foundation for understanding the meaning of verses, thus limiting the scope of interpretation to the authority of accountable transmission. Interpretation through the Quran is carried out by linking one verse to another that has a corresponding meaning or theme. The hadith serves as an explanation (*bayān*) of the verse's content, whether in the form of details, limitations, or legal affirmations. Meanwhile, the opinions of the Companions are used as references due to their proximity to the time of revelation and their understanding of the historical context and language of the Quran (Rahayu & Alwizar, 2024). The sources of tafsir bi al-Ma'tsur include tafsir bil-Qur'an, tafsir bil-Hadith, and tafsir bil-Atsar, each of which has its own position and function in interpreting the Qur'an (Rahayu & Alwizar, 2023). Thus, tafsir bi al-Ma'tsur places the transmission of narrations as the primary authority in interpretation, so that its validity is highly dependent on the quality of the sanad and the validity of the sources used.

a) Interpretation of the Qur'an: that the Qur'an is.

Tafsir Al-Qur'an with Al-Qur'an is an interpretation method carried out by explaining a verse through other verses that have related meanings in the Qur'an. This approach is based on the principle that the verses of the Qur'an interpret and complement each other. Verses that are general (*mujmal*) are understood through other verses that are more detailed (*mufassal*), while verses that are conveyed concisely are clarified by explanations in other verses in different parts. As an illustration, in Surah Ar-Rahman verses 19–22, two oceans are described that flow side by side with a boundary that cannot be exceeded by either of them. It also mentions the emergence of pearls and marjan as manifestations of Allah's blessings. These verses show how the Qur'an presents interconnected explanations in revealing divine meanings and messages (Nasrun & Alwizar, 2025).

b) Interpretation of the Qur'an with the Sunnah (al-Hadith)

Interpretation of the Qur'an with Sunnah (hadith) is a method of interpreting the verses of the Qur'an by referring to the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW if the explanation of a verse is not found in detail in the Qur'an itself (Siregar, n.d.). If the Qur'an does not find a direct explanation of a verse through another verse, then the next interpretation is referred to the Sunnah or hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This is because the Sunnah functions as an explanation and detail of the content of the Qur'an. Its position as the second source after the Qur'an in interpreting its verses has been affirmed by Allah SWT, as mentioned in Surah An-Nisa' verse 59 (Rahayu & Alwizar, 2024).

c) Tafsir of the Qur'an with Atsar

Tafsir bil-Atsar is the interpretation of the Qur'an based on the sayings and explanations of the Companions and Tabi'in. The interpretations of the Companions hold a significant position because they witnessed the revelation of the Qur'an directly, understood the social context, and mastered pure Arabic. The interpretations of the Tabi'in are accepted as long as they do not contradict the Qur'an and Hadith. Tafsir bil-Atsar, along with those of the Qur'an and Hadith, falls into the category of Ma'tsur interpretation (al-Qaṭṭān, 2007).

According to Muhammad Abdul Azim al-Zarqani (1998), the boundaries of tafsir bi al-ma'tsur can be classified based on the criteria for accepting or rejecting a narration. First, acceptable tafsir bi al-ma'tsur, that is, interpretations that are based on valid narrations and do not deviate from established provisions, thus not being considered erroneous. Second, invalid or inauthentic interpretations of the Qur'an, namely interpretations based on weak narrations or those that do not meet the standards of validity, making them unsuitable as a basis and must be abandoned (Firdaus et al., 2023). Thus, the methodological limitations of interpretations of the Qur'an lie not only in the type of sources used, but also in how the narrations are examined and the selection of narrations based on standards of authenticity.

2. Tafsir bi ar-Ra'yi

Etymologically, ra'yi means opinion or rational consideration born from ijihad. Terminologically, tafsir bi ar-ra'yi is a method of interpreting the Quran that utilizes the intellectual abilities and logical reasoning of an interpreter to understand the meaning of verses. This method emphasizes a rational and argumentative approach in exploring the Quran's message. However, interpretations driven by desires without any basis in evidence are not permitted, while ijihad that aligns with sharia principles is permitted. This permissibility is reflected in the practice of the Companions who conducted interpretations when no direct explanation from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was available (Maryana et al., n.d.).

