

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRINCIPLES OF TAFSIR

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Abstract

This journal discusses what "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" is, by providing a brief overview of its definition and the history of its emergence as a separate scientific discipline. Then we also mentioned several main references which are references for studying "Qawa'id at-Tafsir". The method we use is the Systematic Mapping Study method which is a Literature Review method which involves several books which then become the support for our statement. "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" is the initial foundation that must be considered carefully before giving an interpretation to the verse, it is like a finished mold which if it comes out of that shape it is said to be out of the corridor. "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" can be said to be a branch of knowledge that was originally only found with the books of tafsir and ulum al-Qur'an. Then later, it became a special discipline in the 14th century and has developed until now.

Keywords: Qawaid, Knowledge, Developing, Reference, Print.

Abstrak

Jurnal ini membahas tentang apa itu "Qawa'id at-Tafsir", dengan memberikan gambaran singkat tentang defenisinya serta sejarah munculnya sebagai disiplin ilmu tersendiri. Lalu kami juga menyebutkan beberapa refrensi utama yang menjadi rujukan untuk mendalami "Qawa'id at-Tafsir". Metode yang kami pakai adalah metode Systematic Mapping Study yang merupakan salah satu metode Literature Review yang melibatkan beberapa buku yang kemudian menjadi penopang akan statement kami. "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" adalah pondasi awal yang harus diperhatikan dengan seksama sebelum memberikan interpretasi pada ayat, ia bagaikan cetakan jadi yang jika keluar dari bentuk tersebut maka dikatakan keluar dari koridor. "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" bisa dikatakan sebagai cabang ilmu yang awalnya hanya ditemukan bersama kitab-kitab tafsir dan ulum al-Qur'an. Lalu kemudian, menjadi disiplin khusus pada abad 14 H dan berkembang sampai sekarang.

Kata kunci: Qawaid, Ilmu, Berkembang, Rujukan, Cetakan.

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A. Introduction

The Qur'an is an exceedingly magnificent and perfect book, with content and messages so diverse and vast that it resembles an ocean, deep and boundless, or the sky, so high it cannot be seen with the naked eye. It is also like the expanse of the earth, so wide that it can give birth to many kinds of disciplines of knowledge, which then grow and develop like fruit-bearing trees. Of course, it needs sufficient rainwater and sunlight to grow healthy and sweet fruit. Once it bears fruit, everyone can pick it and enjoy it while saying “*alhamdulillah*” without having to toil through the entire process.

The first representative of Allah SWT to provide that sweet fruit was the Prophet Muhammad SAW, who then passed it on to his companions, then to the tabi'in and tabi' tabi'in, also known as the *salaf as-salih* (the first three generations of the Islamic golden era, with some extending it to the first five centuries). After that, the baton was passed to scholars whose chains of knowledge (sanad) are credible and accountable. As mentioned in the hadith:

... وَإِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ ...

Translation

: “...and indeed the scholars are the inheritors of the prophets...”¹

Each scholar's concentration varies; some focus on fiqh, others on tauhid, and some on tafsir, etc. Each scholar chooses their inclination based on their foundational knowledge or interests. And naturally, the fundamental nature of knowledge is to continually develop with the times. Many disciplines of knowledge have emerged that were not present in previous eras, but this does not mean that contemporary scholars are smarter than those of the past, as that is not necessarily the case. Regardless, among the many emerging disciplines, one of them is the knowledge of methods for interpreting the Qur'an, which is known as “**Qawa'id at-Tafsir**”.

¹ Abu Isa at-Tirmizi, *Al-Jami' Al Kabir*, Juz 4 (Cet I; Beirut: Dar al-Garbi al-Islamiy, 1996) hal 414.