Tafsir bi ar-ra'yi began to develop in the 3rd century AH and exhibits various characteristics according to the scholarly backgrounds of the interpreters. Scholars interpret it from a legal perspective, such as in Al-Jassas and Al-Qurtubi; theologians emphasize theological aspects, as in Al-Zamakhshari's Al-Kashshaf; Sufis, like Sahl al-Tustari and Ibn Arabi, understand it spiritually. In the modern era, this approach continues to develop through socio-literary interpretations such as Tafsir al-Manar and the scholarly interpretations in Tantawi Jawhari's Tafsir al-Jawahir (Yana et al., 2020).

An exegete using tafsir bi ar-ra'yi must meet several criteria to avoid error. He must possess sound belief, adequate ijihad skills, and the morals and capabilities of an exegete. His interpretation must be based on basic knowledge and the discipline of Qur'anic scholars, avoid errors outlined by scholars, and be free from the influence of lust. Furthermore, his interpretation must not contradict the Qur'an, deviate from linguistic rules, or be influenced by prohibited schools of thought or schools of thought. The exegete must also not claim the results of his ijihad as the sole meaning of the verse and must convey them with humility. If all the requirements are met with a sincere intention for the sake of Allah SWT, a bi ar-ra'yi interpretation is considered valid. Conversely, if these requirements are ignored, the interpretation is deemed incorrect and unacceptable (Yana et al., 2020). Bi ar-ra'yi interpretation is only valid if it is conducted in accordance with scientific principles so as not to deviate from the intent of the Qur'an. An interpreter must master supporting sciences such as the sciences of the Qur'an, Arabic, hadith, ushul fiqh, as well as grammar, sharaf, and balaghah to understand the verses correctly. Furthermore, the interpretation must not contradict the Qur'an, Sunnah, the consensus of scholars, or the authentic interpretations of the Companions and Tabi'in (al-Qattan, 2011).

Some scholars reject bi ar-ra'yi interpretation because it emphasizes human reason, while the Companions and Tabi'in highly respect the Qur'an and avoid interpretations that contradict revelation. For example, Sa'id ibn Mus'ab was reluctant to interpret the verses of the Qur'an even when answering questions about halal and haram, and Abu Bakr r.a. emphasized that he did not dare to interpret even one letter of the Qur'an if he risked contradicting the will of Allah SWT (Opinions of Scholars Regarding Tafsir Bi Al-Ra'yi, 2017).

3. Tafsir Isyari

Ishārī Sufī interpretation is the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an that emphasizes the inner signs or hidden meanings, but still refers to the spiritual practices and spiritual training (*riyādhah*) carried out by Sufi interpreters to understand the secrets of the verses before Allah SWT, even though sometimes different from their apparent meaning. According to Mahmud Basuni Faudah, Ishārī Sufī interpretation has been known since the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. The Quran itself emphasizes the implied meaning and order of revelation in verse 82 of An-Nisa', while the mursal hadith from al-Hasan states that each verse has both an outward and an inward meaning, indicating that the Companions already understood the concept of Ishārī interpretation through their *atsar* (Understanding and Opinions of Scholars Regarding Ishārī Interpretation, 2017).

Sufi interpretation has distinctive characteristics that distinguish it from other types of interpretation, as it emerged as a response from Sufi movements to the worldly tendencies of their time. This interpretation is generally influenced by the Sufi understanding of Sufism held by the exegete, either as a primary interest before interpreting the Quran or as a way to legitimize his Sufi views (Sufi Nazari and Ishārī Interpretation, 2012).

Because of the variety of Ishārī interpretations, al-Dhahabi established several strict requirements for an interpretation to be accepted. First, *Isyārī's* interpretation must not negate or contradict *Dzahir's* interpretation. Second, this interpretation must be supported by valid *syar'i* arguments. Third, *Isyārī's* interpretation must not conflict with religious law or common sense. Fourth, this interpretation must not be claimed to be the only truth, but must still pay attention to *Dzahir's* interpretation (Arif & Sayska, 2025).