The status of this discipline is very important in the study of tafsir, its position is like a bridge that must be crossed to reach the lush garden of the Qur'an. If one wants to pick the fruit of the Qur'an without crossing this bridge, what awaits below is a ravine filled with venomous snakes, sharp thorns, and hard stones. Therefore, whoever dares to interpret a verse without first learning its principles has indeed thrown themselves into the abyss of punishment and committed a grave injustice. This warning is often repeated by Allah SWT in the Qur'an with similar wording, among which is His saying:

... فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا

Translation:

*"...So who is more unjust than one who fabricates lies against Allah?"*²

B. Background

In this modern era, many colors have emerged, decorating and painting the universe. There are colors that are actually dark, but because they are seasoned with sweet words, they appear as if they are bright. Conversely, colors that are actually bright, which are essentially true guidance, become dim because the media is controlled by people who are adept at manipulating the truth.

It is not uncommon to encounter on social media, or hear rumors, or even hear directly, people who dare to speak on religious matters, such as what is halal and haram, despite not being educated in the field of religion. Some can't even distinguish between the letters *hamzah* and *'ain*, yet they dare to speak and interpret verses of the Qur'an. Ignorant people who don't know their limits like these greatly harm and mislead the ummah.

Therefore, to understand the words of Allah SWT, it is absolutely obligatory to study and understand well the principles of interpretation that have become tools to delve into and uncover the secrets behind the words of

² Q.S Al-Kahfi/18:15.

the verses. These principles are the means that can guide a *mufassir* to understand the verses and then translate them into simple language that can be understood by the general public.

This branch of knowledge is so important to be exposed and introduced to seekers of knowledge, especially those with a high interest in the Qur'an. This is the reason that prompted us to choose this topic, at least we are trying to provide a brief overview of what the discipline of “*Qawa'id at-Tafsir*” is, its definition, the history of its emergence, and add some other reviews such as recommended books, with a touch of our personal opinions.

C. Research Methods

The research method we chose is the Library Method, by reading several sources related to “*Qawa'id at-Tafsir*”, referring to original turath (classical Islamic) books. Then, we conducted several comparisons, especially regarding the definitions from each scholar. We selected one definition which we believe is the most comprehensive and can represent the others, known in the terminology of logic as "جامع مانع" (jami' mani'),³ a definition that focuses on covering all sub-topics while at the same time providing clear boundaries. This prevents it from becoming too broad and touching on other disciplines, which could cause confusion.

D. Results and Discussion

a) Definition of the Principles of Tafsir

The term “*Qawa'id at-Tafsir*” is a specific “*laqab*” a name assigned to a particular discipline of knowledge studied to understand the words of the Qur'an. This name consists of two components, “*al-murakkab al-idafiy*”, and to properly understand this term, we need to break down these components first. Here is the explanation:

- Term (قواعد)

³ Muhammad Amin as-Şinkiti, *Adab al-Bahş Wa al-Munazarah*, Juz I (Cet V; Riyadh: Dar ‘Aṭa’at al-‘Ilmi, 2019) hal 56.

Linguistically, this is the plural form of the word (قاعدة), which means (الأصل) and (الأساس). Both of these terms mean “origin and foundation upon which something else is built”,⁴ whether it is concrete (الحسية) or abstract (المعنوية). This is similar to the words of Allah SWT:

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ ...

Translation:

“And [mention] when Ibrahim (Abraham) was raising the foundations of the House with Ismail (Ishmael)...”⁵.

And the word of Allah SWT:

قَدْ مَكَرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَاتَى اللَّهُ بُنْيَانَهُمْ مِنَ الْقَوَاعِدِ ...

Translation:

“Indeed, those before them had devised plots, but Allah struck their buildings from the foundations...”⁶

In terms of terminology, the word “قاعدة” (qa'idah) has many definitions that are similar and closely related, including:

والقاعدة حكم كلي ينطبق على جزئياته ليتعرف أحكامها ...

Translation:

“A qa'idah (rule) is a general principle that applies to its particulars to determine their rulings...”⁷

This means that the rule applied to the “كلي” (universal) also applies to the “جزئي” (particular), whatever the ruling of the “كلي” is, that is also the ruling of the “جزئي”, because the “جزئي” is a part of the “كلي”. It is similar to when you say “all intoxicants are prohibited, and alcohol is an intoxicant,” which leads to the conclusion that the ruling for alcohol is also prohibited. Thus, the term “alcohol” is the “جزئي” of the term “intoxicant,” which is the “كلي”.

⁴ Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Azhari, *Tahzib Al-Lughah*, Juz I (Cet I; Beirut: Dar Ihya at-Turaş al-'Arabi, 2001) hal 137.

⁵ Q.S Al-Baqarah/2:127.

⁶ Q.S An-Nahl/16:26.

⁷ Sa'du ad-Din at-Taftazani, *At-Talwiḥ 'Ala at-Tauḍīḥ Li Matni at-Tanqīḥ*, Juz I (Mesir: Maṭba'ah Muhammad 'Ali Şubaiḥ Wa Auladih Bi al-Azhari, 1957) hal 34.

- The term (التفسير)

As for the term “tafsir,” linguistically, it generally points to two meanings: (البيان) (clarification)⁸ and (الكشف) (unveiling), which mean “clear and uncovered.” According to the terminology used by scholars of tafsir, there are many definitions, all pointing to the same direction, which is:

التفسير علم يعرف به فهم كتاب الله المتزل على نبيه محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم وبيان معانيه واستخراج أحكامه وحكمه

“*Tafsir is the discipline of knowledge used to understand the book of Allah SWT, which was revealed to His Prophet Muhammad SAW, to understand its meanings, and to know its rulings and wisdom...*”⁹ Therefore, it can be said that “tafsir” is the science that leads to the clarity of a meaning that may have previously been obscure.

- The Term (قواعد التفسير) (Laqab)

After briefly explaining the meaning of each component, it is now time to explain the term “laqab” (compound term). Essentially, the term "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" (Principles of Tafsir) has similar definitions among scholars, and we have chosen a definition that encompasses all of them, which is:

هي الأحكام الكلية التي يتوصل بها إلى استنباط معاني القرآن العظيم ومعرفة كيفية الاستفادة منها

*It is the universal rules that help in deriving the meanings of the noble Qur'an and in understanding how to derive benefits from its verses.*¹⁰

Simply put, the science of "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" is a tool used to achieve a correct understanding of the verses of the Qur'an by applying specific standards to ensure that interpretations do not deviate from the bounds of Sharia and creed. These standards prevent misunderstandings and also serve as a benchmark if there are interpretations that deviate or stray from the

⁸ Ibnu Faris, *Mujmal al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah*, (Cet II; Beirut: Muassasah ar-Risalah 1986) hal 721.

⁹ Badru ad-Din az-Zarkasi, *al-Burhan Fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, Juz I (Cet I; Mesir: Dar 'Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1957) hal 13.

¹⁰ Khalid 'Usman as-Sabt, *Qawaid at-Tafsir*, Juz I (Cet I; Mesir: Dar Ibni 'Affan, 2018) hal 40.

proper path. By understanding the process of these principles, a student can filter the opinions of scholars. Or, in today's context, a student can determine who the true scholars are and who are the impostors relying solely on rhetoric.

b) History of the Emergence of the Principles of Tafsir (Qaidah Tafsir)

The discipline of "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" (Principles of Tafsir) initially emerged intertwined with books of tafsir (exegesis) and ulumul Qur'an (the sciences of the Qur'an). This situation persisted for a long time until it evolved into a distinct discipline studied extensively by scholars, particularly those specializing in tafsir. This developmental pattern is common across all fields of knowledge, which initially blend with other disciplines and then, over time, transform into distinct fields of study.

In brief, we can outline the development of this science in three stages as follows:

- **First Stage**

The birth of the science of "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" in tafsir books and their introductions. This stage began during the era known as (عصر التدوين) "the era of writing," specifically from the beginning of the 3rd century AH to the 5th century AH. During this period, it was common for scholars of tafsir to explain their methods at the beginning of their books' introductions while mentioning several principles they used as references when interpreting the words of Allah SWT. Among the most famous and primary reference books of this stage are (تفسير الطبري جامع البيان) "Tafsir al-Tabari, Jami' al-Bayan" and (تأويل مشكل القرآن لابن قتيبة) "Ta'wil Mushkil al-Qur'an by Ibn Qutaybah."