Scholars differ in their opinions regarding the interpretation of *isyārī* (Sufi interpretation). Some allow it with certain conditions and consider it *maqbul*, while others reject it as *mardud*. There are those who consider this interpretation to be a form of perfection of faith and *ma'rifat*, but there are also those who consider it a deviation. The assessment depends on the goal. If it is used to follow one's desires or manipulate verses as is the practice of mysticism, then it is reprehensible (*mazmumah*). However, if the aim is to reveal the greatness of Allah through inner meaning that does not conflict with the *zahir*, then it can be a form of purifying *ma'rifat* and strengthening faith. As stated by Ibnu Abbas, the Qur'an has outer and inner dimensions, covering various aspects such as *halal-haram*, *nasikh-mansukh*, and *muhkam-mutasyabbih*. Therefore, the deepening must be guided by scholars so as not to deviate (Sholihah et al., 2024).

Al-Zarkasyi in *al-Burhān*, as quoted by Hasbi al-Shiddiqy, believes that the interpretations conveyed by Sufi circles do not fall into the category of valid interpretations, but rather are expressions of feelings and inner experiences when reading the Qur'an. Meanwhile, Ibnu Shalah in his fatwa, referring to Abu Hasan al-Wahidi's statement, strongly criticized Abu Abdurrahman al-Sulami's work entitled *Haqā'iq al-Tafsīr*. He emphasized that if the book is believed to be an interpretation in the true sense, then that belief could have the implication of *kufr*. Thus, Ibn Shalah not only rejected this model of interpretation, but also forbade it and strongly warned against anyone who confirmed it as an interpretation.

Islamic interpretation, in terminology, is the interpretation of the Qur'an by shifting its meaning from its outward meaning to another meaning based on subtle signs. These signs can only be understood by those on the spiritual path or by those who consistently draw closer to God and possess a pure personality. Therefore, Islamic interpretation relies on revealing the inner or hidden meaning, while still attempting to relate it to the explicit meaning of the text (Sholihah et al., 2024).

All of these requirements aim to assess whether an Islamic interpretation is acceptable. The word "acceptable" here means that the interpretation is not erroneous as long as it does not deviate from the external interpretation and does not conflict with the principles of sharia. However, this acceptance does not automatically make it a mandatory guideline, as this interpretation relies on inner experience and spiritual sense that are not always supported by

sound evidence and arguments. Islamic interpretation is essentially the spiritual experience of a Sufi. Therefore, it can be practiced personally by those who believe in it, without the need to make it a general standard or force others to follow the same understanding (Nurman, n.d.).

Differences in sources and methods in interpreting the Qur'an have a direct impact on the resulting interpretations. Narrative-based interpretations tend to be textual and adhere to the authority of classical scholars, while rational interpretations are more contextual and responsive to contemporary developments. Islamic interpretations, on the other hand, emphasize the spiritual dimension that enriches the inner meaning of verses, although they often give rise to methodological debate. Thus, the diversity of interpretations demonstrates that Qur'anic interpretation is dynamic and influenced by the approach, background, and scholarly orientation of the interpreter.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of methodological differences in the retrieval of tafsir sources, it can be concluded that tafsir bi al-ma'tsūr, bi ar-ra'yi, and bi al-isyārī have different epistemological characters but complement each other in the treasury of Islamic scholarship. Tafsir bi al-ma'tsūr emphasizes the authority of narrations as the main basis of interpretation, thus maintaining continuity of understanding with the early generations of Islam. Tafsir bi ar-ra'yi provides space for rationality and ijtihad while remaining grounded in sharia principles, thus enabling interpretations that are responsive to the developments of the times.

Meanwhile, tafsir bi al-isyārī presents a spiritual dimension and depth of inner meaning, while still requiring conformity with the apparent meaning and principles of sharia. These differences in approach indicate that the dynamics of retrieval of tafsir sources are not a form of methodological conflict, but rather a reflection of the breadth of the meaning of the Qur'an and the complexity of how to understand it. Therefore, the validity of an interpretation is largely determined by methodological consistency, the accuracy of the use of sources, and its compliance with the rules of the science of interpretation. Thus, the diversity of interpretation methods actually enriches scientific discourse and strengthens the relevance of the Qur'an in various spatial and temporal contexts.

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