- **Second Stage**

The development of "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" in the books of "ulum al-Qur'an" (the sciences of the Qur'an), beginning from the 5th century AH and coinciding with the emergence of books focused on "usul al-fiqh" (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), continuing until around the 9th century AH. A close

examination of this period reveals that discussions about “Qawa'id at-Tafsir” were intertwined with topics on “ulum al-Qur'an”. Among the most influential books of this stage are (البرهان في علوم القرآن للزركشي) “Al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Qur'an by Al-Zarkashi” and (الإتقان في علوم القرآن للسيوطي) “Al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an by Al-Suyuti”.

- **Third Stage**

In this stage, the discipline of "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" became independent, no longer relying on other disciplines, but rather forming a well-organized field with its own structure. This stage appeared relatively late, around the 14th century AH. However, by this time, there were already several specialized books focusing entirely on the fundamental principles for interpreting the Qur'an, accompanied by examples. Among these books is (القواعد الحسان لتفسير القرآن لعبد الرحمن السعدي) "Al-Qawa'id al-Hisan li-Tafsir al-Qur'an by Abdurrahman al-Sa'di." In this book, the author compiled a large number of tafsir principles and included discussions on proper conduct when engaging with the Qur'an. This work served as a spark for subsequent scholars to develop this discipline further, resulting in many other writings that continue to this day.

- c) **Core Reference Books**

We will mention some of the main references that include discussions on "Qawa'id at-Tafsir." We have chosen to write the titles in Arabic to make it easier for lovers of tafsir to find them. We divide them into four sources as follows:

- The first source is **Introductions to Tafsir Books**.

1. مقدمة في تأويل مشكل القرآن لابن قتيبة (ت 276 هـ)

2. مقدمة في تفسير جامع البيان للطبري (ت 310 هـ)

3. مقدمة في التسهيل لعلوم القرآن لابن جزي الكلبي (ت 741 هـ)

4. مقدمة في تفسير القرآن العظيم لابن كثير (ت 774 هـ)

5. مقدمة في التحرير والتنوير لابن عاشور (ت 1393 هـ)، و هلم جرا.

- The Second Source: Books on the Sciences of the Qur'an (Kitab 'Ilm al-Qur'an)

1. البرهان في علوم القرآن للزرکشي (ت 794 هـ)

2. التيسير في قواعد علم التفسير للكافيحي (ت 879 هـ)

3. الإتيقان في علوم القرآن للسيوطي (ت 911 هـ)، و ما إلى ذلك.

- The Third Source: Books on Contemporary Principles of Tafsir (Kitab Qawa'id Tafsir Kontemporer)

1. قواعد التفسير جمعا ودراسة لخالد بن عثمان بن علي السبب

2. قواعد الترجيح عند المفسرين دراسة نظرية تطبيقية لحسين بن علي بن حسين الحربي

3. كتاب قواعد التدبر الأمثل لكتاب الله عز وجل لعبد الرحمن حسن حبنكة الميداني

4. قواعد وفوائد لفقہ كتاب الله تعالى لعبد الله الجوعي

5. القواعد الحسان لتفسير القرآن لعبد الرحمن السعدي، وغير ذلك.

Here are some books that discuss the principles of Qur'anic interpretation. However, we must remind you that, in our opinion, the primary sources for the knowledge of interpretation principles are the tafsir books themselves. When you read any tafsir book carefully, you will often find that the author mentions the principles they use, either before or after interpreting. The principles they use are closely related to branches of knowledge such as usul al-fiqh (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), language, balagha (rhetoric), ulumul Qur'an (the sciences of the Qur'an), logic, or other disciplines. Among these books are:

- The Fourth Source: The Tafsir Books Themselves

1. التفسير الكبير / مفاتيح الغيب لفخر الدين الرازي (ت 606 هـ)
2. أنوار التنزيل وأسرار التأويل لناصر الدين البيضاوي (ت 685 هـ)
3. روح المعاني لشهاب الدين الألوسي (1270 هـ)

For anyone who wishes to delve deeper into the branch of knowledge known as “Qawa’id at-Tafsir” (Principles of Qur'anic Interpretation), it is essential to study the books we have mentioned. However, the listing of these titles should not be taken as a limitation on the number of useful sources. Instead, our intention is to provide a brief overview, as essentially, every book has the potential to impart valuable information. The benefit derived from each book depends on the reader's perspective and the breadth of their knowledge.

d) Purpose of Studying “Qawa’id at-Tafsir” (Principles of Qur'anic Interpretation)

It is a fundamental duty of scholars to provide clear illumination of Allah’s intentions in His words. However, they often encounter difficulties in understanding a verse due to several factors, such as apparent contradictions, unclear linguistic meanings, words with multiple meanings, or ambiguous and complex verses, among other cases. They need a solid foundation and balanced scale to avoid errors in interpretation.

This is where the discipline of “Qawa’id at-Tafsir” comes into play. It acts as a basic guide and strong foundation used to generate a stable understanding of the explicit and implicit guidance in the Qur'an. This work is an activity that continually evolves, in line with social, scientific, and linguistic developments. With this understanding, it should be noted that these principles do not bind or force other interpreters to use the same

procedures. Each interpreter has the right to use different procedures, provided they have a defensible methodological framework.¹¹

e) Urgency of Studying "Qawa'id at-Tafsir"

Indonesia is one of the most open countries for expressing and discussing religious matters. This has positive impacts, such as the freedom to preach without pressure. However, on the other hand, it can be very dangerous and misleading for the community, as it gives rise to many speakers who rely solely on media and rhetoric, without accountability for the truth of their statements. In essence, those who are qualified to speak about religion, especially the Qur'an, are scholars who possess expertise, one form of which is knowledge of the principles that serve as a balance in understanding the words of Allah SWT.

The obligation to study this method is mandatory because without understanding it, major problems in the realms of Sharia and creed could arise, such as contradictions with other verses or hadith. The field of "Qawa'id at-Tafsir" emerged alongside the books of tafsir (exegesis) and ulumul Qur'an (the sciences of the Qur'an), and then in the 14th century AH, scholars began to author books on the principles of interpretation as an independent discipline complete with practical examples.

E. Conclusion

At the pinnacle of the hierarchy of knowledge is the science of tafsir, including everything related to it, such as the science of the principles of tafsir. It is not fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), not hadith, nor theology or other branches of knowledge. The reason is simple: a person cannot interpret the verses of the Qur'an correctly without knowing the rulings of fiqh and its principles, or knowing the hadith, and of course, having a strong foundation in theology, especially linguistic sciences such as grammar (nahw), morphology (sarf), rhetoric (balagha), logic (mantiq), and others. This seems

¹¹ Muhammad Aqsho, "Kaidah-Kaidah Tentang Penafsiran al-Qur'an", *Jurnal Warta Edisi*, 49 (Juli, 2016), hal. 14-15.

to indicate that interpreting the words of Allah SWT is the main objective, while everything else is a means to that end. Nevertheless, even as a means, studying all these subjects is obligatory for the student of knowledge, as stated in the principle of *usul al-fiqh*:

ما لا يتم الواجب إلا به فهو واجب، سواء كان سببا، أو شرطا

"A duty that cannot be completed without it, then it becomes obligatory, whether it is a cause or a condition"..¹²

All other branches of knowledge besides tafsir either serve as a cause for perfecting an interpretation or as a condition that must be fulfilled to produce a perfect interpretation. This means producing a perfect tafsir is impossible without the aforementioned means, thus making the study of these means obligatory, because the perfection of interpretation depends on the perfection of the means.

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¹² Safiyuddin al-Armawi al-Hindi, *Nihayah al-Wushul Fi Dirayah al-Usul*, Juz II, (Cet I; Mekkah al-Mukarramah: al-Maktabah at-Tijariyyah, 1996) hal 575.